

Diasporic Alienation and Empathy in Arab-American Poetry: A Postcolonial Comparative Study of Khalil Gibran and Suheir Hammad

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ABSTRACT

This research explores themes of diasporic alienation and empathy in Khalil Gibran and Suheir Hammad's poetry from a postcolonial perspective. Khalil Gibran, a Lebanese-American poet, and Suheir Hammad, a Palestinian-American poet, articulate their complex diasporic experiences from distinct historical moments. Both emphasize a persistent longing to reconnect with their homelands, revealing how alienation and empathy shape identity in diaspora. While numerous studies have analyzed Arab-American literary expressions of identity and displacement, there remains a notable scholarly gap concerning how hybridity and subalternity shed light on the poetry of these two prominent poets. Employing postcolonial theories of hybridity and subalternity, this research uses a descriptive qualitative method, analyzing primary data from Gibran's poem "Dead Are My People" and Hammad's poems "Break (Rebirth)", "Break (Sister)", and "Break (Embargo)". Secondary sources include literature addressing Arab-American diasporic experiences, the Israel-Gaza conflict, and the Lebanese famine events. Through textual and contextual analyses, the findings reveal Gibran's depiction of geographical and cultural alienation, emotional alienation, and alienation from collective solidarity, whereas Hammad primarily explores identity alienation. Regarding empathy, Gibran addresses the historical trauma of the Lebanese famine under Ottoman rule, while Hammad reflects on the contemporary violence and suffering in Palestine. This study contributes to Arab-American literary scholarship by showing how diasporic alienation and empathy illuminate ongoing colonial impacts and identity negotiation across generations.

Keywords: *Arab-American poetry; diasporic alienation; empathy; hybridity; subalternity*

INTRODUCTION

Diasporic alienation refers to a sense of cultural and emotional disconnection experienced by individuals separated from their homeland (Rani & Phil, 2018). This phenomenon often involves cultural and linguistic differences that complicate adaptation, leading to a forced loss of traditional identity and disorientation (Dwivedi & Khare, 2020; Singh & Thomas, 2024). These feelings are intensified by psychological factors, creating emotional distance between immigrants'

past and present lives (Yahya et al., 2022). Thus, immigrants navigate complex processes, maintaining their heritage while integrating into new societies (Gor, 2020).

Technological advancements—such as social media, messaging apps, and video calls—have accelerated globalization and expanded the diaspora's ability to maintain contact across borders (Reddy, 2013). Yet despite these virtual

connections, emotional bonds often remain strained. These technologies cannot replicate the embodied presence of homeland relationships. Cultural gaps persist, and many immigrants continue to experience homesickness and nostalgia—a blend of comfort and longing that complicates identity formation in foreign settings (A. Bhattacharya, 2016; Sharma, 2023).

Within this context of dislocation, empathy remains a vital force in helping individuals navigate the complex emotional terrain of diasporic life. By sharing in the struggles of others, immigrants are able to cultivate meaningful relationships that transcend geographical and cultural divides (Eichbaum et al., 2023). These shared emotional experiences can serve as a bridge between the past and present, enabling individuals to mitigate the sense of isolation through mutual recognition and solidarity. In literature, empathy helps diasporic writers reaffirm ties to their homelands and bear witness to their people's suffering. Khalil Gibran and Suheir Hammad exemplify this practice; through poetry, they convey an empathetic bond that spans distance and time, linking the diaspora to its origins and shared historical trauma (Jinghua & Yuhui, 2024).

The relationship between alienation and empathy reveals broader psychological and sociocultural consequences. Alienation may lead to trauma, including conditions such as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) (Dorovskikh, 2015), and challenge cultural belonging, particularly for Muslim communities navigating Western environments (Mahdi, 2019). In response, new diasporic identities often form in tension with political, social, and cultural change (Tahir et al., 2021). Empathy helps ease this transition, sustaining both collective memory and communal bonds (Cesário et al., 2023). In the case of Gibran and Hammad, poetry becomes a space where pain is transmuted into resilience, illuminating shared experiences of displacement (Morrissey, 2022).

