

From Home and Nationalism to Transnationalism ...

Wafaa Abdulaali

**From Home and Nationalism to Transnationalism: A
Study of Contemporary Poetry by Arab and American
Women Poets**

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ABSTRACT

This paper studies selected contemporary poems by women-poets from the Arab and American worlds that tackle the idea of “home,” or country, nation and nationalism in times of terror as the focal point. The women-poets, whether writing in Arabic or in English, as a native language, cannot avoid delving into the politics of the time. In such poetry, politics and poetics converge. Arab women-poets sing the love of home and the Nation, American women-poets question the idea of their country staging wars abroad, and condemn what they see their country’s unethical interference in other nations’ business, ousting this regime, supporting another, in the name of nationalism/patriotism. Unlike their Arab peers, the American women-poets condemn nationalism/patriotism. The paper takes the comparative approach as a springboard, to conclude that women-poets’ political poetry is a gendered genre of outrage, of resistance, a tool of fight.

Split at the root, neither Gentile nor Jew
Yankee nor Rebel, born
In the face of two ancient cults,
I'm a good reader of histories.

Adrienne Richⁱ

The problem with America
is that her morale is still too high.
She needs to be a bit more depressed

before she starts behaving better.
The trouble with America
is she is a big bully

and a big coward,
also that she has no conscience.

These are dry times, orphan times,
Fear on the wind, anger in the soil. I cannot
Imagine an appealing future
for my species, that is born to violence.

Alicia Ostrikerⁱⁱ

To Jaffa, to Haifa
We will run, dear ones,

We will sing the love of our father's land.
In the morning, winter grieves will die away,
And in Jerusalem, where the hill, olives and the moon,
the faces of our buried ones will shine again.
We'll move above their torn bodies,
We'll head to Akka and Baisan.

Slafa Hajjawiⁱⁱⁱ

The tanks of murder rove.
Baghdad. . .
Samarqand,
Granada labors for breath.
Once again Hulago drives
into the shirts of tired towns;

Bushra Al-Bustani^{iv}

We must always return
to poems for news of the world
or perish for the lack.

Meena Alexander^v

“Poetry is a political action,” with this remark, an interviewer asked the African-American poet June Jordan to comment on her saying that “Poetry is a political act because it involves telling the

truth.” Jordan maintains that “Poetry is not a shopping list, a casual disquisition on the colors of the sky, a soporific daydream, or bumper sticker sloganeering.”^{vi} With this confirmation, Jordan ushers in an era, though as old as poetry, in general and women’s poetry, in particular, of a sturdy relationship between poetry and politics, a beginning of a new era of poetics in political poetry.

Themes such as Nationalism/Patriotism, Home, the failure of the National dream, and resistance are the most common in women’s political poetry of the present. The poetics of home and nationalism, which develop in a later stage into transnationalism, encompass all of these themes. Nationalist poetry and political poetry inevitably meet and cannot in most cases be mutually exclusive. They meet in aim, but depart in approach. Singing the love of home is an individual act addressed to the nation or to the community and is usually historicized in a context, which is traumatic for the country or the nation. Protest and anger, or standing with a side against the other is unavoidable and hence the thin line between political and nationalist themes. The public issue or the nationalist problem is the stimuli and the purpose.

Long ago, Whitman, expressing his concern over the politics of his time said that the duty of the poet is “to cheer up slaves and horrify despots.”^{vii} In the Arab world, Arab literary historians say that the poet was the spokesman of the tribe who used to defend, and praise his tribe, the head of the clan or its fighters. Incitement to

defend the land, praise of the tribe's fighters and their steadfastness, victories against enemies, lamentation and glorification of martyrs were the major elements of classical, Arabic poetry--Qasīdā. In brief, poetry was "a weapon of battle."^{viii} Specific genres like the panegyric or eulogy (known as al-Madīḥ) where nationalist sentiments prevail and the boasting of one's identity (known as al-fakhr) were popular throughout the history of Arabic poetry.

Women's poetics of home is woman's gendered poetics of space which is both personal and public. Long ago, George Eliot said, "There is no private life which is not determined by a wider public life," which is an epigraph used by Adrienne Rich in her book *Diving into the Wreck*. Rich also says, "Time's mainstream idea that you sacrifice aesthetics if you write about political positions", but "I don't think that's true".^{ix} Indeed, Adrienne Rich, June Jordan, Sonia Sanchez, Carolyn Forché, Bushra al-Bustāni, Su'ād Al-ṣabaḥ, Slafa Ḥajjawi to mention a few, both sides of the Arab and American women-poets are related to their society and to women on other planes: American women-poets transform their nationalism into transnationalism mainly because it is their policy-makers who stage wars on remote distances. They do not only enact personal awakening to such political issues like war and nationalism, from which they are traditionally excluded, but they share the voicing of their conscience and consciousness within the historical and historicist context of their existence, and this is where

gender and politics converge. Indeed, women-poets have a political thinking enunciated by the art of direct or elusive speech, of diving deep into the layers of the real meaning of a historical moment, of the art of articulating visions and capturing manifestations of the US policy away from home, on remote foreign lands of the Globe. They do not only search for infuriating heated issues to produce a rhetoric of resistance or a burst of angry lines, but they also articulate first-hand experience. In love of home, in defense of the usurped land, in resistance to oppression, in instigating fighters to defeat invaders and occupiers, Arab women-poets pronounce powerful nationalist sentiments which are sharply political without sacrificing the gendered aesthetics of poetry. These elements are constituents of the poetics of politics they find themselves committed to voice.

