

The Conflict between Traditions and Freedom in “Remember Vaughan Monroe” and “Not Like Today”

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Abstract

This study sheds light on the conflict between adherence to Arab traditions and the aspiration to live a freer American life that most Arab American young adults suffer from. The research focuses on two Arab American young adult short stories by Evelyn Shakir's “Remember Vaughan Monroe” and “Not Like Today” which reflect the tension between tradition and freedom for the young adult protagonists who are obliged by their parents to live an Arab traditional life and who like to live their American life without restrictions. The study concludes that Arab American young adult protagonists get confused at the end of the stories because of their inability to compromise between their Arab traditions and their willingness to live the American freedom they want.

Keywords: Arab American Young Adult Literature, traditions, freedom, conflict, memories, generations, gap

1. Introduction

Mourad and Carolan (2010) discuss the role of daughter in the Arab family, in which females are more highly stressed than males in terms of their behavior. They should protect the family honor and reputation, and they are prohibited from any sexual activity before marriage. Thus, Arab American females should maintain their virginity: “concerns that the family's honor would be tainted by any indication that the daughter was not a virgin, that is, a broken hymen, results in the discouragement of using tampons and douches, or visiting a gynecologist prior to marriage” (180). All family members should take care of female chastity. The writers explain that when females achieve menarche, they are given the status of woman, in which the daughter should behave as a mature woman, not socializing with males, and “being subject to stricter guidelines for her behavior, and more modest attire” (180). Another problem faced by Arab American women is that they cannot report any abuse happened to them to the authority because it is shameful, so Arab American women are victimized by this cultural framework (180).

Abdelkader (2007) depicts how Arab/Arab American women are caught between the East which views feminism as a “Western colonial ‘cultural transplant’ and the West which views Arab women as “oppressed”. In other words, the writer argues that “The status of Arab women in their communities is often misrepresented, both within and outside the Arab community. All too often, Arab women are categorized in stereotypical roles — ranging from the hopeless, oppressed figure to the sexy pop star”. The writer questions the negative depiction of hijab as “repressed” whereas “a covered nun, bride, Amish woman, and religious Jewish woman are seen as “devout”” (*Arab News* 2007).

In her distinguished article entitled “Emergence of a Genre: Reviewing Arab American Writers,” Gabriel (2001) sheds light on the contemporary challenges facing Arab American writers including those who write for young adults. The first challenge is the hyphenated identity most Arab American writers have, in which they have to deal with the issues related to their Arab homelands and to the American one. This conflict is represented by what the Arab American poet Naomi Shihab Nye claims that “there is a tension between Arab communal values and the individualism and freedom America is seen to offer...It is a tension not resolved so much as honored” (qtd. in Gabriel 2001). Another female writer called Evelyn Shakir claims that “the Arab woman not only faces...discrimination in the mainstream culture, but the very place she turns to seek refuge, the family, has issues of another flavor, with patriarchy and tradition holding sway. This double bind impacts the Arab woman

writer, who might feel that any criticism she might direct at her own culture will only feed those who feed on such material to degrade the entire culture” (qtd. in Gabriel 2001). Thus, what the writer wants to point out here is that Arab American women writers tolerate the conflict between American stereotypes for Arabs and their desire to live an American life away from the patriarchal authority without losing their connection with the Arab culture.

Arab American Young Adult literature is semi-autobiographical. Hassan (2002) discusses the role of the genre of autobiography in Arab American literature in reflecting Arab American identity. The writer notes that Arab-American autobiography is constrained by two requirements: “first, that it constructs a selfhood that is intelligible in light of American paradigms of subjectivity, and second, that it address Western ideas about Arabs, Muslims, Middle Easterners” (11). Thus, Arab American writers in their autobiographies try to reflect their individuality, freedom, and independence which are the outcomes of American individualism, and at the same time, these writers reflect their cultural values, Islamic rituals, and Middle East’ political conflicts (10). Similarly, Cherif (2003) thinks that Arab American women writers reflect their femaleness and self through relying on their gendered memory, in which, for example, the writers Abinader and Abu-Jaber “investigate the interconnectedness of the past and the present in the making of the Arab American female self and create a space of self-invention for Arab American women where they negotiate a new sense of self in the layers of a buried ethnic and female past...[they use memory] in order to examine the implications of their own ambivalent perceptions of self and to devise a constructive way of dealing with the present” (208).

