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## **LITERATURĂ**



# FRAGMENTATION OF THE AMERICAN DREAM: DIANA ABU-JABER'S NOVEL *ARABIAN JAZZ*

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## ABSTRACT

This article examines the demystification of the American Dream through an in-depth analysis of Diana Abu-Jaber's novel *Arabian Jazz*. Drawing on literary and cultural theory, the study explores the complexities of Arab-American identity and the challenges immigrants face in pursuing the American Dream. The study delves into the intricacies of Arab-American identity, examining themes of migration, belonging, and cultural hybridity. Characters like Ricky and Gilbert challenge traditional narratives of the American Dream, emphasizing the role of nature and cultural diversity in reshaping societal norms. Furthermore, the article discusses Abu-Jaber's narrative techniques, including symbolism, narrative voice, and intertextuality, as tools for conveying the nuances of Arab-American experiences. The transformative power of music, particularly jazz, emerges as a potent metaphor for navigating cultural dualism and embracing hybrid identities. Overall, this analysis offers a nuanced exploration of the immigrant experience and critiques the idealized notions of the American Dream, inviting readers to reconsider the complexities of cultural assimilation and identity in the United States.

**Keywords:** *Fragmentation, American Dream, Diana Abu-Jaber, "Arabian Jazz", Immigration, Cultural identity*

## 1. *Dream or Nightmare?*

The concept of the "American Dream" has long been intertwined with the promise of prosperity and boundless potential. However, as they embarked on their journeys to America, immigrants from Arab nations grappled with a significant disconnect between the ideal and the multifaceted reality that awaited them. This discrepancy became a central theme in the literary works of Arab writers who sought to navigate the intricacies of the concept.

Arab writers contend profoundly with the notion, questioning its universality and applicability to their unique experiences. The literary encounter becomes a space for introspection, where authors explore the contradictions and challenges in pursuing success in a country that often defies the idealized portrayal.

The literary exploration of the concept by Arab writers is marked by the nuanced perspective they bring to the discourse. It goes beyond merely critiquing the Hollywood-generated ideal, delving into questions of identity, assimilation, and the clash between cultural expectations and the American ethos. Their works offer diverse narratives that enrich the broader discourse on the American Dream.

Within this exploration, two Americas emerge – the imagined America and the real America. The imagined America is the dreamy landscape painted by Hollywood, where success seems within reach for everyone. Arab writers reflect on how this idealized version influenced their aspirations and expectations before arriving in the U.S. However, the real America represents the challenges, opportunities, and societal nuances that Arab émigrés encounter, including economic struggles, cultural adjustments, and the harsh realities that diverge from the cinematic portrayal.

Through literature, Arab writers contribute to an evolving narrative, challenging stereotypes and offering alternative perspectives that reflect the diverse experiences of Arab émigrés in the United States. The literary encounter becomes a means of reshaping the discourse on the American Dream, emphasizing the complexities inherent in pursuing success in a new and unfamiliar environment.

The literary encounter between Arab writers and the sometimes harsh realities of idealized America serves as a dynamic platform for examining the interplay between idealized visions propagated by global media, the cultural realities faced by immigrants, and the nuanced complexities of pursuing success in the United States.

The disjunction between imagined America and the harsh realities encountered on its shores is a narrative thread woven through various literary traditions confronting the American experience. This dichotomy, rooted in the dissonance between European expectations and the actualities faced upon reaching American soil, finds a striking parallel in the Arab literary discourse.

The post-World War II era witnessed a shift in perspective, unveiling the deceptive nature of the America portrayed in dreams and movies, often transforming the American Dream into an American nightmare within literature. This storytelling technique not only underscores the profound gap between dreams and actual experiences but also integrates imagination with the intricacies of the American reality. Idealized America became an extension of European aspirations, promising a utopia that often proved elusive upon arrival. European immigrants faced a stark discrepancy between the idealized America constructed in their minds and the challenges, struggles, and complexities that awaited them on American shores.

By transforming the American Dream into an American nightmare, Arab authors not only inverted preconceptions but also contributed to a nuanced understanding of the challenges faced by those who sought to build new lives in the land of opportunity. This narrative inversion emerges as a potent tool, connecting the divide between the imagined and the tangible, merging the realm of imagination with the actual encounters of Arab immigrants in the United States.