To begin, it's necessary to give a brief definition of nation, nationalism, and patriotism. *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* defines "nation" as a group of people who share one ethnic, one culture, besides the political state-nation. But history and geography of that space may be added. As for "patriotism", from the Greek "patria"—means "fatherland", it is a loyalty, a "collective mentality," and aspirations like the collective feeling of the Arab countries represented by the Arab League as an organization functioning like an umbrella of the Arab Nation as a whole. Today, nation's collective ethnic is replaced by "civic" loyalties like the case with the multiculturalism of the US.^x

Regarding “nationalism” it is defined as an “attitude” and an “action. It is an attitude that members of a nation have when they care about their identity. It’s an “action” taken by members of a nation to achieve or sustain self-determination. A “state” is a “political entity” with a high degree of sovereignty with an authority over internal and external affairs.^{xi} So, in the present times, Iraqis, Palestinians, Lebanese, Kurds, the blacks—African Americans, etc in their search to establish sovereignty, would be exhibiting a state-focused nationalism. In the case of the American women-poets, they voice repulsion in the face of crimes committed in the name of state nationalism. America’s unjust wars abroad gave the women-poets the impetus to reject the war and hence the emergence of transnationalism by virtue of the feeling of the victimizer on their part and interconnectivity has grown between them and the victimized. Transnationalism is the substitute, the antidote of the clash of cultures. This term was created by Randolph Bourne (1886-1918).^{xii} In Pan-Arabism, in times of disaster, like war or invasion or oppression, it behooves members of the nation to seek solidarity represented in the armed struggle to sustain the rising of a statehood that brings back their sovereignty and independence. On the contrary, in the US, the women-poets condemn the American involvement in the political turmoil of remote countries outside the states and deterritorialize their home to be on the land of the

victimized and identify with their dilemma and speak on their behalf.

In Arabic, the nation, “umma”, is a feminine name; its root is “umm” which means mother and the land is “ardh” which is also feminine. The attack of the foreign male invaders, occupiers or raiders, is a “disgrace of the honor” of the motherland which must be washed away by blood and the sacrifice of souls, if needed. The interest of the wounded home is above the personal or group interests. Hence, death on the defense battlefield is heroism, martyrdom, a war need to be extolled. Besides, nature or “Ṭabī‘ā” in Arabic is also feminine, so conceived of as motherland, with all other female physicality: giving birth, suckling from land’s breasts, connection with the umbilical cord, land’s fecundity, femininity and fertility against this staining of honor. Even defending “land”, “nation”, “nature” or “home” against enemies is a male’s honor and a show of manly ethics. The “land”, “nation” and “nature”, have wombs, fertility, breasts, that is full femininity; in brief, they are women. “Patriotism” still a feminine, in Arabic “qawmiyya”, yet it is possible to envision patriotism as the “fatherland” of the larger Arab homeland from the Gulf to the ocean and nationalism is individual’s emotional attachment with home—each of the twenty-two countries of the Arabian geography. So, “Qawmiyya” is derived from the root word of “qawm” meaning “people of a tribe or tribes, clans, or kin, etc.” Presumably, it is the wider, more comprehensive

“fatherland”. The nationalist poet, in Edward Said’s definition, “articulates the experiences, the aspirations, and the vision of a people suffering under the dominion of an off-shore power.”^{xiii} In this way, the Arab history has a long surviving culture and history of resistance, a tradition of integrity and steadfastness in response to the continuous colonization, to the continuous usurpation of the Arab land and the violation of their sovereignty. Nationalism, then, is the springboard, from which the Arab poets start, from the shared common history, religion, geography and language.

However, on the other side, ethics of patriotism/nationalism has always been questioned. In former Yugoslavia, for instance, women tend to be anti-nationalist as contemporary Balkan feminists supported the patriotism of the victimized. Here, I am going to stick to three major types of nationalism: the Arabist, the Pan-Negroist-Africanist nationalism, and the feminist anti-Americanist nationalism.