2. Discussion

In the following discussion, two short stories from Arab American young adult literature are selected for analyzing how the young adult protagonists struggle with the Arab traditions imposed on them by their parents and with their desire to live according to the American free lifestyle.

2.1 “Remember Vaughn Monroe?”

In “Remember Vaughn Monroe?” the protagonist is a young adult girl who is fond of the singer Vaughan Monroe whom she meets in the restaurant she is working at: “Vaughn came from these parts, and he was true blue—that’s a well-known fact” (33). It seems clear from the beginning of the story that the protagonist is not tied to her Arab traditions, in which she is fond of dancing, singing and dating friends.

Her memories back to her native country Lebanon reveals her hatred to live in the Arab traditional life, in which she and her sister Emmie’s behaviors were limited to her conservative father who just cares for the people around him and scares of shame. Her memory when they go to the gym reveals how she hates and complains about these traditions:

*We were brought up to know about right and wrong and ‘Shame, shame!’
In gym class, I remember, we had to wear long pants ‘cause the folks didn’t
want us in bloomers showing off our legs. Papa wrote a note to the principal
to tell him, and I was the one had to carry it to the office. I cried and said I
wouldn’t, but Papa said I had to or he’d go in himself. And do you think we
could stay after for Glee Club or even extra help? Or take in a Staurday matinee
at the Rialto? Nope. It was go to school, do your homework, that’s it. And, of
course, help out (35).*

Thus, it seems clear from the above quotation that the protagonist struggles with her father to get her freedom and this struggle is due to the generation gap, in which her father wants his daughters to live according to the way he lived when he was a kid. She is crippled by the native traditions and by her father’s rigid mentality which focuses on the culture of honor.

The protagonist’s description of her parents’ tradition in canning the food and how she and her daughter have to crochet because it is a skill they should master in order to get married reveals how she does not like these traditions and mocks of them:

*“we all had to crochet for at least one whole complete hour a day. Don’t ask
me what we were making. I don’t think it mattered one bit. Mama and Papa
just figured we wouldn’t get married if we couldn’t crochet. Turned out, the
joke was on them ‘cause they had a hard time getting rid of us. We didn’t*

*know how to say cute things like American girls are always coming out with
or how to do with your eyelashes to let a fellow know you could be interested (35)*

Thus, the protagonist here highlights the importance of early marriage for girls in Arab culture, in which the parents want their daughters to be hard-working housekeeper in order to attract the men to marry them. She compares herself with the American girls who are more skillful in attracting men. Here she indicates that because of her traditions, she cannot say cute things or attract men to marry her.

The protagonist highlights the value of hospitality in her old culture when she refers to how her mother receives newcomers from Lebanon, and how she makes the protagonist and her sister Emmie “parade from the kitchen into the living room, chests out, shoulders back, carrying trays of Turkish coffee and giant pistachios and homemade macaroons and Fannie Farmer chocolates” (36). The protagonist shows us that her mother who represents the older generation is more adhered to her ethnicity, Lebanon’s food, and native people than the younger ones. The protagonist criticizes her sister Emmie’s marriage which is traditional: “Emmie got married and moved in with Mitch’s family, old country style” (36). She does not want to follow her sister’s type of life, in which her sister is a housekeeper and a cook caring just for her kids and husband: “Then from morning ‘til night, it’s ‘Emmie, bring me a glass of water’ and ‘Emmie, come brush my hair’ and ‘Emmie, don’t roll the grape leaves so tight.’ Til Emmie was mama to three sons” (36).

The protagonist wants to live a freer life according to the American system, in which she wants to make a romantic relationship with a boy she chooses, and she does not want her mother to arrange marriage for her:

*After what Emmie went through, I let the world know I wouldn’t stand for
anyone pulling that ‘arranged’ stuff on me, and so did my sisters. I guess
they were waiting, like I was waiting, for a blue-eyed boy to romance me
and promise to spend his life making sure I was happy. And it would be just
between him and me and no one else. American style (36).*

Thus, it seems clear that the protagonist challenges her tradition and wants to assimilate in the American culture and life and does not favor her mother’s interference in her personal life and decision of choosing her partner.

