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Ethnicity, Cultural Predicament, and Food Connotations in Diana Abu-Jaber's Crescent

العرق، المأزق الثقافي، ودلالات الطعام في رواية "الهلال" لديانا أبو جابر

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Abstract:

This study aims at shedding light on the cultural in-betweenness and hybridity of Arab Americans. Additionally, it examines the expression of important themes in Arab American women's minor literature. Furthermore, it accentuates the hyphenated identity and food significance in *Crescent* (2003), a novel written by the Arab American writer Diana Abu-Jaber. This novel focuses on the Arab-American community of Los Angeles. It highlights the multidimensional romantic relationship between Sirine, the thirty-nine-year old beautiful Iraqi-American heroine who works as a main cook at Nadia's Café, a Lebanese restaurant in Los Angeles, and Hanif, a handsome Iraqi professor of Arabic literature who works with Sirine's uncle at the university and who admires her beauty and delicious meals. Indeed, both of them suffer from exile and dislocation: Sirine represents cultural exile while Hanif represents political exile. It is undeniable that the Middle Eastern cuisine plays a pivotal role and grants the Arab Americans a sense of identity and community.

Keywords: Cultural in-betweenness – Arab Americans – Arab American Women's Literature – Ethnicity – Food Significance.

الملخص:

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى تسليط الضوء على الهوية الثقافية المزدوجة والتهجين لدى العرب الأمريكيين و تبرز كذلك المواضيع المهمة في الأدب النسائي للعربيات الأميركيات مؤكدة على الهوية المزدوجة وأهمية الطعام في رواية "الهلال" (2003) للكاتبة العربية الأمريكية ديانا أبو جابر. هذه الرواية تركز بدورها على المجتمع العربي الأمريكي في لوس أنجلوس، حيث تتمحور حول العلاقة الرومانسية متعددة الأبعاد بين سيرين، البطلة العراقية الأمريكية الجميلة البالغة من العمر تسعة وثلاثين عامًا و التي تعمل كطاهية رئيسية في مقهى نادية، وهو مطعم لبناني في لوس أنجلوس، وحنيف، العراقي الوسيم، أستاذ الأدب العربي، الذي يعمل مع عم سيرين في الجامعة والذي يعجب بجمالها وأطباقها الشهية. في الواقع، كلاهما يعاني من المنفى والتشتت: تمثل سيرين المنفى الثقافي بينما يمثل حنيف المنفى السياسي. و من المؤكد أن المطبخ الشرق أوسطي يلعب دورًا محوريًا ويمنح العرب الأمريكيين شعورًا بالهوية والمجتمع.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الهوية الثقافية المزدوجة – العرب الأمريكيون– أدب النساء العربيات الأمريكيات – العرق – أهمية الطعام

1. INTRODUCTION

Arab Anglophone literature serves as a crucial conduit for Arab Anglophone female authors to portray a genuine image of the Arab world and its women. *Crescent* (2003) is a romance novel written by the Jordanian-American writer Diana Abu-Jaber, whose works accentuate socio-cultural issues and seek to humanize Arabs for the American readers. This romance novel is an important work in contemporary cross-cultural immigrant literature, symbolizing Arab Americans with the crescent emblem, which signifies the unity and spirituality of the Arab-Islamic community.

Furthermore, they are placed in the contact zone between two cultures, two languages, and two worlds. Dr. Jenni Ramone emphasizes the fact that "the individual who migrates is translated into a new place and operates through a new language, becoming a translated individual bearing traces of both locations and languages" (2011, p. 115). This in-betweenness makes them acquire a double vision and a cultural hybridity. The narrative delves into themes of exile and the quest for both individual and communal identity (Bhabha, 1994, p. 1-2). Therefore, the intermediate position is distinguished by the possibility of forging a bicultural identity. In addition, culture has a pivotal role in forming the individual identity.

These themes are particularly resonant for ethnic minorities in America, who navigate dual cultural identities and the linguistic shifts of English to bridge their native and adoptive cultures. Culinary tradition, particularly Middle Eastern cuisine, is the means through which Arab Americans, as an ethnic group, express their ties and maintain their identity. Thus, food links individuals together and grants them the sense of belonging. The fact that the protagonist, Sirine, chooses to work in a café is also significant in this context. It demonstrates her interests and connects her to the people and the community. Indeed, food can be perceived as an emblem of identity.