II

In the introduction to *Black Nationalism in America*, the editors give a definition of Black Nationalism in a time when the racist discrimination against African-Americans was at its peak and the black race started to call for certain solidarity among them to resist it. Pan-Negroism and pan-Africanism foster the “attitude” that Africans throughout the world have common characteristics, share

common problems as a result of their origins, their political oppression and economic exploitation by Western civilization.^{xiv}

Black women-poets express that feeling very overtly in their poetry of the late 1960's and early 1970's. They lean on separatist ideology and resolutions even anti-white sentiments. June Jordan, Nikki Giovanni, Sonia Sanchez, to mention a few, call their black people to develop a racial solidarity, using a discourse of hate in favor of an action that achieves their nationalistic unity. In her poem "Okay, Negroes", June Jordan addresses a group of African-Americans who wait for some goodness from the white. She calls upon them to wake up and see the chauvinistic and prejudiced socio-political inclinations of the white. She says:

Okay "Negroes"
American Negroes
Looking for milk
Crying out loud
In the nursery of freedom land;
The riders are rough.
Tell me where you got that image
Of a male white mammy.^{xv}

In her "Poem for My Family," Jordan resists the history of slavery and racism by her own birth which is celebrated as the birth of a nationalist pride:

MY LIFE IS BEING BORN

This is a lesson
In American History
What can you teach me?
The fire smells of slavery.

American
I mean America how
Do you intend to incinerate
my slavery?
I have taken my eyes from the light of your fires.
The begging body grows cold.
I see.
I see myself
Alive
A **life**.^{xvi}

Jordan feels herself the transformer of the whole black nation.

Sonia Sanchez, in her whole collection *We A baddddd People*, creates a nationalist rhetoric to galvanize the black people in a collectivity against the white foe who plans to kill the black people. Using her own slang, she says ironically and bitterly:

i'm blk. liven in a
white/psychotic/neurotic
schizophrenic/society where

all honkies have been plannen
my death since....^{xvii}

Nikki Giovanni, likewise, in “The True Import of Present Dialogue: Black vs. Negro” asks black men to collect courage to kill the white men as they are obliged to fight on the Vietnam front for the lives of the white, she says:

We will kill Viet Nam
For them
We kill for UN and NATO and SEATO and US
And everywhere for all alphabet but
BLACK
Can we long to kill WHITE for BLACK
Learn to kill niggers
Learn to be Black men.^{xviii}

According to Addison Gayle, “the Black Nationalism is a corrective—a means of helping black people out of the polluted mainstream of Americanism.”^{xix} In Edward Said’s words, nationalism is tied to “an aspiration to sovereignty, to sway, and to dominance.”^{xx}

In the poetry of the American women-poets, nationhood is replaced by the migration individualism seeing that their country stages unethical wars in their names. They seek to deconstruct the authority of the constituents of American nationalism that legitimizes the State and its political system and hence their

advocacy of the personal as political. On the Pan-America, “the State” shows the ability to employ the rhetoric of nationalism to posit a threat to its existence and its people in specific. This, to the American women-poets, is used unethically to justify its imperialism, military adventurism and the worship of Moloch, the god of power. Nationalism, they believe, is used to demonize America and to bully the weak nations.

Adrienne Rich, who is often cited as an icon for defining and asserting the identity of a poet as a woman, in her *Dream of a Common Language* (1974) and through a passionate lyrical nationalism, presents her project to build up a strong, cohesive community of women, of a corporate identity where women-poets find a vision to sustain a bond between women and mothers. It is a separatist, women-centered nationalism that Rich theorizes. It is better-called “only-women nationalism”. She says “we were always like this/ rootless, dismembered: knowing it makes the difference/ Birth stripped our birthright from us/tore us from a woman, from women, from ourselves.”^{xxi} She also says “two women eye to eye/ measuring each other’s spirit, each other’s/limitless desire,/a whole new poetry beginning here.”^{xxii} So Rich envisions a feminist community where the state nation has no place. To resist misogyny and the rejection of her character as radical Feminist, Rich’s feminist separatist nationalism is the solution. Julia Kristeva describes Rich’s project as a “counter-society,” a female society, “a

place outside the law, utopia's floodgate" and "half of the sky."^{xxiii}

In her poems of *Your Native Land, Your Life* (1986), *Atlas of the Difficult World* (1991), *Dark Fields of the Republic* (1995) and *Midnight Salvage* (1998) Rich fathoms the meaning of nationhood/patriotism after all the aggressive behavior of her country against humanity. She identifies home as a refuge and locus of pain, "this continent of the homeless," and "this planet of war-torn children, of women and children standing in line."^{xxiv}

Home for her is a cluster of emptiness, absence, abandonment, loss, a place "where absence began." Diasporic perspective overwhelms "at times, home is nowhere. At times, one knows only extreme estrangement and alienation. Then home is no longer just one place. It is locations."^{xxv}