The protagonist’s boyfriend Arthur seems a good match to her. She describes him as “the kind of boy you don’t notice—he’s got like no-color hair—but if you fall into conversation, you see he’s got nice teeth and blue eyes” (37). She does not hesitate to accept his invitation to go to *The Treasure of Sierra Madre* because she wants to live the American life, to feel that she is free and not limited by traditions. However, she is still scared of the culture of honor and secrecy, and that is why she lies to her mother and tells her that she will go with her girlfriend: “I told Mama I was going with a girlfriend” (37).

The protagonist’s interest in having a romantic relationship represents her refusal of her traditions. She does not react when her boyfriend Arthur puts his arm behind her during the movie: “Halfway through the movie, me waiting and still no girl, no romance, and Bogie going crazy, Arthur rests his arm behind me on the chair. I make out like I don’t notice” (37). In other words, she accepts her boyfriend’s act but does not react because of her desire for what he is doing, and because she is not skillful in dealing with the romantic situations: “Arthur worked his hand in and squeezed my arm so I felt something happen in my breast, but I kept staring straight ahead. . . I never knew what a little thing like that could do to a gal” (37, 38).

The tension between the protagonist and her mother starts when the protagonist invites Arthur to visit her family on the Christmas Day: “I mentioned it to mama like it was no big deal” (38). In other words, the protagonist realizes that her mother cannot accept the idea of knowing that her daughter has a relationship with a boyfriend. The mother asks her “You like him?” (38), and the protagonist is scared to reveal her emotions to her mother because it is not traditional: “But how can you talk to your mama about that?” (38). Arthur’s behavior in which he “showed up a half hour late with a fruitcake in a tin which. . . he didn’t have to” (38) is a source of concern to the protagonist because it is unnatural according to her family’s tradition. Her sister Emmie likes his behavior. However, Arthur keeps smiling at the family and apologizes and leaves. This is not an expected behavior from him: “Arthur smiled a lot for about half an hour, so you couldn’t help but like him, but then he said ‘sorry’ and left before the refreshments came out, which we weren’t expecting him to do”(38). In other words, it seems clear that Arthur is unaware of the protagonist’s traditions, etiquette, and habits.

When the protagonist’s mother asks her daughter about Arthur “What is he?” (38), she avoids answering her question because she is scary of her mother’s reaction: “I told you, he takes care of parking at the Meadows” (38). But her mother insists on her question and the protagonist tells her that he is “Irish” (38). The protagonist

expects that her mother would refuse this relationship because she wants a man from her ethnicity:

I knew what was going on. She was thinking that Italian or Greek, even Jewish, would leastways be a little better. Those people were like us, the old timers said. They loved their families and knew about honor. But the Irish were cold, like the English. Of course, first choice would be Lebanese, except from the day poor Papa came down with TB, no more folks from Zahle came calling to check us out. After he was gone, they still stayed away (38, 39).

It is clear from the above quotation that what is going on in the protagonist's mind is related to her previous knowledge about the importance of honor and family in her Arab culture, and of the preference of getting married with a man from the same ethnicity.

However, her mother accepts Arthur to visit them but does not allow her daughter and him to walk downtown alone because of the culture of honor and the fear of her people's observation of that. That is why her mother sends her daughters Evelyn and Antoinette with Arthur and the protagonist when they go to get an ice cream soda.

Her mother's attitude toward Arthur changes because of his unawareness of the Arab traditions and because of his unsociability with her. She asks the protagonist to tell Arthur not to come to visit their house: "Then Mama turned against him. It was silly stuff. Like maybe she offers him chocolates and he takes a piece right away instead of hanging back. Or it got her goat how he's always waiting for her to say hello to him instead of him coming up to her first thing and asking how she's feeling. 'Tell him not to come to this house,' she says" (39). From this moment on, the protagonist starts dating Arthur secretly at Shopper's World because of her fear of her mother's reaction. She visits him in his flat and he presents her wine, and she lets him kiss her: "All I remember is it was red and it made me cough. Arthur wasn't the type talked much...After a while, he said, 'You're not like other girls,' which I wasn't sure how to take. And then I let him kiss me, and that was all" (40). We notice here that the protagonist does not know how to exchange feelings in the romantic relationship because of her lack of knowledge of the American lifestyle.

When Arthur proposes to the protagonist to marry her, she feels very happy, but she does not find anyone to talk to about her engagement: "I was dying to tell someone. But who could I tell? My sisters were all thick as thieves with Mama. I did ask Emmie, did she believe in long engagement, she said, 'No, Why?'" (40). Thus, there is a gap between the protagonist and her sisters who seem traditional like her mother. Arthur feels that her mother will not like him because of the ethnic and cultural differences between him and the protagonist: "Your mother's never going to like me" (40). The protagonist keeps struggling to keep with Arthur and assures him that her mother will accept him: "Don't worry about Mama, I'll take care of that" (40).