The move from the American dream to a nightmare or the exploration of contradictions and cohesion is a literary response to this battle within American identity. The diversity of experiences, perspectives, and historical narratives contributes to a rich tapestry that defies reduction to a singular narrative. Arab writers engaging with the American experience recognize and respond to this complexity in their works.

By portraying America as a site of conflicting dreams and harsh realities, these writers contribute to a broader discourse that challenges simplistic notions of



American identity. This complexity is a testament to the ongoing negotiation between different facets of American society, encompassing various cultural, historical, and sociopolitical dimensions.

## **2. Navigating Arab American Identity: Literary Strategies and Cultural Dynamics**

The methods employed by Arab writers in navigating the American experience, whether through shifting from dream to nightmare or exploring contradictions and cohesion, align with Edward Said's recognition of the diverse and complex nature of American identity. These literary approaches serve as powerful tools for engaging with the intricate layers of American society, offering nuanced perspectives that enrich our understanding of the multifaceted nation.

Arab American writers navigate the delicate balance of cultural adaptation in the Western context. The tension between preserving cultural roots and assimilating into a new cultural milieu is a recurrent theme. Their works' characters, settings, and narratives reflect the ongoing struggle to negotiate cultural identities, fostering a rich exploration of the complexities inherent in diasporic existence.

The condition of Arab American writers involves a continual exploration of identity in a global context. Questions of who they are, where they belong, and how they navigate the intersections of multiple identities form a significant part of their literary discourse. The search for a cohesive and authentic identity within the complexities of diaspora emerges as a central theme in their creative expression.

The choice of English as a medium of expression carries its complexities. While providing access to a broader audience, it prompts considerations of linguistic impact on authenticity and cultural resonance. Arab American writers navigate the challenges of using English to convey their experiences, grappling with questions of linguistic identity and the global reach of their narratives.

In addressing these intricate conditions, Arab American authors serve as cultural ambassadors, bridging gaps, fostering understanding, and offering insights into the nuanced experiences of diasporic communities. Their literary contributions enrich the global literary landscape, providing a window into the challenges and triumphs of those who navigate the intersections of displacement, identity, and language. Through their works, Arab American writers contribute to a broader narrative that transcends geographical boundaries, fostering understanding and empathy across diverse cultural landscapes.

Beyond the economic, political, and social factors driving the initial Arab immigration to North America, several other influential factors played a crucial role. Notably, the advancements in global communication and transportation systems, particularly the development of steam navigation, facilitated shorter and safer sea crossings. The initiatives undertaken by steamship company agents also proved instrumental in attracting new immigrant passengers during this period.

Two distinct waves of Arab immigration shaped the Arab presence in North America. The initial wave spanned from the 1880s to the Second World War,

followed by a subsequent wave from the Second World War to the present, and each migratory period exhibited unique characteristics, both in terms of the immigrants themselves and the societal and political challenges faced by each group. Any comprehensive analysis of these migratory groups should acknowledge and consider these differences. The convergence of both communities began in the 1960s, notably after the Arab-Israeli war of 1967, a crucial aspect that should be factored into any examination. The term “Arab-American” refers to immigrants and their descendants who arrived in North America from the Arab countries of the Middle East. Various designations may be used based on circumstances, but the community is predominantly referred to as Arab or Arab American, particularly in the case of the United States.

Determining the exact number of Arab immigrants in North America is challenging due to changing classification criteria in the United States and Canada over time. Until 1899, U.S. immigration censuses grouped Arabs with Greeks, Armenians, and Turks. Consequently, only approximate estimates can be provided, given the historical modifications in classification criteria and other factors influencing the data.

In her article “New Directions: Arab American Writing Today”, Lisa Suheir Majaj, one of the pioneers of Arab American literary and theoretical production, underlines the importance of defining Arab-American identity:

We need to take a closer look at the complexity of Arab American identity. [...] The legacy of split vision, of being torn between the Middle East and the U.S., has had direct and pragmatic impact on the evolution of this identity. But Arab American authors do not simply write Arab literature in English (as was once suggested to me): they do not simply translate from culture to culture. Arab American literary works need to explore ethnicity as something altogether new: something that is in the process of creation. (Majaj 2006: 132-133)

