

## **Abstract**

### Maps of Home:

#### Representations of Identity in Palestinian-American Literature

The subject of this thesis is recent Palestinian-American literature as it is a part of Arab-American literature and American ethnic literature, and as it is a distinct category of writing written by first and second generation Palestinian-American immigrants. The thesis studies representations of identity relying on the cultural concepts of race, orientalism and diaspora and on the motif of food. It analyses the work through a transnational approach since these works employ artistic strategies that cross geographical locations. The thesis offers a fresh perspective on the study of Palestinian-American literature since research in the field on identity deals mainly with Arab-Americans as a pan-ethnic group or with Palestinians on a global scale, rather than a category of American literature. It analyzes novels written by Naomi Shihab Nye, Susan Abulhawa, Ibtisam Barakat, Ibrahim Fawal, Randa Jarrar and Diana Abu Jaber, a Jordanian-American author with Palestinian roots. The thesis also analyzes short stories written by Nabeel Abraham, Susan Muaddi Darraj, and Randa Jarrar and poetry written by Naomi Shihab-Nye and Suhair Hammad.

Transnationalism has occupied a prime place in the study of immigrant literature. Immigrants settling in the United States continue to move between the point of departure and the point of arrival enriching the cultural scene in the United States and influencing their homelands through their exposure to American culture. These “comings and goings,” in Shelly Fisher Fishkin’s words, “create familial, cultural, linguistic, and economic ties across national boundaries.” Transnationalism forms the basis of analysis throughout the thesis and reveals how multi-local affiliations complicate representations of identity in immigrant literature through the four categories of research identified above. The thesis also shows how some works

romanticize Palestinian identity, idealizing patriarchy in the process and providing fixed images of East and West. In most of the works, the collective Palestinian experience plays a central role in the lives of Palestinian Americans, but nevertheless, their exposure to American culture allows them to see the world both within and outside the United States through the American lens.

The first chapter examines representation of identity through the medium of race and shows how Palestinian Americans' encounter with the US racial binary leads them to position themselves with people of color despite their legal classification as white. They seek solidarity with other ethnicities, especially African Americans, allowing them to experience visibility given their feeling of being "honorary whites." The chapter on Orientalism relies on Edward Said's theory of Orientalism and concludes that writers deconstruct images of the Arab as depicted by the orientalist, and in doing so engage sometimes in what some scholars call Reverse Orientalism or Occidentalism. The third chapter deals with Palestinian Americans as a diasporic group living away from a homeland that no longer exists. This diasporic state creates a tension between both sides of their hyphenated identity prompting a desire to form imaginary homelands by clinging to constants they create through the familiar. The chapter also shows how return, whether real or imaginary, plays a key element in the Palestinian diaspora. The final chapter analyzes representations of identity through culinary practices, a theme that runs through much of the literature and invites a transnational approach to analyzing the literary works. The chapter illuminates through the trope of food how Palestinian Americans view themselves as non-white in the racial binary. Furthermore, the chapter exhibits the influence of America's capitalism globally through culinary practices and how it shapes the identity of immigrants living within the United States. The chapter demonstrates that food and language, both linked to orality, are strong elements of identity. Finally, food images in

these works express the trauma of living a diasporic life away from home and highlight the influence of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict on identity formation in multiple locations.