



## **IDENTITY CRISIS & ARAB-AMERICAN WOMEN: A CRITICAL STUDY**



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### **ABSTRACT**

*The research paper centers on the history of Arab-American women and their sufferings, especially in the contemporary age. The research paper focuses on the cultural, social, political, economic and psychological issues which the contemporary Arab-American women face in day to day life. The Arab-American writers tried to uncover the women's misery from the social traditions and religious taboos. The writers have very well covered and focused a light on the social problems like problems in the family, between wives and husbands, between women and their communities. The Arab women have also faced various kinds of crises and dilemmas in the colonized countries. In these countries, women have been*

*suffering because of the contrast in culture between the colonizer and the colonized. All these writers are shocked to see how women are living in Arab countries. The main role of these women is just to be mothers and to take care of their children. For instance, when you explore the role of women in the Middle East, you will find out that some Arab women are working very hard to survive because most of Arab men are engaged in the civil wars.*

## **RESEARCH PAPER**

Arab-American women have been suffering from discrimination and male dominance in their societies for many reasons. However, Arab-American women have been struggling in the passage of time to get their full rights. Arab-American women writers strongly defend themselves and their societies as well. They have been using their pens as weapons to resist and prove that they are indispensable part of a society. They are struggling against the marginalization of the East and the discrimination of the West. Arab-American women have been facing a double marginalization. That is to say, in the East, Arab-American women are often considered as dependent subjects and they have to follow their masters. Similarly, Arab-American women have been suffering from oppression, discrimination and marginalization in the USA. They have proved their success in all fields of life, socially, politically, economically, etc. Though they are criticizing Arab-American communities, which add to their plight, Arab-American women never forget to mention the American policy. This targets Arab-American women in a way or another and adds more oil to fire. Arab-American women are the victims of the US anti-Arab bias. Most Americans show their hatred and hostility to Arabs and Arab-Americans.

Muslim Arab-American women do not have enough freedom to practice their religious and cultural rituals. The present research study is of great importance for investigating women's issues in general and for studying the status of Muslim Arab-American women in particular. It serves as a bridge between the East and the West, as it provides the reader with a reasonable idea about the cultures and traditions in both civilizations, i.e., the Eastern and the Western. It conveys the sufferings of Arab-American women not only in the host country but also in the country of origin under the influence of many factors, such as the cultural, religious, political and economic factors that vary in both civilizations. It investigates the main issues that Muslim Arab-American women face in their routine life. There are many themes investigated by contemporary Arab-American women writers, such as patriarchy, identity, exile, discrimination, racism, nostalgia, ethnicity, colour bias, social and cultural displacement, diaspora, veil/hijab issue, the Israeli-Arab conflict and the Lebanese Civil War, September 11 attacks and so on.

The present study also centers mainly on Arab-American women who are the victims of discrimination and oppression. They are placed in a position between a hammer and the anvil, i.e., the hammer of the West and the anvil of the East. If we set some basic principles and values, such as the principle of social, cultural and religious co-existence, women's issues will disappear gradually so that women can live peacefully and get their full rights in both societies. The culture of love, peace, justice

and tolerance should be taught in schools, colleges and universities in the Arab-American societies. The aim of contemporary Arab-American women writers is to reject and resist issues of racism, oppression and hatred. Being members of various cultures, Arab-American writers got motivation from some revolutionary movements like Feminism, Black theories and postcolonial criticism in order to record decades of negative clichés hostility and racism and explore features of their ethnic native history.

The literary works produced by Arab-American women writers set the bridges to reach their origins and their motherland. In doing so, they shed light on recounting immigrant experiences to describe Arab-American's issue of identity negotiation in Diaspora. Arab-American women attempt to engage in a dialogue with others to adapt diasporic identity. Arab-American women have a huge attention to poetry, novels and non-fiction as seen in the remarkable collections of poems, anthologies, journal articles, book reviews and academic researches. Arab-American women writers attempt to record decades of racism, negative stereotypes and alienation in the US with the aim of transmitting their voices by telling their own stories which revolve around immigrants' experiences. They try to break up the intersections of stereotypical racial and oriental discourses, which are practiced by the West against Arab Americans. Writers use their writings as a tool for resisting violence and oppression. In addition, they try to create a space for reducing the complexities of their hyphenated often fragmented identities. Arab-American women in Diaspora face a further burden because of the traditional and cultural factors assumed in preserving Arab tradition and culture for their communities and families. Contemporary Arab-American writers seek to cast aside issues of racism in an effort to explore ethnic self-affirmation and diasporic sensibilities, which touch upon issues of identity, history and Diaspora. Also, Arab-American writers have paid much attention to enlarge and explore the conjunctions of race, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, politics and class in the recent writing.