The diasporic condition, affecting both internal identity and external belonging, prompts poetic responses grounded in alienation and solidarity. Khalil Gibran's "Dead Are My People" and Suheir Hammad's trilogy—"Break (Rebirth)," "Break (Sister)," and "Break (Embargo)"—offer compelling portrayals of loss and empathy directed at oppressed communities. Though their historical moments differ, both poets have been recognized for expressing diasporic longing and resistance through their work (Bauridl, 2013;

Altabaa & Hamawiya, 2019). These poems were selected for their thematic richness in portraying dislocation and cultural rupture.

Postcolonial theory offers a framework for understanding these tensions, particularly through the concepts of hybridity and subalternity. Homi Bhabha's (1994) notion of hybridity speaks to the formation of new, unstable identities at the intersection of dominant and marginalized cultures—a dynamic reflected in the voices of diasporic poets negotiating between inherited and imposed traditions. Gayatri Spivak's (1999) theory of subalternity, meanwhile, underscores how marginalized voices resist erasure by dominant power structures. Through these lenses, this study explores how both poets articulate dislocated identities and reframe marginalized voices within the Arab-American diaspora.

This research adopts a qualitative descriptive design within a postcolonial framework. The primary data consists of Khalil Gibran's poem "Dead Are My People," available through the *All Poetry* website, and Suheir Hammad's poems "Break (Rebirth)," "Break (Sister)," and "Break (Embargo)," featured in the anthology *The BreakBeat Poets: New American Poetry in the Age of Hip-Hop* edited by Coval et al. (2015). Secondary sources include scholarly texts addressing the Arab-American diaspora, the Israel-Gaza conflict, and the Lebanese famine. Data collection was conducted through literature review and critical reading, with attention to both textual structure and thematic content. The analysis incorporates both textual and contextual methods, examining poetic language and form alongside relevant historical, social, and cultural contexts. This study engages with Homi Bhabha's theory of hybridity (1994) and Gayatri Spivak's concept of subalternity (1999) to interpret how Gibran and Hammad articulate diasporic alienation, particularly through themes of cultural negotiation and the expression of marginalized voices.

Diasporic alienation continues to be a recurring subject in literary discourse, and Suheir Hammad's collection *Breaking Poems* has received considerable scholarly attention. For instance, Moore (2020) draws on feminist and transnational hip-hop theory to examine the break-beat structure of Hammad's poetry, emphasizing its role in shaping Arab-American identity. Fuad et al., (2021) offer an ecofeminist reading, contrasting Palestinian cultural heritage with American cultural norms and racial discrimination.

Mohammad and Abdulaal (2022) analyze Hammad's language and poetic form, highlighting how her work resists hegemonic American and Israeli narratives.

Despite this growing body of research, a critical gap persists concerning the application of hybridity and subaltern theory to poetry. Although studies such as Abbas and Gohar (2023) and Ameen (2022) have employed hybridity in novel analysis, and Ichsan (2021) and Kara (2020) have done so similarly, these approaches have rarely been extended to poetic texts. Likewise, Prihatin and Mayasari (2021) focus on subaltern perspectives in novels, but their relevance to poetry remains underexplored.

This study seeks to address that gap by examining how Khalil Gibran and Suheir Hammad portray alienation and empathy toward their native communities through poetry. By drawing on hybridity and subaltern frameworks, the research aims to enrich our understanding of diasporic alienation and reveal how these poets uniquely navigate identity within the layered experiences of Arab-American diaspora life.

FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

This section presents findings based on the analysis of Khalil Gibran's and Suheir Hammad's poetry, focusing on how diasporic alienation manifests among Arab-American writers. The forms of alienation discussed include geographical and cultural alienation, emotional alienation, identity alienation, and alienation from collective solidarity. In addition, this section explores how both poets express empathy toward their oppressed communities.