In *An Atlas of the Difficult World*, Rich emerges as a muralist in an attempt to envision a map of her home away from the America of the time; she says: "I promised to show you a map you say but this is a mural/ then yes let it be these are small distinctions/ where do we see it from is the question."^{xxvi} Rich in her sixties emerges as a naturalist, envisioning the world as facing "earthquakes and drought, followed by freezing, followed by war" (p.22). She despises violent militarist nationalism as she says, "Every flag is a cry of pain" (p.23); she says these flags, like any other military operation they celebrate, are to assuage the pains afflicted upon the enemy. She says, "I am bent to fathoming what it

means to love my country/ the history of this earth and the bond with it?" (p. 22). Asking her reader "Catch if you can your country's moment..." (p. 12). "It is the sixth day of another war"(p.20). She sees that America is an alien nation living in, "*solitude, loneliness, homesickness, lonely retreat*" (p. 20). Here she verges on the lamentation, the mournful using anguished tone as her country America "glazed with salt", "the Sea of Indifference" with a history of pain and dishonor; the land of burial of dreams. In an interview she says, "I was trying to talk about the location, the privileges, the complexity of loving my country and hating the ways where national interest is being defined for us". She strives to conceptualize her own "patriotism" as "matriotism"—from the mother as an icon of redemption. She addresses the reader directly as "you" and dedicates to him this concept when she urges him to listen to her and include him in the spirit of matriotism she theorizes. She defines the patriot/matriot as a female, saying "A patriot is not a weapon. A patriot is one who wrestles for the soul of her country/As she wrestles for her own being, for the soul of his country."(24)

In *Dark Fields of the Republic*, Rich warns the Americans of the seriousness of the moment in the aftermath of the Gulf War of 1991. She taps into predicting what is in store as America was moving closer "to its own truth and dread" warning against remaining in dark fields of the republic which might lead to the fall

of America, to a fall—so painful like those of 9/11, a horror she predicted quite prophetically.^{xxvii}

In *Midnight Salvages* (1999), Rich still concerned about her country, broods over what salvage to bring to America through poetry. She emerges as the “messenger” America needs— as a critic says.^{xxviii} Now she is “the national poet [who] speaks from underground and seems to see and address everyone and everything in America” (p. 213). She sees America as a home, a continent “of the homeless/of children sold... taken by force/driven from their mother’s land/killed by their mothers to save from capture.” In brief, “a home of trail of tears.”^{xxix}

Like Rich, Mary Campbell mocks nationalism and all its icons: the flag and the national anthem, “the Star-spangled Banner”. In her poem “To the Editor” she says ironically and bitterly:

Thank God there is no constitutional amendment
 Against burning words. I’m going to burn
 The constitution. I’m going to burn
 The Declaration of Independence.
 Every morning before I go to work
 I’m going to write THE FLAG
 On a piece of paper and use it to light
 The dawn’s early cigarette.^{xxx}

Carolyn Forche, in her prose and poetry, questions such values as “citizenship”, being an American and what is “political and poetic” and opts for an identity which shudders the American’s blatant and flagrant complicity in wars abroad. In her collection, *Country between Us* ^{xxxi}, she tackles as an eyewitness the American-involved war in El Salvador. Never forgetting her identity as an American citizen and as a poet, Forche, like Rich questions the concept of nationalism when she is on the land of America. She recognizes the horror of a complicity in the cause of the Salvadoran suffering. Her country funds a “centrist” government which uses death squads to annihilate social activists. In her poem “Return”, reminiscent of Rich’s description of the American nation’s solitude and alienation, she feels no connection with her American people; the gap between the people of the nation is too wide to go over. She says she rarely speaks to an American, especially men. She also finds a crossing-line between the conventions of American poetry-writing and her “righteous impulse to write narratives of witness and corruption.”^{xxxii} She explains in “San Onofre, California” what she calls Americans’ “failure to pay attention”, “the cries of those who vanish/might take years to get here”^{xxxiii} In her prose poem “The Colonel” she breaks these conventions of American poetry as the horror of the experience behooves, and asserts, “there is no other way to say this.”(16) Interestingly, Meena Alexander’s conception of home hinges upon the “one” language and the “one” place; she

say: "I could take to be mine alone" therefore, "Diaspora" lingers in her saying "I felt stranded in the multiplicity that marked my life", it is a 'predicament though with a blessing. She compares herself to a bee working hard in the "hive" of language, as she innovatively calls it, that allows her "to make a strange and sweet honey, the pickings of dislocation." In actual fact, she gives a glimpse into an extraordinary, accurate description of her "transnationalism" through the "hive" imagery. She depicts her transnationalism as an act of "swimming" into 'the uncharted waters... which ... I shared with many others,' but this is such a tenuous experience that she envisages as "a tenuous solidity."^{xxxiv} In her poetry, it goes without saying that she probes into the problems of Sudan and Dar fur, into Sept.11 Disaster, into the gulf war and the invasion of Iraq.

Black Nationalism and feminist nationalism are the major trends in women's poetry of the decades of wars, but both of them are separatist from the mainstream of what is seen as the satanic evil Americanism which they view as a serious threat to all life on the globe and to women's in particular. As for June Jordan and the other Black Nationalism poets, nationalism is a means of critique and opposition and of creating a solidarity and separatism, and for Rich it is a means of empowerment of women. In Rich's later development of her political thinking, nationalism shifts from a women-centered concept to a global-centered synthesis of internal and external issues, of the past, the present and the future.

