

# Resistance Literature: An Arab-American Voice From Post 9/11

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## ABSTRACT

Resistance has mostly been a consequence of subjugation. The word resistance is derived from the Latin root word 'resiste re', meaning stand against, which denotes a slow but insistent, often invisible but enduring strategy that has the potential to dislodge the dominant structures, if not dismantled them. Resistance hash over a re-interpretation of the hegemonic biases which determines the identities of subaltern groups and thus silence them. As resistance flash on the need to hear the voices of the exudates and aims to shoulder the marginalized in to the centre, it confronts the dominant and oppressive structures, the overt and the enshrouded. The subjugated naturally fire to call in question or to exterminate the domination. Thus resistance arises out of utmost distress against insufferable atrocities unleashed by the hegemonic power. Subjugated victims have been catching various modes to express their resistance against this. Pen is taken as a weapon to display their resistance against the power of dominance. Literature in this manner plays a key role in proclaiming an individual's resistance. The literatures from ethnic minorities and from the refugees have chiefly been a remonstrance against the majority group who always attempt to evacuate the rightful people from their own homeland. Resistance literature has brought to light the awareness among the people regarding the exploitation, suppression and cornering of the sufferers who are been marginalized by the hegemonic of power in one or in other ways. Despite of the United Nations, an intergovernmental Organization that was tasked to maintain international peace and security, still such subjects are facing inhumane and boorish treatment at the hands of the decision makers and stakeholders of power. On other hand the politicians seem to capitalize than trying to root out this evil. As a result the wounded and the one with sense, owned their pen to face this agony by witting their pangs, culture and society.

**Keywords:** Resistance literature, Arab-American, Post 9/11

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## INTRODUCTION

The national tragedy and traumatic experience of the 9/11 events, represented by the attacks on the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon, marked an irreversible change in the life of the Americans. The terrorist attacks of September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001 were a worldwide media story. This event caught the attention of each with access to media coverage of global news. The term 9/11 is widely used to refer to this date, this event, and most specifically the shock of the planes hitting the Twin Towers in New York city and their subsequent collapse in front of a horrified spectator of millions. It was considered as the traumatic event of the nation. Allen Meek in his book *Trauma and Madia: Theories, Histories, Images* points out that 9/11 has become an "iconic cultural trauma- relived and retold in numerous documentaries and dramatizations" and given that the media representations of 9/11 seem to have become "events in their own right, displacing access to any original content", it is critical to find other ways of accessing the event. Here comes the relevance of this paper, which will find its access to the new perspectives of 9/11 through a detailed research on the resistance literature genres of the affected subjects from the very same nation itself. This will be beneficial in unfurling the genuine consequences of 9/11 through each lenses of the issue.

Arab-American"s were confronted with the devastating consequences of this tragedy by victimizing them by „war terror“ and their civil liberties were hijacked and were all of a sudden recast as a threat to the security of American nation. The Palestinian Arab- American, Naomi Shihab Nye"s (20002) online piece "An Open Letter from Naomi Shihab Nye to any Would be Terrorists" is a good one to show the relevance of this argument, in which she identifies herself as an American devastated by the loss of human life as a result of the 9/11 attacks being a Palestinian with deep roots in the Arab world.

Nye underscores her double national allegiances, not favouring one over the other but aiming to bridge the differences that are constantly a play in separating the Arab from the American. But the Arab-Americans roundly had to take on a traumatizing friction under their hyphenated identities against each other. The ambiguous identity complicates and contradicts the simplistic us Vs them concept among the post 9/11 dominant mindset, which ingrained in a way that hate and love just like us and them, American and non- Americans commenced to be separate and unrelated entities. Thus, hate and revenge took its turn to be the rightful reaction of solely the dominant group. Along with the world the literary writing also changed after 9/11 and so the literature of this period is a reflection of its historical context and social feelings.