2. Ethnicity and the Cultural In-betweenness of Arab Americans

In the United States, Arab Americans are a distinct ethnic minority, closely tying their language to their ethnic identity. As noted by Sjaak Kroon in "Some Remarks on Ethnic Identity, Language and Education" (1990, p. 421), ethnic identity is profoundly connected to the group's language. This relationship underscores the importance of Arabic as a unifying force among Arab Americans, reflecting their solidarity and distinct cultural identity.

However, in the host country, the ethnic community's language is undoubtedly considered as an ethnic minority language that is vulnerable to shift and loss. In spite of the fact that the mother tongue is not always maintained, depending on its use by the speakers, its loss does not necessarily denote the disappearance or rejection of ethnic identity and pride.

The Cuban-American sociologist Rubén G. Rumbaut, in his article "The Agony of Exile: A Study of the Migration and Adaptation of Indochinese Refugee Adults and Children," introduces the term "1.5 generation" to describe immigrants' American-born children. Religion, therefore, becomes a driving force in preserving both the Arabic language and the ethnic identity of Arab Americans. He states:

> Children who were born abroad but are being educated and come of age in the United States from what they may be called the "1.5" generation. These refugee youth must cope with two crisis-producing and identity-defining transitions: (1) adolescence and the task of managing the transition from childhood to adulthood, and (2) acculturation and the task of managing the transition from one sociological environment to another. The "first" generation of their parents, who are fully part of the "old" world, face only the latter; the "second" generation of children now being born and reared in the United States, who as such fully part of the "new" world, will need to confront only the former. (1991, p. 61)

These individuals navigate the space between the first and second generations, straddling two cultures and two languages. This transitional group reconciles the cultural divide through the creation of a hybrid space, experiencing a cultural struggle as they seek to reclaim their identity.

America is a place where different cultures meet together, forming a dynamic multicultural atmosphere. Arab Americans develop hybrid identities that oscillate between two cultures since they are related to two different worlds: the land of origin and the host country. They only feel at ease when they integrate their dual cultural identity into a harmonious identity through maintaining a good link with both societies and keeping a sense of reconciliation between the two parts of their hyphenated identity. Hence, the collision of two cultures forms a third space, as Bhabha calls it. It is created due to hybridity, and it incites civil communication. Homi K. Bhabha, in *The Location of Culture* (1994, p. 25), describes hybridity as "neither the one nor the other," reflecting the nuanced identity of individuals inhabiting this middle ground. Arab Americans often romanticize their homeland and work toward reconciling their native and host cultures to overcome feelings of inferiority.

In an interview with Jonathan Rutherford, Bhabha elaborates on hybridity as a "third space," stating: "For me, hybridity represents a 'third space' that allows for the emergence of new perspectives. This space reconfigures the histories that shape it, introducing fresh structures of authority and innovative political opportunities. The process of cultural hybridity generates something distinct, novel, and previously unrecognizable—a unique realm for negotiating meaning and representation" (1990, p. 211). Indeed, the diasporic subjects construct such an intermediate location to heal their split identity and feel comfortable, and most industrialized countries build an atmosphere of respect and acceptance that welcomes cultural diversity.

In multicultural societies, cultural diversity is often framed as a norm established by the dominant culture, which determines how other cultures are understood and integrated, stating that "these or other cultures are fine, but we must be able to locate them within our own grid" (Bhabha, 1990, p. 208). Hence, cultural diversity is both encouraged and contained at the same time. Undoubtedly, it is obvious

that the different cultures cannot easily coexist and that cultural identity formation is a complex process. Actually, cultural identity is an essential way to build and assert "interpersonal and intergroup relationships" (Witteborn, 2007, p. 573). Once cultural identity is constructed, the members develop positive perspectives of themselves and their cultural group. Therefore, they bear more responsibilities, work harder, and achieve better academic level.

However, the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, marked a significant turning point for the Arab American community. Following this tragedy, Arab Americans were increasingly perceived as a source of violence and threat, leading to heightened difficulties with cultural integration and identity formation. The Lebanese-American historian Alixa Naff highlights the complexities faced by the Arab diaspora in America, attributing these challenges to several factors, including the timing of migration, the socio-political and economic conditions in the host country, the size of the immigrant group, its cultural values and traditions, its reasons for migration, its expectations, and its level of nationalistic sentiment (1985, p. 8).