The Alienation of Arab-American Diaspora Writers

Geographic and Cultural Alienation

Khalil Gibran's poetry reflects the geographic and cultural alienation common among Arab-American diaspora writers. In one of his poems, Gibran writes:

My people died from hunger, and he who
Did not perish from starvation was
Butchered with the sword; and I am
Here in this distant land, roaming
Amongst a joyful people who sleep
Upon soft beds, and smile at the days
While the days smile upon them.

(Gibran, 2019)

This passage conveys Gibran's acute sense of separation from his homeland and his emotional estrangement in a foreign country. The phrases "Here in this distant land" and "Amongst a joyful people" underscore his isolation and the emotional dissonance he feels amid the comfort of others. Such alienation is a recurring theme in immigrant literature, where individuals often feel disconnected from both their homeland and host country (S. Ahmed, 2014; Smith, 2010). Gibran's reflections mirror the experiences of many early 20th-century Lebanese immigrants who fled conflict (Hout, 2011).

Through the lens of Homi Bhabha's (1994) concept of hybridity, Gibran's alienation reflects the complexity of navigating a hybrid identity—caught between inherited cultural memory and new realities. His identity exists in tension, shaped by the interplay of Lebanese roots and American surroundings. Gayatri Spivak's (1999) theory of subalternity also helps frame Gibran's poetic expression as a means of voicing the suffering of marginalized Lebanese communities. The line "My people died from hunger [...] Butchered with the sword" not only conveys personal grief but also amplifies the silenced voices of war victims. His poetry captures the socio-political conditions of his time and the trauma that haunted the Lebanese diaspora (Fahrenthold, 2019).

Emotional Alienation

Another form of alienation revealed in Gibran's poetry is emotional estrangement. In another passage, he writes:

If I were hungry and living amid my
Famished people, and persecuted among
My oppressed countrymen, the burden
Of the black days would be lighter
Upon my restless dreams, and the
Obscurity of the night would be less
Dark before my hollow eyes and my
Crying heart and my wounded soul.

(Gibran, 2019)

This stanza expresses Gibran's internal turmoil and his belief that shared suffering might lessen his burden in exile. His emotional alienation stems from the contrast between his relative safety abroad and the suffering of his compatriots. The imagery—"restless dreams," "hollow eyes," and "wounded soul"—captures a

profound sense of guilt and sorrow. Observing the devastation from afar, Gibran struggles with his inability to share in the collective trauma of his people (Madsen & Naerssen, 2003).

Bhabha's concept of hybridity helps illuminate Gibran's sense of divided cultural selfhood. As a Lebanese-American, he inhabits a liminal space between privilege and loss, prosperity and devastation. This duality fosters emotional distance and deepens his sense of dislocation (Bhabha, 1994). The emotional pain reflected in his writing resonates with broader postcolonial themes of alienation (R. Bhattacharya, 2016). From a subaltern perspective, Gibran serves as a witness and voice for those whose suffering is ignored or marginalized by dominant powers (Spivak, 1999; Ellis, 1999). His poetry becomes a medium of empathy and advocacy, linking personal grief with the collective struggles of a displaced community.

Identity Alienation

Suheir Hammad's poetry vividly conveys identity alienation shaped by diasporic fragmentation:

ana gathering selves into new
city under construction gaza eyes pitted zeitoun
spit meat taqasim
brooklyn broken English wa exiled Arabs
sampled

(Coval et al., 2015: 91)

In her poem "Break (Rebirth)," Hammad captures the fragmentation of identity shaped by diasporic existence. The line "ana gathering selves into new city under construction" signals her effort to reconcile a self divided by the pull of two worlds. As a Palestinian-American, Hammad navigates the demands of dual belonging, negotiating memories of Gaza and Brooklyn simultaneously (Zahrawi, 2020). References like "gaza eyes" and "zeitoun" evoke deep-rooted trauma tied to her homeland, underscoring how geographic distance does not sever emotional or historical connection (El-Hajj & Harb, 2011).