The study in this research work centralize on post 9/11 American works which trade with the portrayal of Arab- Americans and the effects of the attack on the life of Arabs living inside the American society. The resistance literature works of post 9/11 are been picked here to do research on this problem. For the sake of an unbiased argument, the works of American novelists are also selected along with the Arab-American authored works. The research work is planned to work out as two parts, which may deal with the poetry of the selected Arab- American poets and the novels of American writers who has contributed to the unsung atrocities of the oppressed and the affected in the 9/11 attacks. Poetry often regarded as the outpouring of the human spirit, has fascinated people across time and space. Like Modern's view on poetry, it's a work written with a definite political goal expressing not just the imaginative spirit but also the tradition of the land and its people. If it's considered as resistance poetry then it might be hailed as a constructive response to the oppressed. It is a curious matter to observe that these lamentations of the oppressed soul could be divulged in the embodiment of poetry in a more effective tone as it is the elementary form of expressing a person's innermost beliefs and ideas. The poetry of the wounded poets like, a Syrian-American poet Mohja Kahf, Palestinian-American poet Suheir Hammad, Labanese-American poet Dima Hilal and Palestinian-American poet Lisa Suheir Majaj, itself analyze the factor of resistance in it, which over and over attempts to cry out the pagan of identity crisis, feeling of otherness and disillusionment they came across at this particular juncture. As far as novels are concerned, here the novels from different resistance writer's perspectives on the same issue of 9/11 have been preferred to drive home the same objectives of factorizing resistance as a powerful weapon against the trauma of subjugation. For this, Don DeLillo can never be avoided as he always stands against the tyrannized and who has described his fiction as being concerned with "living in dangerous times", and in an interview declared, "Writers must oppose systems. It's important to write against power, corporations, state, and the whole system of consumption and of debilitating entertainments[...] I think writers, by nature, must oppose things, oppose whatever power tries to impose on us." His novel *Falling Man* is the one on 9/11 attacks and its aftermath. The next is *Dinarzad's Children: An Anthology of Contemporary Arab American Fiction*, edited by Pauline Kaldas and Khaled Mattawa (2004) with nineteen short fictions by Arab- American writers on the very issue of 9/11 attack and its payoff upon them. It's a diverse collection of Arab American fiction that speaks to the difficulty and richness of the complicated cultural inheritance of a people who suddenly found themselves as an object of public debate in the wake of September 11. Many stories focus on the ups and downs of family life.

The time calls up to display the applicability and purpose of resistant literature which could facilitate to empower and accredit the literary works of the writers under one's thump and to highlight the unnoticed or least discussed works of the oppressed, on their own sufferings of the incident 9/11 attacks. This comes possible with analyzing resistance through disruption and dissent by critiquing the dominant narratives and figuring out the resistant writers. This could establish new social values in place of the old one with oppression, torture and inhumane treatment by showing the descent of democracy by placing the „other“ nation within the nation.

Numerous works have been conducted on the resistance literature. Dissenting voices and rebellions against the structure of domination have always existed in one shape or another (Hsiao and Linn vii). Many injustices perpetrated under imperialism and colonialism, essentially, compliment a broad context for the aggregate of irregular and amorphous discourses of resistance. Marxism, Feminism, Post colonialism and Dalit studies are leading discourses of resistance that arise from a particular condition of subjugation and marginalization. Such resistance in the globalized context moulds the analytical ground for this research work. The resistance literature is believed to be triggered by the imperatives of saying „No“. Conventionally, resistance has been interpreted as a negative term and has been associated with refusal in a destructive manner. The constructive version of resistance has to be practiced to bring about a positive result. So many such resistance literatures have played a great role in expressing its sensitivity towards marginalized and oppressed „Other“. The studies which have been come across include national as well as international level of researches. „The poetics of justice: the discourse of resistance in selected Indian fiction“ a study research scholar Multani Navaleen; „Every beautiful poem is an act of resistance“ by Mahmoud Darwish a famous Palastenian resistant poet; „Trauma and Media: Theories, Histories, Images.“ by Allen MEEK; „Resistance in exile: a study of Tibetan poetry“ a study by research scholars John, Appu Jacob are some of the studies that paved way to the specification of this research topic towards the resistance literature of Arab-Americans like the poems of the Syrian-American poet Mohja Kahf. This lead to the discovery of many other Arab-American poets such as Suheir Majaj a Palestinian-American, Dima Hilal a Labanese-American and Lisa Suheir Majaj a