III

The values and forms of the nation and nationalism in Arabic poetry, in general and women's in particular, are part and parcel of their frame of mind, identity, culture, religion, even tradition. Belonging to the land, to each other, to the Arab culture are essential to the collective, communal and individual feelings of homogeneity, as they also have a shared language, geography and history. Arab land has been always attacked by enemies coming from overseas; because of this, Arab women poets' nationalism, like that of the black women poets', is fraught with what appears to the outsider to be violence and militarism. However, the Arabs believe it necessary for self-defense, self-determination, and for the liberation of their sacred home. A nationalist poetry is a poetry that aspires to lay down the foundations of a nation of encompassing homogeneity, homology, and inclusive diversity, with a universality and timelessness links. The nation is abstract, its foundations, elements and constituents are substantiate. Bosworth in his book, *Nationalism* (2007), says that "The sacralization of the land prompts the view that a nation is made through the mystical fusing of its soil (and sometimes its flora and fauna) with the "blood" of the humankind that has inhabited and developed it."^{xxxv} This is as

ancient as Arabic poetry, whether in Arabic poetry as a whole or in women's.

In her poem "A Poem For Iraq", Bushra Al-Bustani attempts to define Iraqism as a synonym is used here to indicate her Nationalism and Arabism to indicate her Patriotism. The female self/speaker fuses physically and spiritually with the home: the reader identifies with the female lyric speaker and through her, sharing the oneness of identity. Thus, she goes beyond the gender of the speaker; she objectifies her femininity and hence invites all the readers, beyond gender, to share a national/patriotic, Iraqist/Arabist, one identity. Her individualism melts into the identity of home, Iraq with the whole Arab Homeland. The self-identification of the female heroine of the poem with home and with the reader is at the core of this literary/poetic nationalism of Bushra Al-Bustani. Despite the turbulent present of the home and of the homeland, she finds shades of hopefulness in the resilience of the healthy home as she sings the possibility and the certainty of the eventual rise of Iraq. She peers back into history and foresees a resistance, a very revolutionary one. The national/patriotic literary tradition, Iraqist/Arabist, with all its diversity and long history, gives authority to the realness and cultural homogeneity of the nation and lyric nationalism derives some of its authority from the collective retrieval of its manifestation in the previous historical period of the history of the nation. Al-Bustani in a panoramic poetics of home

uses the “mountains” of Iraq as her metonymic pivotal point to pronounce her nationalist sentiments and couples them with the catastrophic political situation of the Arab nation; bashing the rulers in the first place, she says:

The history of swords
Is shaken on their horses’ backs
The Tatar’s horse,
The barbarous.
All that was bright, real and great,
Was swept away.^{xxxvi}

The mystical fusion of the mountains, the minarets, and the Iraqi flag with the poet’s/woman-speaker’s body reaches its peak in these lines:

The mountains,
The hell,
The mountains,
The bliss.
The mountains that wrestle,
pacify me.
I do not calm down,
Mountains are minarets,
green,
red,
black.^{xxxvii}

In her poem “My Body a Palm Tree that Grows in Shatt Al-Arab”, Su‘ād Al-Şabāḥ voices a mystical fusion with the home, with the mother land, yet protest politically against the Arab leaders and what she names as “the oil curse”, saying,

I am the daughter of Kuwait,
I grew up with the pearl of the sea,
and nestled in my lap the shell and stars.
The sea was kind to me, Oh! So liberal!
Then came the damned devil of oil,
and all fell prostrate at his feet,
and worshiped night and day.
We forgot the desert ethics its honor and hospitality,
our coffee mortars, our ancient poetry,
And drowned in trivialities.^{xxxviii}

In the aftermath of Saddam’s invasion of Kuwait, al-Şabāḥ wrote poems in which she expresses disappointment. In her poem, “An E-Card from Darling Kuwait”, she speaks about home as a motherland and the mystical fusion between her and Kuwait saying:

We will linger here.
This land is our nursing mother,
our tent, cloak, and our home,
the robe that warms us,
the roof that protects us,

the breast that tenderly warms us,
the letter that we write,
the poem that crafts us.
When they shoot a bullet towards Kuwait,
The bullet tears my heart apart.^{xxxix}

Al-Bustani, in a wonderful intertextuality with an ancient Arab poem of Malik bin Al-Rayb, which is a self-elegy, protests against the invasion of Kuwait in an elusive way to cover up her condemnation of this invasion. She uses the Al-Ghadha tree as a chandelier of the text, a tree that grows in the Arabian Desert and it has become an image of the Arabs, their culture, their history, etc. The poet-speaker projects the feelings of loss, and diaspora on the land of home. She says:

I do not show you contentment.
The sand of Al-Ghada tree is soaked in blood,
and the pearls of the tree's night,
frustrates tribes' leaders.
The sand is sick,
Its wound has pushed a way to the sea.
The stab has shot a flower into the sky,
and falling on the ground,
growing a dome in the landscape.^{xl}

The tree is traditionally associated with growth, youth, life, and the society. The whole collection, *Anguish of Trees* (2002) resonates with this theme: In Iraq during the atrocious time of the embargo, the whole society is sick, anguishing for an exit from the shackles of the big imprisonment, internal and external, psychological and physical. The economic sanctions targeted at Iraq and Iraqis, society, individuals and families. Bushra Al-Bustani's Nationalism is a way of her being in the world, at home, on the land of the country. It is not an escape from the world, but the vital attempt to be in it, part of it. She crafts a poetic shield for protection from marginalization and hence building a female individuality with the communal nation to heal and to reclaim.