Hammad's blending of Arabic and English—"ana," "wa," "taqasim"—creates a fluid linguistic space where identity remains in flux (Sagheer, 2018). The phrase "brooklyn broken English" reflects her refusal to fully assimilate into American norms, opting instead to preserve elements of her cultural origin (Oumlil, 2012). Bhabha's notion of the "third space" (1994)

aptly captures this fusion, where meaning and identity emerge from the tension between cultures. This stylistic choice becomes an act of cultural assertion, allowing Hammad to maintain continuity with her heritage while resisting cultural erasure (Z. T. Ahmed & Mohammed, 2024).

From a subaltern perspective, Hammad's verse gives voice to Palestinian communities often excluded from dominant narratives. The line "gaza eyes pitted" speaks to the visible violence inflicted on her people, while "exiled Arabs sampled" critiques the piecemeal treatment of diasporic Palestinian identities by dominant forces (Sharaf, 2015). Her use of bilingualism serves as a counter-hegemonic strategy, demanding recognition of Arab-American identity within global literary culture (Harb, 2012).

Alienation from Collective Solidarity

Gibran's depiction of collective suffering in Lebanon, written during the Ottoman era, reflects a deep emotional rift between his peaceful exile and the trauma of his people:

But I am not living with my hungry
And persecuted people who are walking
In the procession of death toward
Martyrdom...I am here beyond the
Broad seas living in the shadow of
*Tranquillity, and in the sunshine of
Peace... [...]*

(Gibran, 2019)

Gibran wrote this poem during a period of intense socio-political crisis in Lebanon under Ottoman rule (Arslane, 2022). In the early 20th century, waves of Lebanese emigrated to America due to poverty and oppression, among them Gibran, who arrived in 1895 (Najjar, 2015). Here, Gibran articulates the gulf between his peaceful life abroad and the collective suffering of the Lebanese people. The guilt that accompanies his relative comfort in exile stands in stark contrast to the hardships endured by those he left behind (Balaa, 2015).

Viewed through the lens of hybridity, Gibran exists between two cultural realms: a tranquil life in America and the anguish of his homeland (David, 2019). He lives in what he describes as "the shadow of / Tranquillity" in America, while maintaining a deep emotional bond with "my hungry and persecuted

people” back home. This tension between two realities speaks to the fragmented self of the diasporic subject, caught between participation in Western life and the memory of Eastern suffering. The juxtaposition of peace and persecution encapsulates the internal conflict of a hybrid identity—neither fully here nor there (Sharkah, 2023).

Seen through the lens of subalternity, Gibran uses his platform as a prominent diasporic writer to amplify the voices of marginalized Lebanese communities (Arslane, 2022). The phrase “hungry and persecuted people” refers to those made invisible under colonial regimes, while “procession of death toward / Martyrdom” evokes the violence imposed on them. Gibran’s work becomes a conduit through which these silenced experiences are voiced. Yet, as a figure writing from a position of relative privilege, he also confronts the moral complexity of speaking for the subaltern. In navigating this role, Gibran positions himself as both a witness and a mediator, bridging the suffering of his people with a broader global audience (Jussawalla & Omran, 2021).

Diasporic Empathy in Gibran’s Reflections on Genocide

Deep Grief over His People’s Suffering

*Dead are my friends and in their Death my life is
naught but great*

Disaster.

[...]

*My people died from hunger and he who
Did not perish from starvation was
Butchered with the sword [...]*

(Gibran, 2019)

Drawing from the poetic excerpt above, Khalil Gibran reflects on the condition of Lebanon in the early twentieth century, particularly during the Great Mount Lebanon Famine (1915–1918) (Pitts, 2020). His references to hunger and violence underscore the profound suffering endured by the Lebanese under Ottoman rule and later during the French mandate (Jackson, 2017). The line “My people died from hunger” evokes the historical catastrophe in which famine, war, and disease decimated nearly a third of the population (Fahrenthold, 2019). In exile, Gibran documents Lebanon’s colonial devastation through poetry, bridging his personal grief and the trauma of

his people. His poetry testifies to the socio-economic collapse and systemic violence that scarred Lebanon during that period (Tanielian, 2018).