The hybridity at work in Arab-American literature, rather than the manifestation of mixed blood, is the result of an experience of emigration and exile, whether that of the authors or that of their family. These authors may have been born in the United States or arrived as adults. While some are perfectly bilingual, others speak broken Arabic or English. Among them, some live between the United States and the Arab world, while others have never set foot on the land of their ancestors. Starting from this diversity Geoffrey Nash, in his work *The Anglo-Arab Encounter* starts from the assumption that “There is a qualitative difference between Arabic literature, Arabic literature translated into English, and a literature conceived and executed in English by writers of Arab background” (Nash 2007: 11). The qualitative difference highlighted by Majaj and Nash between Arab-American literature and Arabic literature translated into English forces us to question the dynamics concealed by the hyphen.

In his essay “What Does It Mean to be an ‘American’?” Michael Waltzer challenges the conventional notion of an exclusive American identity by asserting, “There is no country called America. We live in the United States of America, and

we have appropriated the adjective ‘American’ even though we can claim no exclusive title to it” (Waltzer 1990: 591). He argues that an ethnic American is someone who can, in principle, live their spiritual life as they choose, transcending the hyphen that often characterizes dual identities. Waltzer contends that American citizenship, in this sense, is anonymous and doesn’t necessitate a complete commitment to American nationality or any other nationality (*Ibidem*: 611).

Arab-American critics and researchers consistently assert that the demonizing and ostracizing of the Arab-American community is viewed as an inheritance from what Steven Salaita describes as a “centuries-long history of ethnic-mainstream conflict.” Consequently, as the twenty-first century began, literary and ethnographic critics hesitated to subject Arab American studies and scholarship to the urgency of an unexpected moment, such as the post-9/11 period. Despite becoming a pivotal moment in the history of the Arab-American community in the United States, this period is conceptualized by critics as an extension and reinforcement of post-Cold War United States expansion in the Middle East (Naber 2012; Salaita 2005). Stephen Salaita defines Arab American literature as the creative output produced by individuals connected either by heritage or a deliberate choice to the Arab community in the United States. Its primary audience is this community, acknowledging the work as genuine and adaptable. This body of work explores various facets, such as aesthetics, politics, or the people of the Arab world. While literature is the central focus, it should encompass other forms like oratory, scholarship, opinion, and autobiography, addressing Arabs and/or Arab Americans and involving the audience in activist and communal values (Salaita 2000: np).

Salaita’s definition of Arab-American literature is deliberately open-ended and inclusive, reflecting the dynamic and evolving nature of cultural and literary expressions within the Arab-American community. It accommodates diverse voices and forms of expression by encouraging challenges and expansions, contributing to the rich tapestry of Arab-American literary works. Salaita emphasizes that authors must be affiliated, either by birthright or conscious desire, with the Arab community in the United States. Additionally, their works should be primarily aimed at and accepted by this audience, ensuring a meaningful connection between the creators and their intended readership. The criteria also highlight the cultural and communal context that shapes Arab-American literature.

Furthermore, the critic underscores that Arab-American literature should directly or indirectly engage with the aesthetics, politics, or people of the Arab world. This criterion acknowledges the interconnectedness of Arab-American experiences with the broader socio-political and cultural contexts of the Arab world, adding depth and context to the literary works. The definition emphasizes the literary concept, extending it to encompass any form of linguistic activity, such as oratory, scholarship, opinion, and autobiography. This broad approach recognizes the diverse ways Arab-American experiences are articulated and shared.

Finally, this definition includes works that engage the audience in activist and communal values, adding a dimension of social consciousness to Arab-American literature and aligning with the idea that literature can serve as a vehicle for social

change and community building. Overall, Salaita's framework respects the fluidity and complexity of Arab-American identity and literature, providing a robust foundation for understanding and appreciating the multifaceted nature of this literary tradition.

### **3. The doubleness of Arab Americans**

W.E.B. Du Bois's concept of double consciousness has significantly shaped the critical response to African American literature over the decades. Similarly, the Arabs, viewed as "Neither black nor white, yet both," have evoked comparable reactions from critics and the wider audience. While notable distinctions between the two communities extend beyond the linguistic contrast between Arabic and English, the historical brevity of Arabs' presence in the United States and significant social differences, including variations within the Arab American community, highlight unique challenges. Like African Americans, Arabs grapple with a divided allegiance, torn between their country of origin and their new American home. Their hyphenated identities hinder the development of a unified sense of self, leaving them repeatedly feeling alienated and lost amidst the often conflicting demands of these two worlds. Struggling to establish a harmonious balance between their dual affiliations, both communities share a profound sense of fragmentation and the challenges inherent in navigating complex and multifaceted identities.