Despite these obstacles, Arab Americans persist in promoting their culture, forming their identities, and confronting stereotypes to challenge the dominant culture. The achievement of identity is not an easy task. In this respect, the French philosopher Etienne Balibar points out that "identity is never a peaceful acquisition: it is claimed as a guarantee against a threat of annihilation that can be figured by 'another identity' (a foreign identity) or by an 'erasing of identities' (a depersonalization)" (1995, p. 186). Therefore, the struggle of Arab Americans to forge their identity, especially with the increase of Islamophobia, discrimination, and hostility after the 9/11 tragedy, is inevitable. The Arab Muslim world reveals solidarity and a religious identity against the unsympathetic attitudes of the American mainstream, calling for respect and dignity.

Crescent explores ethnicity through several dimensions. First, it examines how characters' backgrounds shape their ethnic identities. Second, it analyzes how characters interact with and respond to the ethnicities of others. Third, it depicts the Arab American community's experience as a whole. As the characters in the novel individually explore their own and others' ethnic backgrounds, their solidarity helps them overcome prejudice, political conflicts, and personal dilemmas and experiences. In an increasingly divided world, further plagued with terror, the novel is optimistic in celebrating various aspects of Arab cultural heritage. Being a story of displacement and dual identity (Arab and American), the work explores many important elements, including identity, history, trauma, and language.

Moreover, Carol Fadda-Conrey pinpoints that *Crescent* examines an important issue about "the overriding ethnic ambiguities that often engulf people of color in the US. This novel, moreover, creates a physical and psychological ethnic borderland in which different ethnic communities coexist and communicate. [...] Only through such strategies can the ethnic borderland transcend exclusionary limitations and become a transformative site" (2006, p. 203).

The characters of the novel clearly exhibit pride in their Arab-American identity although they admit to Sirine "how painful it is to be an immigrant" (Abu-Jaber, 2003, p. 19). Through its characters' fulfilling lives and choices, the novel illustrates how they adapt while preserving their Arab culture in unique ways. These adaptations create what Fadda-Conrey describes as "the ethnic borderland: a constructive space in which interethnic ties between and within different communities of color could be established and maintained" (2006, p. 187).

The café in which Sirine works provides a microcosmic world for the Arab diaspora in an American setting. In this gathering space, the characters rely on food and storytelling to save their cultural identity and memory from erasure. Furthermore, Sirine bridges together different individuals from various ethnic groups and facilitates their affinity and interaction.

In brief, the Arab identity expression is associated with the Arabic language, ethnic values, and Islam. Additionally, keeping strong family relationships, showing respect, and caring for others - mainly family members, neighbours, and friends- are features that characterize Arabs. In addition, Islam, as a solid foundation, is considered as a powerful bond that links Arabs and as a moral code for children who grow up in the American context. It transcends national boundaries. Thus, the aim of Arab Americans is to construct a consistent Arab collective identity within a heterogeneous society.

3. The Manifestation of Pivotal Themes in Arab American Women's Minor Literature

From a cultural and linguistic perspective, Arab Anglophone works, in general, and women's texts, in particular, are considered as minor literature. Arab Anglophone writers adapt the English language to reflect Arab culture, connect with Western audiences, and challenge stereotypes. They use their work to bridge cultural divides, making the unfamiliar aspects of Arabic culture relatable to the Western world. Arab American authors were among the earliest immigrant writers to gain recognition and organize collectively as a literary community (Abinader, 2000).

In 1920, influential figures of the Arab diaspora, including Gibran Khalil Gibran, Mikhail Naimy, Iliya Abou Madi, and Ameen Rihani, formed *Al-Rabita Al Qalamiyya* (The Pen League). Known as the "Mahjar Writers" (immigrant writers), they emphasized themes such as transcending materialism, advocating for reform in the Arab world, addressing political concerns, exploring relations between the East and West, and serving as cultural intermediaries. Their collective efforts aimed to advance Arabic literature. As noted by Ludescher, these writers sought to escape materialism, reform their homeland, and negotiate cultural identities (2006).