Palestinian-American and a whole anthology of thirty short fictions „Dinarzad’s Children: An Anthology of Contemporary Arab American Fiction” written by almost every Arab-American writers on the issues of post 9/11 attack, which I have taken as my reference data for this study. Hardly very few resistance works are been found in relation to the plights of 9/11 period, which mainly exhibits the political issues on terrorism. Most of the works on 9/11 attack appears to be dominant. A faculty of Humanities in the department of Midden oosten studies, has done a study on „The Formation of Arab-American Identity in a Public Schooling post 9/11 America: The Case of Fordson High School in Dearborn, Michigan in which he has analyzed the complexity of an Arab-American identity within a post 9/11 America. Here he has interviewed the school students to do his work. In the introduction to the first anthology of Arab-American short fiction, „Dinarzad’s Children: An Anthology of Contemporary Arab-American Fiction”, comment on the inextricable link between the global political repercussions triggered by the events of 9/11 and the need to assert Arab-American literature on the US literary map. Again, The Carol N.Fadda-Conrey’s research paper on „Writing Arab-American Identity Post 9/11” targets on the importance for the Arab-American poets, fiction writers, journalists and essayists to point out the historical injustices that fellow Arabs in the Middle east had been subjected to by US foreign policy.

The significance of analyzing diverse modes of resistance, peculiarly those inscribed by the ordinary people to challenge the authority of the dominant structures cannot be smoked up as they attempt to transform the given order in historically specific ways. The role of resistance in unveiling the unrighteous practices, undermining the power of the dominant structures to carve out a break even field for the normal people and their practices is to be sung out. The literary pieces that this research paper explore, helps in bridging the binaries East and West. Through this the researcher could delve into the identity of hybridization, an identity of blending two distinct cultures, languages, literatures, and an identity which bent over backward to merge the multihued literary flow of 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Hansaki Kohei in the forward to the book *Ethnicity: Identity, Conflict and Crisis* comments that: “It is with the crash of the geo-political hegemony of the colonial first worlds that the third world ethno-identical struggle began. It is with the rise and success of the national liberation movements in Asia, Africa and Latin America that the two words became representative of the many realities of the oppressed few. The first world had been prophesying a „Theology of Progress” to the colonies. This philosophy based itself on the fact that „progress is commercialization, assimilation, cultural unification, equality and freedom based on atomized and abstract individuals”

## CONCLUSION

The third world has redefined the meaning of the twin words „ethnicity” and „identity”, unlike the alertness made in the above lines. Ethnicity is a quite genuine topic and is a live issue postmarked in diverse fashion by the global bodies. This paper stretches out to the reach of researching the ethnic affair of Arab-Americans breathing American air as their own country in the post 9/11 attacks. The resistance set out against this issue by the literary contributors from the same ethnic groups are been taken into account for the first hand exchange of genuine information regarding their identity conflict. The works of Arab-American poets and writers will be analyzed to explicit their own views on the 9/11 attack through the resistance literature pieces, which gave the opportunity to voice Arab-American concerns in this period by bringing them into the limelight. In Palestinian- American, Naomi Shihab Nye’s (2002) online piece, for instance, “An Open Letter from Naomi Shihab Nye to Any Would Be Terrorists” she says to the faceless terrorist, “I beg you,” as your distant Arab cousin, as your American neighbor, listen to me. Our hearts are broken, as yours may also feel broken in some ways we can’t understand, unless you tell us in words. Killing people won’t tell us. We can’t read that message. Find another way to live... Make our family proud”. Arab-American literature thus could be made an important tool for self-representation and self expression to dismantle the inaccurate portrayals about them.

The research work may advance on the hypothesis that Arab-American writing originated in the post 9/11 period may be predominantly read as constituting a complex and multilayered discourse of resistance countering the new pressure of domination in the emerging global order. Such domination is largely perceived as the suppression and violence which is totally unjust. Considerable representations of marginalized and subjugated factors could be revealed by a careful study of the works selected to undergo the research. Here the linguistic, cultural, and ecological inflections of resistance have been taken into account. The specific background of the contemporary world history will also be finely studied, where ever relevant, against the backdrop of an emerging neo-liberal ideology, and its manifestation. The selected poems, fiction and short stories of Arab-American writers will be examined for the various forms of resistance and an emphasis will be given in the study of diverse discourses at their point of intersection. The critical analysis is expected to bring out the applicability of non-violent resistance in democratizing an unjust order and thus redefine equality and justice in the globalizing world.

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