Wars, conflicts in Iraq, and subsequent negative perceptions have contributed to the portrayal of Arab Americans as associated with terrorist groups, further deteriorating their image. The surprising persistence of classifying Arab Americans as "Negroes" well into the 21st century highlights the challenges they face, caught between two cultures with denied rights and citizenship. This predicament intensifies their heightened feelings of in-betweenness and double consciousness, reflecting the struggle for identity and acceptance.

Franz Fanon's application of the concept of double consciousness extends beyond African Americans to other colonized people, including Arab Americans, who face similar profound impacts on their identity due to historical and contemporary geopolitical events:

This tearing away, painful and difficult though it may be, is, however, necessary. If it is not accomplished there will be serious psycho-affective injuries and the result will be individuals without an anchor, without a horizon, colorless, stateless, rootless – a race of angels. It will be also quite normal to hear certain natives declare 'I speak as a Senegalese and as a Frenchman...' 'I speak as an Algerian and as a Frenchman...'. The intellectual who is Arab and French, or Nigerian and English, when he comes up against the need to take on two nationalities, chooses, if he wants to remain true to himself, the negation of one of these determinations. (Fanon 1963: 218)

Franz Fanon's statement underscores the profound impact of colonialism on individuals' psyches, leading to severe psycho-affective injuries. The imagery of individuals without an anchor or horizon, colorless, stateless, and rootless, suggests a disconnection and disorientation resulting from the complex interplay of colonial

forces. The notion of a “race of angles” evokes a sense of fragmentation and dehumanization caused by the imposition of colonial identities.

The idea that individuals may declare themselves as both Senegalese and French or Arab and French reflects the internal conflict faced by those subjected to colonial rule. Fanon’s observation that the intellectual, confronted with the necessity of adopting two nationalities, may choose to negate one of these determinations is a poignant reflection on individuals’ internal struggles in reconciling dual or conflicting identities imposed by colonial powers.

This statement emphasizes the psychological toll of colonialism, highlighting the challenges individuals face in navigating the complexities of identity when forced to embrace multiple, often conflicting, nationalities. It speaks to individuals’ internal tensions and dilemmas in their quest for selfhood and authenticity within colonial domination.

The identity crisis within the Arab-American community distinguishes itself from analogous struggles among other racial and ethnic groups in America, weaving a complex narrative fraught with contradictions. Central to this intricate dynamic is the diverse tapestry of backgrounds embedded within the community, reflecting a multiplicity that fosters a unique set of challenges in shaping a cohesive identity. The racial classification of the Arab-American community introduces another layer of complexity, marked by contradictions that emerge from the amalgamation of varied ethnicities within this collective identity.

Furthermore, the identity crisis within the Arab-American community is compounded by the intersection of racial classification with religious affiliations, particularly within the framework of Islam. The conflation of Arab identity with the Islamic faith adds a layer of nuance as individuals navigate the intricate interplay between their cultural heritage and religious beliefs. This intersectionality underscores the multifaceted nature of the Arab-American experience as the community grapples with the challenge of being simultaneously categorized by ethnicity, race, and religion.

The liminal state that Arab Americans find themselves in prompts a continuous struggle to reconcile their American and Arab cultural backgrounds, a necessary step in securing their position within a racially charged America. This struggle involves navigating the complexities of their cultural heritage in a new environment, leading to a hyphenated existence that spans two cultures, two opposing identities, and linguistic dualism. In response to this intricate situation, Arab Americans exhibit a disposition towards improvisation, ultimately forging a unique identity – the Arab American – by melding their Arab past with the present American context.

This hyphenated existence drives Arab Americans, compelling them to negotiate the challenges of living between two worlds. The process involves adapting to the American cultural milieu and retaining and celebrating their Arab roots. In their pursuit of identity, Arab Americans engage in a delicate dance between these contrasting elements, contributing to forming a distinct and multifaceted identity.