The evolution of Arab American literature was driven by two major factors: the growing interest in voices beyond the traditional Anglo-American literary canon and the political challenges faced by the Arab American community. This growth was deeply political, reflecting the community's solidarity and resistance against stereotypes (Ludescher, 2006).

The tragic events of 9/11 increased focus on Arab American literature, sparking interest in the unique perspectives of Arab

Americans and leading to the publication of numerous works addressing their experiences. Arab American literature has since become an integral part of the American ethnic literary landscape. This body of work reflects an ongoing interaction between Eastern and Western perspectives, emphasizing the tension between the past and present. Bhabha explains this as a reinterpretation of history in a way that reshapes the present: Art revisits the past not as a nostalgic recollection but as a necessary reinterpretation, creating a transitional space where historical and present realities converge, leading to new meanings and representations (1994). Consequently, communal culture is varied and continuous. Arab Anglophone writers need to convey their communities' voice against discrimination.

The third space is viewed as a productive sphere in which cultural values are in constant renewal. Actually, it continually creates new and challenging works that explore national identity, cultural diversity, and multiculturalism in contemporary America. According to Bhabha, it gathers more than one culture and forms a bicultural identity. Likewise, the American critic Henry Levin pinpoints that "the most creative minds are those capable of keeping that other world in sight; and it is by no means easy" (1966, p. 80). Indeed, cultural difference is considered as a source of empowerment for cultural identity. Arab American literary works try to illustrate the different images of the home land, as being ideal or exilic, and to provide solutions to identity crisis.

Arab Anglophone writers highlight critical issues impacting their communities, particularly the instability of identity. Their literature frequently addresses themes of hybridity, reflecting the Arab American experience of existing between Eastern and Western cultures, as well as political concerns rooted in the colonization of the Middle East and the aftermath of the September 11, 2001, attacks.

These dual cultural influences and political events shape the content of Arab Anglophone literature. Moreover, Western readers direct their attention towards the Arab Anglophone literary works, especially after the tragedy of September 11. They attempt to understand the Arab world and the Arab way of thinking since this literature directly addresses the English speaking audience without the need to be translated.

Despite the fact that Arab females embody honour and respect, they undergo exaggerated constraints on their activities in America since it represents a sphere of perceived threat. Women's vision and voice depend on various factors. Dr. Tina Sherwell, the art historian, emphasizes:

> Women are found in a multitude of different circumstances and their identities tempered by religious beliefs, class backgrounds, the social contexts in which they find themselves, and personal experiences [...] identities do not have a fixed essence but rather are always made and remade [...]. Thus such a broad label as Arab women may at times also encompass conflicting and antagonistic identities and experiences. (1999, p. 59–60)

Hence, Arab American women writers defy the different circumstances to convey their voice. Their writings stress mainly the issues of feminism, identity, religion, and nation. They try to relocate their minor narratives, which are part and parcel of minor literature, into specific categories. Minor literature is created by minority groups within a mainstream culture. Over recent decades, Arab American authors, both male and female, have captured the attention of readers, partly because of their use of English as a literary medium.

Anglophone Arabic literature, distinct from both traditional Arabic literature and its English translations, plays a vital role in fostering trans-cultural discourse. Arab Anglophone female writers' works attribute more clarity and recognition to the Arab female identity, which is viewed as complex and different by Western readers due to its previous stereotypical portrayal. They are often categorized as postcolonial, hybrid, feminist, or Anglophone narratives. In spite of the fact that these texts are ramified and that their female writers belong to different societies, they focus on the common themes of homeland, nation, identity, religion, culture, ethnicity, displacement, integration, and gender. As a body of work created by authors of Arab descent writing in English, it grapples with the complex themes of hybridity, exile, and diaspora.

Born outside their ancestral homelands, these writers navigate tensions between the "homeland" and the "host land," revisiting recurring questions of belonging, loyalty, and identity (Al Maleh, 2009, p. x). Arab American women writers are situated at the borderlands of three minorities: Muslims, Arabs, and females. Therefore, the advent of an independent corpus of literature, which is multidimensional and hybrid, is inevitable.