Contemporary Arab-American women authors convey the fact that Arab-American women have been caught in two different cultures. They do not know whether they belong to the West or to the East, as it was difficult for them to find a true home to which they belong. The fact is that contemporary Arab-American writers in this study belong to different religions, ethnicities and cultural backgrounds. They have highlighted many important social, cultural and political events, such as the Arab-Israeli Conflict (1948-Present), the Gulf Wars (1990), Iraq War (2003) and the Lebanese-Israeli War (2006), along with the Lebanese Civil War (1975-1990), events that have dominated their minds and have a great impact on their daily life. Contemporary Arab- American women authors have been inspired to create and write their works depending on their personal life experiences, as eye witnesses to those events. Another important factor that inspired Arab-American writers to create and publish their literary works was their life and existence in the USA.

Arab-American women writers have become prominent figures in the field of Arab-American literature. However, Arab women have been victimized in the West and the stereotyping of Arab men has grown in the West, as well. The feminist fight against sexism and racism must be taken into consideration. There is the possibility for Arab-American women to explore the interaction and intersection between their two cultures, and between sexism and racism. Arab-American women writers are highly empowered and they are greatly grateful for Arab-American feminism that has inspired them and supported them to convey their voice and concerns through literature. Arab-American feminism began nearly in 1983 with the establishment of the Feminist Arab-American network, which acted as a reaction to the rejection of the US National Women Studies Association to condemn the Israeli attack on Lebanon in 1982. Arab-American women were treated as inferior by mainstream feminism. They found it necessary to set up a distinct feminism that would tackle both ethnic and women's issues. Arab-American feminism has had a very important role in enabling Arab-American women to voice their concerns. However, this is not the only reason why women of Arab descent have actively published a lot of literary works in the last decades.

Pamuk utilized the three sisters to represent the Turkish women in the period between 1969-2012. The Turkish woman does not have the authorized freedom to choose her career, so they run away from their families. All girls in this society marry after primary school, as Pamuk depicts *A Strangeness in My Mind*. Pamuk portrays the familial relationship between the elder sister and the widower father in the Turkish community, where she is responsible for the younger sisters and serving her father. Pamuk believes that these women, regardless of whether they are dads, spouses, or brothers, suffer significantly under the authority and power of men in such a society. Orhan Pamuk portrays the character of the Turkish woman at the time and the extent to which she is held accountable for wrongdoings and actions for which she is not responsible. They are considered products for money exchange. Nevertheless, love and marriage for Samiha are based on her free will of choosing the man she loves. It is a case of exception.

*My Name is Red* documents the lives of Turkish women in 16<sup>th</sup>-century Ottoman society and how these conditions have changed due to women's struggles for self-discovery and female identity exploration. Even though the novel delves into the cultural and religious circumstances of 16<sup>th</sup> century Turkey, it also paints a vivid picture of the social conditions and roles of men and women in this culture. Pamuk portrayed Shekure as a spokesperson for all Turkish women at the time. She dares to raise her voice to be heard and seen by all. She informs her readers that she is the sort of character who strives to

have a respected and valuable female identity in society. A woman in such a society cannot have her own chosen location and live her life. Therefore, she is the female figure. Pamuk decides to break the male-centred ideology. In this way, Shekure has some aspects in common with Virginia Woolf so that both are preoccupied with women's right to speak out about their lives and experiences publicly. Though men cause many troubles to her, she keeps striving for asserting her female identity.

Esther demonstrates public occurrence and autonomy, all of which are limited to Muslim women in Istanbul. She is a matchmaker. "I've played matchmaker to half the maidens of Istanbul," who delivers Hasan's and Shekure's letters, and afterwards Black's and Shekure's. Pamuk depicts her as an intelligent, strong, friendly, and independent outsider. Pamuk reveals a feature of the Jewish character that is ready to do anything for the sake of money. She is an outsider to the Istanbulites, as depicted in the novel as a Jewish woman. This viewpoint helps her explain the story more holistic (if not objective) than any other narrators. Pamuk tries to emphasize women's important position across the globe. He believes that a woman must have the right to be free, respect her privacy, and enjoy her tenderness and beauty. The society members are responsible for protecting her from violating her rights. Marriage should not connect her to a man and turn her into the maid of the house. Pamuk, through Hayrira, refreshes the readers' memories of the type of master-slave relationship that is permitted under Islamic law. She is a human being with no rights or opportunities for a good life. In this novel, Pamuk employs his narrative to those viewed as outsiders, migrant workers from Anatolia's small towns searching for work in Istanbul.

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