As active participants in socio-political life, Arab American intellectuals often find themselves compelled to adapt to the new environment. This adaptation

frequently involves the emulation of literary traditions within America. Through their writings, these intellectuals explore and articulate their positions on crucial matters such as identity, racial issues, and gender. In doing so, they contribute to a broader narrative that enriches the understanding of the Arab American experience and its intricate intersection with the socio-political landscape of the United States.

#### **4. The ungentle picture of the Dream**

Diana Abu-Jaber's debut novel, *Arabian Jazz* (1993), garnered widespread acclaim as a "landmark work in the Arab American tradition" (Salaita 2001: 424). As the first Arab American novel to capture the attention of a broad mainstream American readership, it sparked a significant and contentious discussion surrounding the construction and critical representation of contemporary Arab American identity. The novel won the Oregon Book Award and was shortlisted for the Pen/Hemingway Award in 1994. Its recognition marked a pivotal moment in the previously overlooked tradition of Arab writing in America. This recognition occurred during heightened public discourse on the Middle East and American policy in the region, ushering in a phase of increased visibility that persists today.

Diana Abu-Jaber's background mirrors the hyphenated experience often characteristic of ethnic narratives in the United States. Born into a mixed heritage, she places hybridity at the core of the narrative discourse in *Arabian Jazz*. While disjointed, her motivations can be linked to her dual heritage. In 1959, she was born to a Jordanian immigrant father, himself hailing from a mixed background with a Bedouin Jordanian father, a Palestinian mother, and an American mother of Irish-German descent. Abu-Jaber's early years unfolded in a typical American middle-class setting as the family settled in the small town of Euclid, just outside Syracuse, New York.

At the age of seven, her family – comprising her parents and two younger sisters – relocated to Amman, Jordan. This move provided Abu-Jaber with a firsthand experience of dislocation and displacement as they spent time immersed in the ambiance of courtyards, trellised jasmine, and extended family in Amman. This aspect of her childhood further underscores the theme of navigating a sense of place and identity within diverse cultural landscapes.

Two years later, the family returned to America, resettling in Syracuse. Abu-Jaber reveals the influence of her father's duality on her upbringing, noting, "My father could not make up his mind about which country we should live in" (*Idem*). In the U.S., he emphasized their Arab identity, restricting social activities like parties and school dances for his daughters. Simultaneously, he encouraged them to pursue education passionately, compete fiercely, and forge their paths in the world. Abu-Jaber's undergraduate journey at the State University of New York-Oswego was monitored by a watchful uncle who taught there, ensuring adherence to paternal values even in the freedom of university life.

Despite the initial taste of independence, Abu-Jaber's education was meticulously overseen to preserve the cultural values tied to her father's homeland.

She later earned her Ph.D. in English and Creative Writing from the University of Binghamton. Teaching roles at institutions such as the University of Michigan, the University of Oregon, and the University of Miami followed. Since 1996, she has been teaching at Portland University, dividing her time between Portland and Miami.

Abu-Jaber's journey into writing began during her school days, almost ingrained in her from an early age. Her indebtedness to her paternal figure is evident as she acknowledges the Eastern tradition of orality through her father's storytelling. This tradition fueled her passion for storytelling. During her postgraduate studies at SUNY Binghamton, Abu-Jaber embarked on her writing career under the guidance of American novelist and literary critic John Gardner. Gardner encouraged her to explore her themes and voice within the context of her dual heritage, setting the foundation for her future literary endeavors.

In a radio interview for the NPR radio station, Diana Abu-Jaber reflects on the profound impact of Maxine Hong Kingston's "The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of Girlhood Among Ghosts" (1976) during high school. Abu-Jaber confessed: "Raised in an Arab-American family, I knew what it meant to feel both proud of my heritage [...] I was a stranger everywhere, neither fully Arab nor fully American. Hong Kingston understood this wild strangeness, using a kind of oral narrative [...] to address the brutality of family, the terror of women imprisoned by the bonds of tradition" (Abu-Jaber 1976: np). As someone who felt like a stranger everywhere, neither entirely Arab nor thoroughly American, Abu-Jaber resonated deeply with the theme of strangeness that Hong Kingston captured so well. The novel provided Abu-Jaber with a profound sense of recognition and the realization that there were various stories within the realm of literature.