Regardless of the language they use, Arab Anglophone writers employ various literary techniques to counter stereotypes about Arab Americans. Prominent Arab American women authors include Diana Abu-Jaber, Layla Al Maleh, Layla Halaby, Mohja Kahf, Naomi Shihab Nye, Susan Abulhawa, among others. These authors create literary spaces to depict the Arab community and homeland authentically while addressing the challenges faced by Arab Americans and highlighting the significance of Arab communities within the American social fabric.

Although Arab Anglophone literature is often considered a minor literary genre, it holds considerable importance as a communication bridge between East and West, especially during periods of heightened tension. This literature offers a more nuanced and authentic representation of Arab culture and identity, diverging from stereotypical portrayals. It addresses both secular and religious themes, providing Western readers with an inside perspective on Arab societies. According to Salaita, Arab Anglophone writers remain deeply connected to their Arab identity despite carrying different cultural values shaped by their unique social contexts (2014, p. 79). Writing in English, a global language, grants these authors greater freedom to explore taboo topics and share the intricacies of Arab identity authentically.

Since they are placed at the contact zone of two different cultures, their writings prove to be distinctive, mainly in terms of themes, perceptions, characters, and strategies. In fact, Diana Abu-Jaber's

Crescent (2003) constitutes an important novel that sheds light on identity hybridity.

4. The Hyphenated Identity and Food Significance in Diana Abu-Jaber's *Crescent*

Arab Anglophone literature serves as a cultural bridge during periods of heightened tension between East and West. By moving beyond stereotypes, Arab Anglophone women writers present a genuine portrayal of Arab women and the Arab world. Diana Abu-Jaber's *Crescent* (2003), a romance novel, exemplifies this effort. The Jordanian-American author explores social and cultural issues while striving to humanize Arabs for American audiences. The novel revolves around themes of exile and the search for both individual and collective identity.

The story centers on Sirine, a 39-year-old Iraqi-American chef at Nadia's Café, a Lebanese restaurant in Los Angeles, and her romantic relationship with Hanif Al Eyad, an Iraqi professor of Arabic literature who works with her uncle. Orphaned after her parents' death, Sirine lives with her uncle. Abu-Jaber uses this relationship to explore identity, culture, and human connection. Hanif is obliged to escape from Saddam Hussein's reign, but his displacement continues since he is a member of the minority in America. He struggles to live away from his beloved country. Indeed, this Iraqi exiled professor's dislocation represents political exile whereas the Iraqi-American Sirine's represents cultural exile.

Through her narrative, Abu-Jaber aims to humanize Iraq, a nation whose culture and image have been tarnished in the aftermath of war and political unrest. Writing and reading, according to Abu-Jaber, are corrective tools to challenge the stereotypical representations of Iraq, particularly following the Gulf War and the events of 9/11. She reflects: "I really wanted to convey the richness and depth of Iraq's cultural wealth. The more I studied, the stronger I felt about this project. There's an incredible treasure there that people are unaware of—this was before the second conflict, after the Persian Gulf War, around 1999 or 2000. I wanted people to understand Iraq's identity as the cradle of civilization" (Field, 2006, p. 212). Through her studies, Abu-Jaber finds Iraq beautiful and fascinating, not violent.

Moreover, Sirine is fascinated by Hanif's face, which personifies the charm of the Arabic countries. His crescent-shaped scar, which is situated near his eye, denotes the fact that he represents Islam in general and Iraq in particular. In the novel by Abu-Jaber (2003), Sirine gains a deep appreciation of her Iraqi heritage through interactions with Han, whose features and gaze evoke the rich, ancient essence of her paternal lineage, making her dual heritage more palpable (p. 188). This realization places Sirine in a liminal space, internally conflicted yet enriched by her diverse ancestry—externally her mother's image, internally her father's essence, especially in her fundamental psychological and physical make-up (p. 205-206).

Additionally, in the novel, food is used not only as a physical substance but also as an "edible metaphor" (Torreiro Pazo, 2014, p. 12). In *Crescent*, Nadia' café, a local Arabic restaurant whose clientele is Middle Easterner and which is managed by Um-Nadia (Nadia's mother), is the space where a lot of immigrants meet to reintegrate their cultural components.