From the standpoint of hybridity, Gibran’s work exemplifies what Homi Bhabha (1994) terms “cultural hybridity,” as he merges Eastern themes with Western literary structures. Although he writes in English, his diction and metaphorical imagery are deeply informed by Arabic poetic sensibilities, creating a synthesis of cultural expression (Ali et al., 2022). This fusion opens a “third space” where Gibran’s diasporic identity intersects with the collective trauma of his community. The juxtaposition of phrases like “Dead are my friends” and “My people” highlights the duality of personal mourning and communal solidarity, underscoring the interconnectedness of individual and collective experience.

Through a subaltern lens, Gibran’s poetry becomes a vehicle for voicing the suffering of Lebanese people historically silenced by imperial powers, resonating with Gayatri Spivak’s (1999) concept of subalternity. Yet his role is complicated by his position as a diasporic, educated writer speaking from outside Lebanon. This complexity aligns with Bhabha’s notion of “vernacular cosmopolitanism,” wherein the local is translated into a global idiom (Lücking, 2023). Gibran thus navigates a delicate balance—bearing witness to the tragedies of his homeland while acknowledging the privilege of his distance, and in doing so, expands the poetic space where memory, grief, and resistance converge.

Guilt and Powerlessness

*But I am not living with my hungry
And persecuted people who are walking
In the procession of death toward
Martyrdom...I am here beyond the
Broad seas living in the shadow of
Tranquillity, and in the sunshine of
Peace...*

(Gibran, 2019)

This excerpt conveys Gibran’s guilt as a Lebanese émigré witnessing the suffering of his people from afar, amid the fall of the Ottoman Empire and the onset of French rule (Jackson, 2017; Pitts, 2020). As Fahrenthold (2019) notes, the mass Lebanese migration between 1880 and 1920 stemmed from

political oppression and economic collapse, forming the earliest wave of the Arab diaspora. The image of a “procession of death toward / Martyrdom” poignantly evokes the Great Mount Lebanon Famine, during which an estimated third of the population died, as documented by Foster (2015). By contrasting his peace with his people’s suffering, Gibran highlights the emotional toll of bearing witness from exile.

Viewed through the dual frameworks of hybridity and subalternity, Gibran’s work exemplifies a form of “diasporic consciousness” that blends Eastern cultural memory with Western literary expression (Riaz & Babaee, 2015). The stark oppositions—“shadow of / Tranquillity” versus “procession of death”—mirror the fractured identities common to diasporic writers. His diasporic privilege complicates his ability to represent the subaltern. As McLeod (2020) argues, Gibran’s acknowledgment of guilt aligns with Spivak’s notion of “strategic essentialism,” allowing him to navigate the ethical tension of speaking for the subaltern while remaining conscious of his privilege. Gibran neither claims to speak wholly for the oppressed nor denies his distance from them. Instead, he assumes a dual role: both as chronicler and as morally implicated observer, negotiating the ethical tensions inherent in representing subaltern suffering while inhabiting the relative comfort of diasporic life.

Critique of World Indifference

They died silently,
For humanity had closed its ears
To their cry.

(Gibran, 2019)

This brief yet piercing excerpt reflects Gibran’s sorrow and anger over the world’s indifference to the suffering of the Lebanese people in the early twentieth century. These lines directly confront the global silence during the Great Mount Lebanon Famine, a catastrophe exacerbated by an Ottoman blockade, locust infestation, and Allied counter-blockade (Fahrenthold, 2019). The famine claimed nearly 200,000 lives, yet drew little international response—highlighting, as Pitts (2020) notes, how geopolitical interests overshadowed humanitarian concern. In this light, the famine becomes a symbol not only of colonial neglect but of what could be seen as a deliberately orchestrated humanitarian

failure. Gibran’s lament thus critiques not just the tragedy itself, but the broader colonial logic behind the Western “civilizing mission” imposed on the East (Barth & Hobson, 2020).

Viewed through the lens of hybridity and subaltern theory, Gibran’s poem inhabits a “liminal space of protest”, where his bilingual, bicultural voice allows him to critique Western dominance using its own literary forms (Ali et al., 2022; Hassan, 2022). The line “They died silently” captures both the literal silencing of Lebanese lives and their symbolic erasure from global narratives. This absence of international acknowledgement resonates with Banerjee’s (2015) notion of “mediated subaltern testimony,” where the voices of the oppressed reach public discourse through the narratives of diasporic intermediaries.