In her collection, *When will you believe that I am a Butterfly* (2005), Reem Qays Kubba gives a self-image of the butterfly which survives heroically the furnace of the war of 1991, the Desert Storm operation, "war on terrorism" of 2003 and the following years. Kubba marvels at the butterfly/ Iraq and she, woman poet, are being brutalized and crushed continuously while still resisting. She says in a poem called "Umniyat" (Wishes):

All of a sudden
in a nap of artilleries,
between two wars
we met....
We dreamed together

that cemeteries might
turn into clubs.^{xli}

Although Diaspora has originally been associated with the Jews' post-Babylonian dispersal and displacement and still lurks there in the poetry of Alicia Ostriker and Adrienne Rich, but it also looms large in Arab women's poetry: Palestinian, Lebanese and Iraqi who were forcibly expelled from home in the aftermath of the invasion or occupation. Diaspora for all these women-poets is a loss of home, of tradition, of roots. Palestinian Diaspora leans on the vision that home is not a geography only; it is a state of mind, an idea, a concept which the poet crafts, sculptures, recreates, casts in blood and flesh, using "poetics" as a means, a poetics that is dynamic, moving in place and time, and requires associations.

In Slafa Ḥajjāwī's collection *Ughniyat Filasṭīniyya* (Palestinian Songs), the geography of home is not merely on the map, but a state of mind associated with the poetics of place and time which are engraved in the poet's memory. However, her home is presented in two ways: topographical, actual names of Palestinian cities, towns, places, villages, etc and in morphological-ecofeminist images of the Palestinian nature: trees, pastures, soil, plants, etc. Topographical, morphological eco-feminist images are imbued with maternal, typically female emotions. Hajjawi depends on a visionary power of insight in "Ru'ya Dair Yassen" (A Vision of Dair

Yassen). The Palestinian cities, towns, villages, and landscape are transformed into women's ornaments and jewelry in compensation for the loss of the geography. Hajjawi say:

Haifa is my daughter's bracelet
Jafa a necklace of oyster-shells;
'Akka is crowns of cornelian
Bissan a dress
decorated by spring with vegetation
Jerusalem is Love's ring
In my daughter's little finger.

In her "Al-Hukm bi'l 'Tdam" (A Sentence to Death), she describes the usurpation of the town of Zaita after her people were expelled, saying:

Zaita is the bride of all the field trees
And all the sons of tribes

Zaita will be hanged in the evening just before the sunset
But, we, in the bottoms of Zaita's heart, withstand.^{xlii}

The Palestinian debacle and its aftermath produced a whole body of Diasporic nationalism literature which is enunciated in the spirit of resistance of displacement. What is thrilling about poetry by women is that some of them carry names of cities or capitals of the

countries America in war with. Arab-American women poets like Muhja Kahf, Deema Shehabi, D.H.Melhem and Arab women poets such as al-Bustani and Lami'ā 'Abbās 'Omārā personify the cities as female and identify with their dilemma and articulate their femininity. Some of them outpour their grief verging on the elegiac such as in Melhem's "Falluja" and "Delivering Mails to Falluja" written in 2005. Falluja is an Iraqi small town that witnessed the fiercest resistance to the American invasion. Through her Transnationalist poem, Melhem in stark narration describes what is blocked from sight: the horror of war and death. She says:

And so I think of Falluja, holy city of mosques and minarets,
wound in a language few invaders understand as they wait, like
Hulago khan

in the twelfth century, waiting to raze and pillage Baghdad.

Today they have begun. Begun the scourging of Falluja.

Inside it is simple: think of one mother with her child,

holding it against her breast, praying she won't drop it

on the earth trembling with bombardment,

hoping some neighbor will protect them,

terrified of sounds that deafen them, explosions that will hurl

mother from child, baby from her arms, raise both of them to
heaven

to be blessed, then rain them back on Falluja as blood and bone,

rain them on Sunnis and Shiites and all the city—

its bombed mosques and hospitals and broken water—
rain them on invaders and defenders alike.^{xliii}

June Jordan, in rejection of the Israeli invasion of the South of Lebanon and the resulting massacre of the Lebanese at Sabra and Shatilla (1982) wrote poems like “Intifada” where she transliterates some everyday Arabic expressions of salutation as heading of each stanzas of the poem. Under “Wa’Alaikum as-Salam”, she says of the Israeli tanks violating the Arab land:

The village trembles from the heavy
Tanks that try
To terrify the children...