The Arabic food that Sirine cooks, like "roasted lamb, rice and pine nuts, tabbouleh salad, apricot juice," reminds those immigrants of their homes and culture of origin (Abu-Jaber, 2003, p. 22). Food is "a little flavour of home" (p. 20). The café's fragrances and tastes ignite the immigrants' memory and nostalgia. This space grants them comfort. The narrative also explores the significance of culinary habits among immigrants, illustrating how small, economical dishes like bean dip, garlic bread, and yogurt (p. 37) become symbolic links to their origins and identity. This connection is particularly evident in Arab American communities where traditional foods such as tabbouleh, tahini sauce, and baklava serve not only as sustenance but also as vital expressions of cultural identity and belonging (Xu, 2008, p. 19). Eating is presented in the novel as an articulation of belonging to an ethnic group. Therefore, food is closely related to identity and binds individuals together.

Furthermore, the novel depicts the daily visits of two American policemen to Nadia's café, where their enjoyment of Arab dishes and soap operas signifies a cultural bridge (Abu-Jaber, 2003, p. 20). Thus, Arabic food and culture constitute an exotic exploration for them, and their presence proves the peaceful behaviour of Arab Americans. Besides this, the café is an independent and sovereign locus with diasporic occupation and Arab meals. Consequently, at the level of this café, the Arabic language is no longer a foreign language, and the immigrants feel at ease.

In fact, Sirine is a culinary guide, not a victim of the domestic sphere. Instead of being manipulated, she herself manipulates the sensory reactions of her clientele whose major part is male. Thanks to food preparation, the female can become an agent of production. Sirine introduces Arabic food to Americans like when she "pours a little olive oil from a small jug over the top of the hummus; the olive oil is velvety and green. 'Try it like this,' she says" (p. 52). Her food grants people access to the Arabic culture, which is clearly defined by love, not horror. The preparation of Arabic food is characterized by its visual and olfactory beauty, "combining the pleasures of taste and smell in a joint of gustatory experience" (Marin, 2000, p. 214).

In the novel, the aesthetic organization of food is revealed: "Everything glows – the butter, a handful of chopped tomato, a bowl of parsley– ripe colors clear as a painting" (Abu-Jaber, 2003, p. 192). Therefore, Arabic food proves to be pleasing. Food possesses a divine quality since it is mentioned it the Qur'an. Arab food is characterized by its divine inspiration, pleasing presentation, delicious flavour, and wonderful fragrance of rose water and spices, like saffron, cumin, and thyme. Even the spices must be well measured to prepare well-balanced and tasty meals. Thus, Sirine works carefully like an alchemist. The culinary balance of Sirine's dishes foreshadows the stabilization of her dual identity.

Food keeps memories alive. Sirine considers it as a contact language and a tool to construct a significant world. Food and her uncle's stories constitute the basis of her search for identity. Sirine finds solace and identity in cooking, believing it provides a more reliable sense of fulfillment and love than her relationships, especially following her parents' demise (p. 194). Through the lens of Sirine's experiences, the novel

presents cooking as a powerful tool against cultural dissonance. Despite her American upbringing, Sirine's mother adopts Arab culinary practices, challenging the traditional binary of American 'whiteness' versus 'otherness' by seamlessly integrating Arab food traditions into their American lifestyle (p. 49-50).

In addition, food is employed as a means to denote the beautiful and particular aspects of one's culture. Actually, Sirine demonstrates the Arabic culture through cooking. Culinary tourism extends beyond experimenting with exotic foods. It involves exploring the distinctiveness of other cultures, often making the cuisine itself a focal point of tourism, rather than just a medium to experience cultural diversity (Long, 2004, p. 1-2). Thus, food is a powerful tool to create a collective voice since the appreciation of common meals constructs the sense of community. It paves the way for the individual to travel and visit another culture.

Likewise, food is significant to the other characters. In his apartment, Hanif reads cooking books and prepares meat loaf, a traditional American meal, for Sirine, who looks impressed. The transformation in cooking styles experienced by one of the characters reflects a linguistic shift from his cultural norms—using butter instead of olive oil, potatoes instead of rice, and beef instead of lamb—symbolizing an adventurous foray into new culinary landscapes" (Abu-Jaber, 2003, p. 68). There is a kind a culinary bilingualism between Han and Sirine. He tries to be all-American when he cooks for her since he perceives her to be more American; however, she claims: "But I'm not really all-American" (p. 68). In fact, food becomes "their private language. [...] The words flow into the eating" (p. 266). Such a fact foreshadows that Han, unlike terrorists, is represented as open to a different cultural experience. Sirine's and Han's cooking methods subvert the prevailing stereotypes and provide comfort by revealing reassuring interrelation with undisclosed realms.

