

**Jameel Al Ghaberi**

**Post-9/11 Anglophone Arab Fiction. A  
Dialogue Between the West and the Arab  
World**

**Master's Thesis**

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POST-9/11 ANGLOPHONE ARAB FICTION: A DIALOGUE BETWEEN THE  
WEST AND THE ARAB WORLD

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## ABSTRACT

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This book is about Arab Anglophone fiction produced after 9/11 in the United States. It attempts to analyze how the writers of such a period portray the life of Arab Americans in a post-9/11 America. The study shows how Arab Americans dealt with the consequences of 9/11. It reflects several aspects that characterize Arab American writing as a diasporic narrative, such as memory and home, racialization, anti-Arab sentiment and urgency of expression, and how Arab Americans responded to the terrorist attack of 9/11. The study also investigates the role of Anglophone Arab fiction in paving the way for more intercultural understanding and attempting to de-orientalize the Arab. What I found is that some writers often try to negotiate with the American culture in order to arrive at an identity that incorporates multiple elements from both the culture of origin and the host culture. Hybrid and cosmopolitan in their approach, such writers also attempt to be cultural mediators, and they show much concern about subverting the normative judgment and stereotypical image that has fixed the Arab American. Works of fiction produced by Anglophone Arab writers, such as Laila Halaby's *Once in a Promised Land*, Rabih Alameddine's *The Hakawati*, and Alia Yunis' *The Night Counter* represented how Arab Americans faced difficulties after 9/11 in terms of identity construction, cultural identification, and the conflicting sense of belonging and non-belonging. These works genuinely depict the life of Arab Americans and give a better understanding of who Arabs are. They also interlink both the Arab culture and American culture, celebrating both cultural identities.

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## **1-1 Introduction**

Anglophone Arab literature has been in existence for more than a century, but it only gained a wider recognition after the tragic incident of September 11, 2001. Since that time, there has been a dramatic increase in publication by Anglophone Arab writers. This literary burgeoning, as seen by Lisa Majaj, reflects in part the shifting historical, social, and political contexts that have pushed Anglophone Arab writers to the foreground, creating both new spaces for their voices and new urgencies of expression, as well as the flourishing creativity of these writers (62). Due to such and many other factors, Anglophone Arab fiction came to the limelight with many emergent voices, expressing the anguish and the harsh experiences of Arabs and Muslims in an attempt to talk to and negotiate with the American culture.

Geoffrey Nash explained 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 (11). Indeed, the Arab Anglophone novel is different from the one written in Arabic and translated into English. Since colonial time, there have been many Arabic novels which were translated into English and contributed to introduce Arabic culture to Western readers. But the Anglophone Arab novel is uniquely different in the sense that it encompasses various elements from the host literary tradition and culture as well as the literature and culture of its original place. In this regard, Zahia Salhi has also explained that such a hybrid literature is “neither entirely Arab nor fully English, but instead occupies a place where both home and host cultures converge, intersect, and even clash, resulting in a third culture”(45). Interestingly, it is the hybrid nature of the Anglophone Arab literature that makes it a promising literary and cultural field of research, not only for its minority status, but also because it would serve as a

primal bridge of communication between the Americans and the Arab world in a time during which ongoing conflict and tension is frequently growing between the two sides. Culturally blended, this fiction would provide the Western readers with fresh and authentic portrayal of the Arab world, away from what has been transmitted to them through Orientalists' works as well as manipulated media channels. Thus, in giving a vivid and authentic picture of the Arab world with its diverse cultural manifestations and its religious and political specificity, Anglophone Arab fiction is more likely to maximize the possibilities of constructing cross-cultural bridges between the West and the Arab world. Culturally, Arabs have been misrepresented and misunderstood since the first encounter between the Arabic culture and the Western one. According to Driss Ridouani, "the Western representation of Muslims and Arabs is not a recent fabrication, but it had been operational and deep-rooted in the West conceptualization ever since the first contacts with Arabs and Muslims" (4). What he emphasized is that the West preserves a persisting conceptualization of Arabs and Muslims as an alien "other" or rather "enemy" (12).

Anglophone Arab authors increasingly demonstrate both the diversity of the Arab cultural roots on which they draw and the diverse ways in which these cultural roots play out in the West. For some, Arab-Anglophone literature will always be about the narrative of leaving behind one identity and acquiring a new one. For others, Anglophone Arab literature takes its place on a global scale, as a constituent of a worldwide Arab diaspora in which cultural ties can be revived. It is this notion of "cultural ties" which is of great interest to me and which I will elaborate and discuss in my thesis in an attempt to promote cultural understanding. This is in light with what Layla Al Maleh stated about the capacity of Anglophone Arab writers to play a crucial role in disseminating through the wider world their images of hyphenated Arabs and of the Arab people as a whole, thereby fostering acceptance through understanding (5). Despite the obstacles, Arab