She credits Hong Kingston's work as her "first inkling that there were many kinds of stories in the house of literature," emphasizing how it played a crucial role in her understanding of negotiating identities and the experiences of hyphenated individuals like herself (*Idem*, np). This early encounter with literature influenced Abu-Jaber's exploration of her hybrid voice, rooted in the autobiographical experiences of a mixed Arab American background. This thematic concern becomes evident in her first two novels, "Arabian Jazz" (1993) and "Crescent" (2003), as well as her memoir titled "The Language of Baklava" (2005). These works showcase a progressive engagement with the complexities of identity and contribute significantly to the Arab American narrative.

While Abu-Jaber's later works, such as "Origin" (2007), "Birds of Paradise" (2011), and "Fencing with the King" (2022), move away from a specific Arab American perspective, she remains a prominent voice in the broader literary landscape. Despite her shift toward other perspectives, her earlier contributions resonate as integral parts of the Arab American narrative.

In an interview for the journal *Asharq Al-Awsat*, Diana Abu-Jaber shared her life story. Born in the United States, she spent two years in Jordan at the age of six. During this time, her father decided to return to Jordan, considering it his true homeland. However, Abu-Jaber, along with her mother and sister, ultimately chose to live in the West, embracing the place of her birth and deciding to belong to it. This

period in Jordan has provided her with valuable insights into life in the East, prompting her to strive to balance the two worlds before deciding to live in the West.

In the same interview, she was asked to comment on her statement, “I am trying to reach a cultural balance between ancestry and America,” Diana Abu-Jaber acknowledges the challenging pursuit of cultural balance between her heritage and America, a complex journey, especially for those born into multiple cultures, such as children of immigrants. Reflecting on her novel *Arabic Jazz*, she notes her closer proximity to childhood and her father’s influences in her twenties. During that period, her connection to her Arab heritage was entwined with a love for rebellion as she sought to understand herself beyond being her father’s daughter. In her current phase of life, she expresses a sense of liberation, feeling more able to embrace her culture without sentimentality and with pride, love, and a genuine sense of belonging:

When you’re born among cultures, say, as the child of immigrants, I think the search for balance becomes a lifelong journey. I wrote ‘Arabian Jazz’ over twenty years ago – I was in my twenties and closer in time to childhood and my father’s influence. In many ways, my relationship to my heritage at that time was one of loving rebellion. I was trying to find out who I was – apart from being my father’s daughter. As an adult, I feel freer to embrace my cultural history, to view it dispassionately, with pride, love, and belonging. (*Ibidem*)

In response to the statement expressing the feeling of being less of a stranger in Jordan than in America, the writer emphasizes the diverse origins of the American population, reminding us that the majority arrived from other countries, and arguing that the position of an outside observer is linked to what one sees, requiring a step back for more precise understanding and an enhanced view of the bigger picture. Drawing parallels with iconic writers like Hemingway, Baldwin, Stein, and Joyce, she notes their choice of “exile” as a condition for their artistic work. Abu-Jaber herself embraces a nomadic life, moving between cities and teaching jobs. This intentional “outsider” choice aligns with her artistic pursuits.

## **5. Rhythms of Aspiration and Being**

There are at least two possible explanations for the present increased interest in this segment of American literature. The first one stems from the need of a wider audience to discover new voices, other than the mainstream Anglo-American literature, and a growing interest in the literature of the ethnic groups in the U.S. The other explanation interests the political – a raise of the “political consciousness and solidarity of the Arab-American community” (Ludescher 2006: 106).

*Arabian Jazz* deals with the identity problems the Arab women in diaspora struggle with, and with the multiple sides of the Arab-ness of their cultural heritage representing “multiple cross geographical and social boundaries of a diverse group of Arab communities having varied languages, religions, traditions, ethnicities, and national identification and conceptions” (Wafaa 2015: 34). Diana Abu-Jaber seeks to identify the tensions inherent in one’s belonging to the Jordanian nation while in



the Other's land. It is Anthony Kwame Appiah who underlined the importance of collective cultural narratives that, when correlated with the life in the new, adoptive land, manage to convey the cultural heritage of the country of origin:

... what makes the cosmopolitan experience possible for us, whether as readers or as travelers, is not that we share beliefs and values because of our common capacity for reason: in the novel, at least, it is not 'reason' but *a different human capacity that grounds our sharing: namely, the grasp of a narrative logic that allows us to construct the world to which our imaginations respond*. (Appiah 2010: 257, emphasis added)