This exploration of new cuisines enables Sirine to create dishes that evoke profound sensory memories in Han, transporting him back to his homeland through flavours infused with pepper, garlic, and a smoky richness, underscoring the transcendent quality of traditional foods (p. 193). Additionally, Han expresses a nostalgic affection for the kitchen environment, reminiscent of the familial and communal warmth of his native home, where food and storytelling by the women in his family played a central role (p. 60). His relationship with Sirine alleviates his feelings of exile, as he describes her presence as the antithesis of his displacement, offering him comfort and joy (p. 140).

Through the romantic relationship between Sirine and Hanif and their shared memories, the reader views a new positive image of Iraq, which is very different from media representation. Hanif's nostalgia stems from his raw experience as a recent immigrant whereas Sirine's comes from her consideration of the country as an ethnic heritage. This sentiment aligns with Svetlana Boym's reflection on nostalgia, highlighting the shared longing for home ('algia') and the individual paths to returning ('nostos'), which uniquely define our experiences of belonging and separation (Boym, 2001). Hence, the spice-filled odours within Nadia's

Café attract immigrants into a space that permits them to have a break from longing.

In addition, at the level of Nadia's café, which is a place of inspiration and mosaic intersection of class, race, gender, and nation, immigrant writers produce the strongest writing. In the novel, the act of cooking itself proves to be sacred and poetic. It is a crucial link between the homeland and the Arab diaspora in America. Actually, Abu-Jaber employs food to create a space of love, peace, comfort, and integration within a sphere of loss, exile, sadness, and strife.

Nadia's restaurant is a place in which the articulation of the Arab voice transcends its constraints. Fadda-Conrey (2006) highlights the nuanced representation of Arab identity by using the names of Arab students—Schmaal, Jenoob, Shark, Gharb, which translate to North, South, East, and West in Arabic. This characterization underscores their diverse origins, countering the often oversimplified perceptions of Arab identity (p. 195). Thus, in spite of the differences that exist among Arab Americans, their voice is able to transcend the limitations.

In Abu-Jaber's novel, Sirine blends her Arab heritage with American traditions, exemplified by her unique take on Thanksgiving, where she prepares the turkey with rice, pine nuts, and ground lamb instead of the traditional cornbread, and serves yogurt sauce instead of cranberries (2003, p. 184). Similarly, the novel portrays Ramadan as a time of culinary and communal unity, where Sirine engages deeply with her Islamic and Arab roots through the preparation of traditional foods like killaj pastry and katayif pancakes, reflecting on the spiritual purpose of Ramadan to foster empathy for the less fortunate (pp. 244, 265).

The novel culminates with the celebration of Eid, where Sirine prepares festive dishes such as stuffed lamb and baklava, further cementing the communal and cultural ties among Arab Americans (p. 265). These culinary practices are not only acts of cultural expression but also serve as a means for Sirine to reconcile her hyphenated identity, feeling wholly herself when she cooks (p. 340).

5. CONCLUSION

The title "Crescent" symbolizes the moon's phases, reflecting the cyclic nature of Islamic traditions and the nuanced identities of Arab Americans. Indeed, Abu-Jaber attempts to humanize Iraq, which has been associated with destruction, and to convey its cultural richness and depth. Actually, the Arab Anglophone community's self-identification is essential.

In brief, the emergence of specific literary texts with special characters, themes, styles, techniques, and perceptions has been triggered by the Arab Anglophone authors' gender, displacement, bilingualism, in some cases, and the manipulation of different cultural features.

Finally, Diana Abu-Jaber, just like the other Arab American women writers, attempts to apply literary techniques to subvert the stereotypical image attributed to Arab Americans. She tries to depict the Arab diaspora and its daily problems and issues from the inside. This portrayal emphasizes the vibrant immigrant community and the preservation of Arabic culture through

language and cuisine, highlighting the distinct nuances within cultural assimilation.

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