

Arab American Family Dynamics

Arab immigrants in North America are less than 2%. Studying Arab American families is crucial at this time of conflicted politics and discrimination in the US. Immigrant authors write in English, like the imminent scholar Edward Said, Mohja Kahf, and Leena Mahmoud. Still their writings depict their countries of origin, their diasporic existence, and family dynamics as individuals in a culture that is more individualistic.

This session, thus, aims to focus on Arab families in the diaspora and how societal pressures affect their family lives. Presenters explore the family lives of Arabs in North America in relevant texts from historical, literary, and cultural angles. The presenters will address the timely but neglected topic in current academia regarding exiled individuals from Arab countries to the USA. They explore Arab American identity across generations through different genres, such as the autobiography, the novel and testimonies.

Scholars such as Edward Said, Leila Ahmed, Moustafa Bayoumi, and many others highlight themes of migration, inclusion and exclusion of Arab Americans in their new homes/families. Their works show how they negotiate dual societal and familial pressures. Touria Khannous explores Edward Said's autobiography, *Out of Place* (1999). Khannous depicts how the domestic space in Said's memoir reflects the political and cultural dislocations that shaped his public life. Deploying Said's theory of "contrapuntal" reading, she examines how familial and linguistic tensions contribute to his enduring feeling of being "out of place." The father's strict authoritarianism mirrors larger colonial structures, making the family a miniature representation of imperial power dynamics. Farah Siddiqui in her presentation titled "The Emotional Labor of Hyphenated Identity in Lena Mahmoud's *Amreekiya*" explores the dilemma and of Arab American children born out of wedlock to Arab fathers and American mothers and the societal tensions. Feroza Jussawalla "Family Dynamics in Mohja Kahf's *Diasporic Arab American Family*," explores *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* as a Syrian American memoir of growing up conflicted in Indianapolis, Indiana. Questions of identity, belonging, race, and culture are all explored through the eyes of a young protagonist who is trying to balance family politics between a religious mother and a more outgoing Westernised father. Jussawalla explores the notion that the children going to the Dawah Center as described by Mohja Kahf are, taught that Americans have broken families and divorces. Kahf, as the narrator, explores her own family dynamics in the light of this teaching. Ibtisam Abujad explores in her "Transgressing Colonial Power through Undocumented Family Unification During the Muslim Ban" "the suffering of Muslim families under such laws. Abujad explores how the restricted immigration from several Muslim-majority countries reinforces racial hierarchies and exclusionary policies. She uses testimonies to illustrate how undocumented family reunification emerged as a form of resistance, challenging state-imposed separations and asserting the right to mobility beyond legal frameworks.

This online- or possibly hybrid panel of four speakers will operate within the allotted time frame giving each speaker minutes to present. We will have a fifteen-twenty minutes of discussion at the end of the panel.

I have solicited abstracts from scholars working on different areas and genres related to Arab American literature. We start with presenting on more established scholars in the field such as Edward Said to more contemporary ones such as the Syrian American Mohja Kahf and the Palestinian American Lena Mahmoud to more pressing topics such as testimonies from Muslim Americans. My ultimate goal is to get these papers published in a volume. Thanks to the MLA, my panel on “Muslim Women Speaking out Persistently” (2021) materialised into a special issue of *Women Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, soon to be a book. I have been in touch with an interested publisher regarding this project.

ABSTRACTS

1- Touria Khannous

Louisiana State University

tkhann1@lsu.edu

Family Dynamics and Displacement in Edward Said's *Out of Place*

Edward Said's memoir *Out of Place* (1999) draws on family as both a sanctuary and a site of exile and displacement. My paper examines how the private sphere of the household in Said's memoir mirrors the political and cultural displacements of his public life. Drawing on his concept of "contrapuntal" reading," I will analyze how family and linguistic dissonance shape Said's lifelong sense of being "out of place." The father's disciplinary authoritarianism reflects broader colonial hierarchies, turning the family into a microcosm of imperial power dynamics. By situating Said's familial narrative within this theoretical framework, this paper illuminates how the memoir re-conceives exile not merely as a geopolitical space but also as an intimate realm, where the home itself becomes a contested space of unbelonging.

Dr. Touria Khannous is an Associate professor in the Department of World

Languages and Literatures and the International Studies Program at Louisiana State University. Her research interests include Film Studies, Black diaspora studies, and Maghrib studies. She has published articles on Maghreb literature and film, a book on African literature, film, and internet discourse, and a recent book entitled *Black-Arab Encounters: Blackness in Arabic Literature and Film*.