She creates a link between racism against the African Americans and this invasion. Commenting on her transnationalist poems and their reception in the Arab world, without naming it, Jordan says :

Moving Toward Home," "Apology to the People of Lebanon," and then, way later, "Lebanon, Lebanon." I wrote those poems for myself, as a way of being a soldier here in this country. I didn't know the poems would travel. I didn't go to Lebanon until two years ago, but people told me that many Arabs had memorized these poems and translated them into Arabic. Haas M.

Mroue [Lebanese American poet] has told me what it meant when he read the lines "I was born a black woman. Now I have become a Palestinian." This was unbelievably shocking to Arab peoples.^{xliv}

Satire, elegy and the panegyric are major thematic genres used in Arab women's poetry of war from the ancient times to the present. The Arab woman poet elegizes, eulogizes, satirizes in a politically-oriented edge. Arab women-poets, unlike the American ones, contributed a lot to the broad corpus of praising the rulers: kings, princes, presidents, soldiers and army and leaders of the Army. Saddam Hussein, Kings of Jordan of Saudi Arabia, of Morocco, princes of Kuwait, of Qatar, etc, etc, each one of them has his own body of the panegyric poetry written by women-poets. The leader of Home is an icon of the Home itself. Perhaps this can be attributed to what Carlyle sees as a hero-worshipper nation.

However, in an ironic, bitter tone, the Jordanian Khadija Rashid welcomes the birth of a baby telling him of the dire times where the heroic values are no more. She says:

Welcome to a time that slays the knights.

Nothing remained except the sword

The scum of the defeated dwarf...

that gives a signal to aggression.

Welcome to a time of liars, hypocrites, apostates.

Those who spit in Palestine's wound s

And brought ṣaladdin's daughters to Hulagu's bed,
and sell Hiṭīn in the slave market.

Welcome to a time starving for a hero

the time of infidels and impostors, the childish time.^{xlvi}

In sum, American women-poets' lyrical transnationalism or transnationalist poetry is a genre of protest, of politics, of history and trauma. Anti-war women-poets enunciated their transnationalist sympathy to others on distant areas. Forche toward the El Salvador, June Jordan the Palestinian and Lebanese, D.H.Melhem toward the Iraqis in Fallujah, a town known for its fierce resistance of the American occupation. Dunya Mikhael, an Iraqi American expresses bitterness and disgust towards Lyndie England, the American soldier whose photos were featured in all media on the globe, enjoying brutally and morbidly the torture of Iraqi prisoners of war.

To conclude, in such traumatic times as war or occupation Arab and American women poets voice their ideas about home and nationalism in vastly different ways. The Arab women-poets bestow upon their wounded home all love, prayers and care. They become mothers of the nation.^{xlvi} The American women-poets see their country going into abysmal of self-destruction, by selling a corrupt democracy and making war-decisions against weaker

nations. Through their transnationalism, the American women-poets emerge as ferocious objectors to their country's bullying of poor nations. One may rightly quote June Jordan's saying that "poetry becomes a means for useful dialogue between people who are not only unknown, but mute to each other. It produces a dialogue among people that guards all of us against manipulation by our so-called leaders."^{xlvi} The transnationalist poetry, as a gendered genre of contemporary poetry, is a therapeutic addition to humanity sick of abusing each other. It is a call for a solidarity that transcends the lies of the politicians and a vigorous resistance of trading on innocent people's choices and destinies.

NOTES

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- i Adrienne Rich, *Collected Early Poems, 1950-1970* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Incorporated. 1993), p.164.
 - ii Alicia Ostriker, "Elegy Before the War," *No Heaven* (PA: University of Pittsburg Press, 2005), p.123.
 - iii Slafa Ḥajjawi, *Ughniyat Filisṭīniyya (Palestinian Songs)* (Baghdad: Dār al-Ḥurriya, 1977), p.64.
 - iv "Andalusian Songs for the Wounds of Iraq." In *Contemporary Poetry from Iraq by Bushra al Bustāni: A Face-Page Translation, Intro & Trans by Wafaa Abdulaali and Sanna Dhahir* (New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2008), 31.
 - v Meena Alexander, "News of the World," in *River and Bridge* (Canada: Ontario Arts Council, 1996), 27.