When the protagonist and her boyfriend Arthur decide to elope in order to get married because of their fear of the protagonist's mother and the traditions, the protagonist starts to remember Arab girls' cases who eloped to marry the person whom they loved. In other words, the protagonist wants to find an encouragement or a motivation from her ethnicity that motivates her to take this decision of elopement: "We decided to elope. I can't remember which of us came up with the idea. Then I began turning over in my head the Arab girls I ever heard of that ran off to get married, beginning with old Mrs. Haddad's pretty daughter, Helen, the one who's a little slow" (41). Thus, elopement in the protagonist's mind is an escape from the pressure of traditions and from the patriarchal authority that does not allow the girls to get married from a person whom their parents do not accept.

The protagonist's depiction of her mother and relatives' expected reaction toward her elopement reflects the internal conflict she has inside. It reflects the shame this elopement will bring to her and to her family because of the cultural unacceptance of this act:

At first, the gal's folks cry and carry on like it's the end of the world, but sonner or later they say okay, it's the will of Allah and we have to accept it. What else can they do? They don't even know to think about annulment, and divorce is a no-no. And let's say the gal and fellow run off and forget to get married, that gal is damaged goods (even if she didn't do anything), so naturally no one else will take her. And the boy's folks have to go along, too, because it would be a big disgrace on them if their son don't stick to the girl now and be a good husband.

So that was all right (41).

Here the protagonist outlines some of the cultural values in Arab culture, such as fatalism in Arab culture, in which the people will take the act of elopement as a fatalistic thing. Like elopement, divorce is a shameful act in her culture, and that if the couples who elope do not get married, they will be both ashamed and disgraced by their people and culture.

The protagonist keeps dating Arthur secretly without her mother's knowledge: "Sometimes I'd say no, I had to get right home because I didn't want Mama to start thinking things, but Arthur would kiss my neck or brush the back of his hand across my breast, and that was that. He knew just how to treat a girl" (42). Here, it should be noted that the protagonist is still scared of the power of traditions and of her mother's authority. She is at the same time interested in her sexuality and in having a romantic relationship with Arthur. In other words, she cannot get rid of the power of traditions and is eager to explore her sexuality.

At the end of the story, the protagonist cannot resist the power of her traditions and the Arab cultural values, in which she realizes that the secret marriage is against her traditions and culture. She cries at first, and then she changes her mind when she and Arthur discuss the arrangements of their secret marriage: "But, naturally, a person gets jittery when a wedding—especially if it's secret—is staring you in the face...I began to cry...so we talked and talked, and that's when I changed my mind. It came to me, clear as day, that I'm not the marrying kind" (42). It is clear here that the protagonist surrenders to the authority of the traditions. She escapes from her actual life and decides to go away from Arthur by visiting her Aunt Karimi and Uncle Latif, but she feels sick. When she goes back to Framingham, she quits her job at the Meadows to be away from Arthur. She starts over her life by working in the phone company because she can talk to everybody. She refuses the idea of marriage because she has had her chance, and she does not want to feel sorry, and someone to be sorry for her:

I wanted to get away so Arthur wouldn't be after me. A clean break is the kindest.

When I got up there, what with everything that happened, I was feeling kind of sick...When I got back to Framingham, I quit at the Meadows to make it easier on Arthur...So I was happy and I've stayed that way. Of course, I never married and neither did my sisters. When Emmie shakes her head at us and says, 'I don't understand it,' I say, 'Never mind.' What she doesn't know won't hurt her. If she goes too far, I might just say, 'I've had my chances.' I don't want a soul feeling sorry for me (42, 43)

Thus, the protagonist surrenders to the power of tradition in the end although she loves Arthur. She refuses the idea of marriage because it attaches her to Lebanese traditions.

2.2 "Not Like Today"

The story starts with a tension between the protagonist who is a girl and her mother who is old-fashioned. The protagonist does not find a shared ground between her generation and her mother and her father's older cousins' generation. The problem lies in the fact that the protagonist wants to live her life, and not to be adhered to the traditions: "My mother's not like me...the worst of the crew are Melia and her sister Josie" (69). The problem between the protagonist and her mother starts when the mother asks her daughter to come with her to visit Melia and Josie. The protagonist does not like to visit and sit with these women because of the generational gap between them and her. She accepts her mother request on the condition that they stay shortly: "Only if we don't stay long" (70).