Gibran emerges as both witness and critic—testifying to his people’s suffering while holding imperial powers accountable for their silence. His poetry enacts what Chaturvedi (2015) calls “ethical witnessing,” speaking for the silenced while recognizing the limitations of his privileged position. Through this mode, Gibran connects the pain of his people to a global conscience, exposing the moral failures of imperialism and its selective compassion.

Hope to Help His People

Were I an ear of corn grown in the earth
of my country the hungry child would
Pluck me and remove with my kernels
The hand of Death from his soul.

(Gibran, 2019)

This metaphor of Gibran as an “ear of corn” embodies his desire to nourish his people amid famine and despair, when widespread starvation was intensified by Ottoman blockades and agricultural collapse (Brand, 2023). Corn, a symbol of sustenance, resonates deeply amid the grain shortages that often define famine (Rouf Shah et al., 2016). Gibran’s longing to become sustenance for a starving child expresses his desire to counteract the devastation inflicted by colonial policies. As Whyte (2017) suggests, hunger has often been weaponized as a tool of imperial control. Through this metaphor, Gibran mourns systemic exploitation while also articulating a redemptive wish—to nourish life, to ease suffering, and to offer healing across distance.

The line also illustrates “transcultural symbolism”—the blending of Western literary tropes with Middle Eastern cultural sensibilities (Temirgazina, 2021). Gibran’s bilingual fluency allows him to draw upon a symbol, corn, that holds resonance across cultural contexts. This synthesis grants his poetic voice both intimacy and reach. As a member of the diaspora, Gibran embodies what Banerjee (2015) describes as a “privileged subaltern agency”—a speaker situated outside the homeland but still deeply invested in its fate. The phrase “remove with my kernels / The hand of Death from his soul” transforms his grief into symbolic reparative action. Though absent, Gibran offers metaphorical nourishment—transforming poetry into a medium of solidarity and healing.

Suheir Hammad and Her Empathy for the Palestinian People

Depiction of Suffering and Violence in Gaza

Doctors open bombed bodies find organs on
re wa these people still alive the dead their
wounds flame after spirit gone

(Coval et al., 2015: 92)

In this stark and visceral excerpt, Suheir Hammad conveys the brutal realities of life in Gaza, shaped by occupation, violence, and systemic neglect. As a Palestinian diasporic poet, Hammad channels the collective trauma of her people. Writing from a liminal space, she amplifies what Edward Said called “the voices of the marginalized” (Nazrul, 2024). The line evokes scenes of devastation—bombed bodies, flaming wounds, and fragile survival—capturing the ongoing humanitarian crisis and the collapse of Gaza’s healthcare infrastructure (Sayigh, 2015; S. K. Ahmed, 2023). Hammad transforms individual suffering into a symbol of a wider sociopolitical emergency.

Viewed through the lens of hybridity and subalternity, Hammad’s poetic language is deeply layered. The phrase “re wa these people” employs fragmented syntax that blends oral English rhythms with Arabic expressions, reflecting what Bhabha (1994) identifies as “cultural hybridity.” This linguistic fusion creates a space where trauma, identity, and resistance can coexist. By focusing on the wounded body, Hammad underscores how the colonized body becomes both witness and “site of resistance” (Shang,

2016). Furthermore, Hammad’s collective voice embodies Spivak’s idea of strategic essentialism, allowing her to momentarily unify subaltern experiences to confront dominant narratives (Spivak, 1999). Her poetry resists mere mourning; it articulates protest and empowers subaltern voices long excluded from dominant narratives (Mohammad & Abdulaal, 2022).