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- vi Julie Quiroz, "Poetry Is a Political Act": an Interview with June Jordan," *Colorlines*, 1, 3 (Winter 1999), 28.
- vii Walt Whitman, "Preface" to *Leaves of Grass* (New York: Pocket Books, 2006), 12.
- viii S. Moreh, "Convention and Revolt in Modern Arabic Poetry," in *Arabic Poetry: Theory and Development* (Germany: Otto Harassowitz, 1973), 155.
- ix Rich, *Diving Into The Wreck: Poems 1971-1972* (Norton & Norton, 1973), 4.
- x *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, URL: <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/nationalism/>
- xi *Princeton Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, UR: <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/patriotism/>
- xii Randolph Bourne, *Atlantic Monthly*, 118 (July 1916), 86-97
- xiii Said, "Yeats and Decolonialization" in *Nationalism, Colonialism and Literature: Essays by Terry Eagleton, Fredric Jameson and Edward W. Said, Introd. by Seamus Deane* (Minnesota: UP, 1990), 69.
- xiv *Black Nationalism in America*, eds, John H. Bracey Jr., August Meier and Elliott Rudwick (Indianapolis and New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Co, Ltd, 1970), xxvi.
- xv June Jordan, *Directed by Desire: The Collected Poems by June Jordan* (PA: Copper Canyon Press, 2007), 48.
- xvi Jordan, 54-55
- xvii *We A baddddd People* (Michigan: Broadside Press, 1970), 12.
- xviii Giovanni, in *The Black Poets: An Anthology*, ed. Dudley Randall (New York: A Bantam Book, 1970), 318-19.
- xix Addison Gayle, "Introduction" to *The Black Aesthetic*, ed. Addison Gayle, Jr. (New York, 1971), .xxii.

- xx Edward Said, *Culture and Imagination* (New York: Vintage Book, 1994), 15.
- xxi *A Dream of a Common Language: Poems 1976-1977*, (London and New York: WW W.Norton,1978), 75
- xxii Ibid, 76.
- xxiii Julia Kristeva, *The Kristeva Reader* (New York: The Columbia UP, 1986), 202.
- xxiv *What Is Found There: Notebook on Poetry and Politics* (New York: Norton & Norton, 1993), 23.
- xxv *Your Native Land, Your Life* (New York: Norton & Norton, 1993), 58
- xxvi Rich, *An Atlas of the Difficult World: Poems 1988-1991*(New York: Norton & Norton, 1991), 6. The page numbers of the following quotations from this collection are incorporated within the paper.
- xxvii Rich, “What Kind of Times are These” in *Dark Fields of the Republic: poems 1991-1995* (New York: Norton & Norton, 1995), 1-8.
- xxviii Cheri Colby Langdell, Adrienne Rich, *The Moment of Change* (Connecticut: Greenwood Publishing co, 2004), 209.
- xxix Rich, “*Midnight Salvages*” in *The Fact of a Doorframe: Selected Poems 1950-2001* (New York: Norton & Norton, 2002), 60.
- xxx Mary Campbell, *Trouble* (Pennsylvania: Carnegie Mellon UP, 2003), 40.
- xxxi Carolyn Forché, *Country Between Us* (New York: perennial library, 1981).
- xxxii *Against Forgetting, Twentieth Century Poetry of Witness* (New York: [Norton](#) & Norton, 1993), 37.

- xxxiii Carolyn Forché, *Country Between Us*, 9.
- xxxiv Ruth Maxey, "An Interview with Meena Alexander," *Kenyon Review*, XXVIII Number 1 (Winter 2006), URL: <http://www.kenyonreview.org/issues/winter06/maxey.php>.
- xxxv R.J.B Bosworth, *Nationalism* (UK: Pearson, 2007), 2.
- xxxvi Bushra al-Bustani, *matarakathu el-rīḥ* (*Left by the Wind*,) (*Damascus: Ittiḥād el-udadā'* 2002) ,82.
- xxxvii Ibid, 84.
- xxxviii *Fragments of a Woman*, Tran by Nehad Selaiha (Cairo: General Egyptian Book Organization 1990), 93-94.
- xxxix *Barqiyyat 'ajila ila waṭani* (*Instant Telegraphs to My Home* (Cairo: al-Haya al-Misriyya lil Kitab, 1992), 28
- xl *Mukabadat el-shajar* (*Anguish of Trees*) (Baghdad: Dār el-shu'ūn el-Thaqafiyya, 2002), 41-44.
- xli URL: <http://www.shathaaya.com/vb/showthread.php?t=48685>
- xlii *Ughniyat Filasṭīyya* (Palestinian Songs), 84.
- xliii D.H.Melhem, "Delivering mail to Falluja" URL: <http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:vlxJb9k6H2IJ:www.poetsagainstthewar.org/displaypoem.asp%3FAuthorID%3D22896+D+H+Melhem,+falluja&cd=1&hl=en&ct=clnk>.
- xliv "Poetry is a Political Act."
- xlv Quoted in Bassim al-Khaṭābiyya, *Shi'r el-Mar'a fil el-Urdun bayn 1980 -2000* (Women's Poetry in Jordan (1980-200) (Amma: Wazarat al-Thaqafa, 2003), 75.
- xlvi I am using the title of the book, Anne K. Mellor, *Mothers of the Nation: Women's Political Writing in England 1780-1830* (Indiana: UP, 2000).
- xlvi Julie Quiroz, "'Poetry Is a Political Act': an Interview with June Jordan," 29.

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