The protagonist's description of how Melia and Josie treats her reveals the gap between the two generations, in which Josie orders her to sit down without any greeting words, and both Josie and Melia look at her strangely, and how Josie later looks at her angrily: "Sit right there... When I look up, I see that Melia and Josie have me in their sights. Their eyes behind bifocals are ticking off the evidence against me: glossy lips, ironed hair, earrings dangling almost to my shoulders. In for a penny, in for a pound I think, so I shift my chair a few inches back and cross my legs...Josie's eyes are moist with indignation. She's never liked me. She's never liked me. But it's Melia rises to the bait" (70, 71). Even Melia mocks of the protagonist by calling her "quite the up-to-date young lady" (71). These two women keep living in their past life and mock of these days, Melia says "the old days were best." (71).

Melia and Josie want the protagonist's mother to tell her about how Arabs came to here and how their first years were difficult. In other words, they want the protagonist to be connected with her past and her ethnic people

history: "Have you told your daughter, Adele?...How our people came from across? First years it was hard times" (71). The protagonist's reaction reveals how she is fed up with hearing this history and how she thinks that the younger generation faces problems too: "Same for everyone wasn't it? I say. I uncross my legs and hook the strap of my purse over my shoulder, ready to leave. Why should I kowtow to these old maids? But then my mother catches my eye. I know her creed: when elders speak, sit still and hold your tongue." (71). Thus, we notice here how the protagonist wants to leave in order not to hear these old ladies' stories. She is still afraid of her mother and of the value of respecting the elderly people. In other words, there is a generation gap here between the protagonist and these old ladies.

Melia clearly states the gap between the protagonist and her ethnic people when she ironically asks the protagonist about the meaning of family for her: "I don't blame you...What's family to you? I wish you'd been around when it was all we had to count on...It's not right. The girl should know about her father's people so she'll be proud" (71, 72). In other words, Melia highlights the importance of family for the first generation immigrants and hints to the idea that the younger-generation girls do not feel loyal for their families. She asks the protagonist's mother to teach her about her ethnicity in order to be connected with her people's traditions and culture.

The protagonist feels bored of hearing the story of Josie and Melia's mother because she listens to it a lot: "First, the story of their mother. I'd heard it so often, I could tell it myself. Left behind when her parents came to America to see about making money. After a year, the gifts began arriving. I knew the list—white kid gloves, then tortoiseshell combs, and then a steamship ticket: Beirut to Marseilles, Marseilles to New York City" (72).

Melia and Josie's narration of their story to the protagonist depicts the tension between the two generations, in which when Melia tells the protagonist that her father "had real merchandise...nothing dinky. Damask linens, crocheted tablecloths, silk negligees" (73), the protagonist tells her "I know...He was a peddler" (73). This indicates that the protagonist has knowledge about that the older generation, and that she is fed up with hearing that.

Melia and Josie keep describing their old days and their memories that connect them with their generation. Melia compares the value of help in the old days and now when she says "The help was different in those days, such nice manners" (73). When the protagonist asks Melia and Josie "why were you at work on a Saturday?" (74), Josie compares the value of work between now and then, in which she criticizes these days: "In our day, a week's work was a week's work. We didn't cheat the bosses" (74).

The protagonist's memory when her grandfather takes her to the coffeeshop and her mother protests because "she's a girl" reveals how it is shameful in the Arab culture to take your girl to the coffeeshops: "*Jiddu* took me once, but you tried to stop him. *She's a girl*, my mother had protested. My grandfather pushed me out the door ahead of him. *She is child, no boy, no girl.*" (75). When the protagonist hears Melia's narration of the gossips her father hears in the coffeeshop, she reacts against these gossips and criticizes the Lebanese tradition and how girls are restricted from dealing with or showing off to boys because of fear of gossips:

"What gossip the men were, I thought. The women, too, of course. I'd hardly met a Lebanese who didn't 'move talk' or live in terror of the talk others moved. What will people say? I'd been hearing it all my life—when I was a kid and wanted to ride a bike or to stay out 'til dark watching the boys play baseball; or in high school when I wanted to spend the night at my girlfriend's, and my parents found out there were brothers in the house. Most of the time I got my way, but that didn't stop my father from sighing, or my mother from walking around with a worried look that took the bloom off my day" (76).