Solidarity with Palestinian Women

cities wa women die like this habibi wa cities
wa women live

(Coval et al., 2015: 93)

Hammad’s line evokes the layered realities of Palestinian women under occupation. The juxtaposition of life and death in the line “cities wa women die like this habibi wa cities wa women live” invokes a history of colonial displacement and the gendered dimensions of survival. Palestinian women, who form a significant portion of the refugee population, face intersecting oppressions—military violence, patriarchy, and systemic deprivation (Salih, 2017; Veronese et al., 2022). The repetition of “wa” (.)—Arabic for “and”—is not merely grammatical—it adds emotional and cultural resonance, blending linguistic codes across Arabic and English registers.

Bhabha’s theory of hybridity offers a useful frame for interpreting Hammad’s technique. Her use of “habibi” and “wa” constructs what Bhabha (1994) terms a “third space,” where complex negotiations of cultural identity and resistance take place. Hammad writes from an “in-between” space, where individual pain reflects larger structural trauma. This interplay of languages and symbols becomes a form of political hybridity (Kwon, 2016).

Through a subaltern lens, Hammad’s work centers Palestinian women who experience “double colonization”—oppressed by both foreign occupation and entrenched patriarchal systems (Spivak, 1999). While acknowledging this dual burden, Hammad resists reducing Palestinian women to victims. Instead, she affirms their resilience, memory, and dignity.

Call for Freedom and Struggle against Oppression

between us wall wara wall wa ana i ain’t jinn
wa ana i ain’t phoenix between us yama walls

ya allah first wa last within me breaking sunset
over into canaan way dawn into egypt river
running through women carry their men

(Coval et al., 2015: 94)

This excerpt from Suheir Hammad's poem captures the historical and political landscape of Palestinian life under Israeli occupation. The phrase "wall wara" refers to the Israeli separation wall, constructed in 2002 to divide Palestinian territories. This barrier spans more than 700 kilometers, with approximately 85% cutting through the West Bank, fragmenting communities and severely restricting access to essential resources like land and water (Weizman, 2024; Busbridge, 2017). Hammad invokes "Canaan" and "Egypt" to link the Palestinian struggle with historical and sacred traditions of liberation, drawing from the symbolic weight these places hold in the Abrahamic tradition. As Crosby (2018) notes, these references underscore the duality of oppression and hope, anchoring the Palestinian fight for justice in sacred and historical memory.

Hammad's poem also embodies Homi Bhabha's theory of hybridity. Her blending of English and Arabic—evident in code-switching phrases like "wall wara wall"—creates what Bhabha (1994) calls the "third space," a site of cultural negotiation where hybrid identities form. Her invocation of both Eastern (jinn) and Western (phoenix) mythologies disrupts fixed identity categories, reinforcing her diasporic hybridity.

From a subaltern perspective, Hammad centers Palestinian women as active agents in resistance. The image of "women carry their men" subverts patriarchal norms, echoing Spivak's concept of "female subaltern consciousness." These women embody not only personal loss but national memory and resistance. By intertwining gendered and national struggles, Hammad restores visibility to voices too often silenced in global political discourse.

CONCLUSION

Khalil Gibran's "Dead Are My People" and Suheir Hammad's poems from the "Break" series explore layered forms of diasporic alienation and the enduring desire to reconnect with the homeland. Gibran articulates three forms of alienation—geographical and cultural, emotional, and alienation

from collective solidarity—while Hammad focuses primarily on identity alienation. Together, their poetry underscores the persistence of alienation in Arab-American diasporic experience—from Gibran's early twentieth-century reflections to Hammad's modern-day expression.

While their expressions of empathy differ, both poets respond to distinct historical traumas. Gibran reflects on the famine and suffering of the Lebanese under Ottoman rule during World War I. In contrast, Hammad addresses the ongoing oppression of Palestinians, especially the gendered dimensions of conflict experienced by women. Despite these distinct historical contexts, both poets explore the complexities of hybrid identity, situated between Arab and American cultural frameworks. Their expressions of empathy become a vehicle for voicing the pain and resistance of subaltern communities—those silenced and marginalized under colonial and imperial regimes. Viewed through postcolonial lenses—particularly hybridity and subalternity—their poetry transcends personal reflection, emerging as a powerful form of cultural resistance and advocacy for marginalized voices.

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