Appiah underlines the function of cultural translation to set intercultural, interethnic, even inter-confessional towards the understanding and the acceptance of the other. Halaby, Abu-Jaber and the other women writers discussed are immersed in a complex process of negotiating their identities through the prism of the "us vs. them" paradigm of Orientalism as formulated by Edward Said, which he explained as follows:

England knows Egypt, Egypt is what England knows; England knows that Egypt cannot have self-government; England confirms that by occupying Egypt; for the Egyptians, Egypt is what England has occupied and now governs; foreign occupation therefore becomes "the very basis" of contemporary Egyptian civilization; Egypt requires, indeed insists upon, British occupation. (Said 1979: 34)

If we replace "Egypt" with Iraq, Syria, or Lebanon - or any other country of the former British Empire, Said's text would not lose its relevance to the discussion. The lack of stability that characterizes the Arab nations, as well as the patriarchal structure of the society, are reflected in several patterns of understanding and the cultural particularities and determine the preservation of culture and the formation of a particular self-image with respect to that nation.

Abu-Jaber intends to go well beyond these Orientalist stereotypes regarding the Arab women and thus they closely approach the feminist discourse on the emancipation of the "third-world" woman according to Western standards. Under the circumstances, all Arab American women writers have to cope with the double pressures exerted by the mainstream culture (American) and feminism (Western) and decide on their own hyphenated identity – Arab, American, or both – and the acute feeling of double-consciousness, as defined by W.E.B. Du Bois with reference to the condition of the African Americans:

It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness, – an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. (Du Bois 2015: 9)

In the context of globalization, the recurrent image of the oppressed Arab women is subject to stereotypes determined by complex historical and political

conditions, and the two women writers aim at correcting such an image and create, through their writings, bridges of cultural understanding and communication, and draw an entirely different portrait of the Arab American women in diaspora in view of traditional national, gender and racial allegiances.

The characters of *Arabian Jazz* simultaneously adhere to and reject their Arab heritage and the new American identity. We are witnessing instances of a clash of civilizations: Orient vs. Occident, the fundamentalist East vs. the assimilating West. What the writer does is to inhabit what Bhabha calls the “in-between” spaces that “provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood – singular or communal – that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself, a “Third Space” where “the non-synchronous temporality of global and national cultures opens up a cultural space – a third space – *where the negotiation of incommensurable differences creates a tension peculiar to borderline existences*” (Bhabha 1994: 218, emphasis added).

Last but not least, the writer deals with the search for home of the diasporic Arabs in America; their novels are stories of displacement, of the individual’s search for a new “home” and a new identity. To quote Diana Abu-Jaber,

We grow into the curve of what we know; for me that was my family’s rootlessness and my father’s control and scrutiny – movement and confinement. I am as surely a Bedouin as anyone who has travelled in a desert caravan. A reluctant Bedouin – I miss and long for every place in every country, I have ever lived – and frequently even the places my friends and my family have lived and talked about as well – and I never want to leave any of these places. I want to cry out, to protest: Why must there be only one home! (Abu-Jaber 2005: 329-330)

In his 1992 volume, *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981-1991*, Salman Rushdie focuses on the emigrant writers’ need to reconsider their relationship with their country of origin and face the challenge of belonging to two different cultures:

Sometimes we feel that we straddle two cultures; at other times, that we fall between two stools. But however ambiguous and shifting this ground may be, it is not an infertile territory for a writer to occupy. If literature is in part the business of finding new angles at which to enter reality, then once again our distance, our long geographical perspective, may provide us with such angles. (Rushdie 1992: 15)

Rushdie ponders on the relevance of the volatile notion of home as an imaginary construct to which one cannot possibly return. He goes as far as to admit that his *Midnight’s Children* was written “of memory and about memory” (*Ibidem* 10).

In *Arabian Jazz* (1993), Diana Abu-Jaber addresses the complex issues of being simultaneously Arab and American – the in-between status of Arab Americans – and the difficulties that such an experience brings about. At the time of its publication, the novel was one of the few American novels written by a woman of Arab descent, and, according to one of its critics, it “broke an unwritten rule in the