It is clear that we are confronted with two types of traditions in this story: the old one and the new one. Melia tells when her father came from the coffeehouse, he cursed "Christopher Columbus...[he] blamed America. Back home daughters didn't dare do the things they get away with here...He used to tell us, Better don't be born if you blacken my face" (76). Thus, we see how the old generation is adhered to the traditions and to the culture of honor and shame, in which if the girl behaves wrongly, she will bring shame to all her family members. Melia's father's concern is based on his conviction that his girls should not be Americanized; he wants them to be attached to their traditions. The protagonist asks Melia if her father's behavior was "some kind of threat" (76), Melia replies her "You wouldn't understand Papa was protecting us" (76) and Josie says "He wanted us to be clean as snow...so no bastard could say a word against us" (76). This indicates that the first-generation girls realize the meaning and importance of the culture of honor and the wisdom behind it which is that the father "could hold his head up in the street" (76) if his daughter brings shame to him. They agree with their parents that this value is right. It also indicates the criticism for the younger-generation girls who are freer and do not care a lot for this value. That is why Josie and Melia keep saying to the protagonist "you wouldn't understand" (76).

Dating between girls and boys is prohibited for Melia and Josie. When the protagonist asks them “I suppose you couldn’t even date?” (77), Josie replies “Date? No such thing” (77). However, there was a desire in Melia and Josie’s psyches to date, in which Melia says “If I had my liberty, I could have stepped out every weekend. I’m not boasting. Did you every hear me boast? But I had plenty admirers, and all nice, respectable fellows...I could tell you their names, Adele. You’d say wasn’t I a fool to let them get away” (77). The protagonist feels sympathetic with Melia because of the prohibition of dating; she gives us a picture of how the generations have changed regarding allowing girls to date: “For a minute there, my heart went out to Melia. Because I’d let a couple of good ones slip away, myself. One night, I met this perfect guy at a party, but when he called to ask me out, I made up some excuse. The truth was I couldn’t picture us a couple—him so blond and fine featured, me dark, with fleshy lips and a wild bush of hair. I hadn’t heard yet of *exotic*. When that came into fashion, I finally got an even break” (77). Thus, the protagonist is given freedom to meet a guy, but she does not go out with him because he is not from her ethnic group.

It seems clear that elopement is the final resort for the younger-generation girls when they want to marry a man who is not approved by their parents. The protagonist still remembers when her mother tells her about Josie who “had been set to marry. Her aunt and his, neighbors in the old country, had made the match. A month before the wedding, Josie’s father had broken it off...*the groom was seen walking on the Common with another girl, he had her on his arm. The family lost face...* Well, *Josie should have eloped*, I said. My mother opened a window and gave her dust rag a good shake outside. *What are you talking about? Josie was ready to go after him with a butcher knife*” (79). Thus, it is noticed that shame is not restricted to only the female figure but for the male in the Arab culture.

Josie presents another contrast between the female gender role in the past in which she talks about her role as “I cooked, I cleaned, I did the laundry by hand. I looked out for the young ones” (79). She contrasts the sense of family in the house in the old times with now, in which they differ: “We didn’t have luxury, just a few rooms, but it was warm, it was clean, it was home. Today you’ve mansions, but they’re cold and there’s no love inside. Each one shifts for themselves, they’re after the almighty dollar” (79).

The gap between the two generations is clear when Melia expresses her fear of how girls nowadays behave and wear. She opposes their freedom and revolution against the power of traditions: “these girls today scare me. So bold, they live out on their own, home isn’t good enough...Hippies...Skirts up to here” (86). The protagonist at the end of the story seems to think that she is confused about her actual life: “I don’t know. These days seems like I’m always figuring wrong” (88).

3. Conclusion

It can be concluded that Arab American young adult literature reflects the gap and tension between Arab American young adults who want to live their American life away from the influence of Arab tradition on them and from their parents who want them to be adhered to their Arab tradition. The young adult protagonists in these short stories do not have a sense of belonging to their Arab traditions because they are accustomed to the American lifestyle which represents for them the world of freedom. The young adult protagonists in the previous short stories end of being confused because they are unable to compromise between their aspiration to freedom and their ability to cope with Arab traditions.

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