2- Farah Siddiqui

University of Texas at Dallas

fxs121830@utdallas.edu

The Emotional Labor of Hyphenated Identity in Lena Mahmoud's Amreekiya

The concept of hyphenated identity entails a sense of displacement and affective labor performed by people who migrate from their homeland to a new country. The term “hybrid” comes from Edward Said who is both Palestinian and American, but “emotional labor” coined by Arlie Hochschild in her 1983 book *Managed Heart* stands for imposed and unrecognized labor. My paper will explore how Lena Mahmoud deals with the hyphenated identity of Isra in *Amreekiya* (2018) in terms of emotional labor. Mahmoud depicts how Isra suffers the stigma of being born out of wedlock from an American mother and a Palestinian father. The family structure is dysfunctional as her mother suffers from cancer and dies with her father being in no condition to take care of her. She was raised by her paternal uncle and aunt where she served as a maid to her aunt. The marriage between her aunt and uncle is a dysfunctional one due to a lack of cultural assimilation by her aunt who keeps on insisting on a lack of piety and respect in the children raised with American values. Based on her experience of failed marriages, Isra prefers her freedom of identity over a successful marriage in the novel. Ultimately, the saga gets worse as her marriage to Yousuf could not survive a miscarriage and a stillbirth. In an interview with Nancy El Gendy, Mahmoud explores the impact of culture and gender on our everyday lives. The gender norms appear stifling as Isra was looked down upon by her mother-in-law for not wearing Hijab, but Isra perceives her miscarriage as a failure of her womanhood. The paper raises questions about the duality of Isra's identity under the lens of her desires and lack of freedom that marriage provided.

Keywords: Hybrid, Affective Labor.

Dr. Farah Siddiqui received a PhD in Literary Studies from The University of Texas at Dallas in Spring, 2022. She currently teaches Technical Communication at the University of Texas at Dallas and English at Tarrant County Community College. Broadly conceived, her doctoral work explores the social construction of affect and empathy through ideology in anglophone, Middle Eastern, and postcolonial literature. She considers the role that rhetoric plays in the propagation of these ideological goals that dehumanize “others.” By “others” she means those who are categorized by the existing social structures as less deserving of empathy but her research demonstrates how literature enables the readers to transcend such constructions.

3- Feroza Jussawalla

University of New Mexico

Fjussawa@unm.edu

Family Dynamics in Mohja Kahf's Diasporic Arab American Family

Mohja Kaf's *The Girl in The Tangerine Scarf* is a typical Postcolonial bildungsroman of a second generation, immigrant Syrian character, in search of herself, culture, religion and roots. She ends up finding and asserting home in America, where she was raised. "I'm home, in America, Bismillah," she writes. "Homeland America, bismillah (313). But it has been a long journey "home" (where her heart is together with her exploratory freedom), a journey of questioning, doubting, exploring, exploring her book of prayers. Khadra Shamy is raised "American," in Indiana, and in Pennsylvania. At a young age, she had begun to ask questions: "Where is Syria?" "What mountain?" Khadra begins to question her aunts: What is a Muslim? What are the five pillars? Why wear Hijab?

The book is a memoir about being/ becoming Muslim, learning how to be one, when all around is doubt and criticism and blame, in the new adopted homeland, where she is raised as a child of refugees. The raised-in-diaspora child asks, "What about women?" The children, going to the Dawah center are taught that the Americans have broken families and divorce. But they also belong in America and question the teachings. This is a form of "exilic consciousness." In this book there is a double exile. The narrator, exiles herself from America and travels to study the Iranian revolution, the situation in Somalia, and returns home to America, both Muslim and not Muslim.

Dr. Feroza Jussawalla is Professor Emerita at the University of New Mexico, in Albuquerque, NM. USA. She is the author of *Family Quarrels: Towards a Criticism of Indian Writing in English*, (Peter Lang, 1984), She has edited , *Conversations with V.S. Naipaul*, 1997 (University Press of Mississippi) and co-edited *Interviews with Writers of the Postcolonial World*, 1992 (University Press of Mississippi), *Emerging South Asian Women's Writing*, (Peter Lang, 2017), *Memory, Voice and Identity: Muslim Women's Writing from Across the Middle East*, (Routledge, 2020), *Muslim Women's Writing from South and South East Asia*, (Routledge, 2021). Her collection of poems *Chiffon Saris* (2002) published by Kolkotta, Writer's Workshop and Toronto South of Asian Review.

4- Ibtisam Abujad

Harper College

ibtisam.abujad@marquette.edu

Transgressing Colonial Power through Undocumented Family Unification During the Muslim Ban- Ibtisam Abujad

Bio

Ibtisam M. Abujad is Assistant Professor in the Department of English at Harper College. She conducts research in the fields of decolonial and settler-colonial studies, critical race and ethnic studies, women's studies, the global politics and economics of empire, and Critical Muslim Studies.