

Jumana Bayeh

ARAB-AUSTRALIAN FICTION: NATIONAL STORIES,
TRANSNATIONAL CONNECTIONS

Abstract

Unlike the scholarly interest in Arab-American fiction, Arab-Australian literature has not received as much attention from literary critics, Australian-based or otherwise. Increased interest in Arab-American literature has been explained and often contextualized through the United States' long-standing interference in the Arab world, as well as the tense relations between Arabs and Americans within the US. But these issues are not unique to America – like the US, Australia has not shied away from intervening in the region and also has its own troubled relations with Arab immigrant communities. And yet, despite these similar circumstances, no study of how Arab-Australian literature might apprehend or dramatize these particular relations has been undertaken. This paper provides some insights into the albeit nascent but growing field of Arab-Australian fiction. It explores how and in what ways Arab-Australian literature can be categorized as a form of Australian writing, and be seen as part of a transnational network of Arab diaspora fiction.



Following his first novel *Tell the Running Water* (2001), a story of various loosely connected characters trapped in war-riven Beirut, Abbas El-Zein published his memoir, *Leave to Remain* (2009), an account of his journey from Beirut to Sydney. Outlining the formative influence of this relocation on his sense of his “place-in-the-world,” El-Zein writes:

Home is a concoction of physical and mental dwellings. I travel between them and live in a virtual metropolis of my making. I am still very much part of my family in Lebanon and I now have a family and friends in Australia, and enough loyalty to them to call Australia home.¹

This is the conclusion El-Zein reaches at the end of the first part of his memoir, titled “Origins and Departures,” leaving the strong

Jumana Bayeh is one of the organizers and editors of this collection of essays.
Email: jumana.bayeh@mq.edu.au

impression that it is only Lebanon and Australia that anchor his notion of home. But in the opening of the memoir's second part, "Unhappy Returns," it is not his return to Lebanon that El-Zein describes, but a journey to Iraq. While not strictly a return, as El-Zein had not visited there before, Iraq nevertheless constitutes a homely site for the author because of its significance for Shi'a Muslims like the El-Zein family. Being Shi'a, as the author explains, locked generations of the El-Zein family into the "transnational world of Islamic scholarship," with Najaf as its epicenter.² El-Zein's notion of home, then, is not circumscribed by Beirut and Sydney; rather, it is one that includes other sites, connecting, as the memoir further describes, Beirut, Najaf, Baghdad, Paris, Palestine, and Sydney.

What this complex notion of home illustrates is the significance of both the Australian context and the transnational connections that shape the author's life and inform his memoir. However, despite the text's local and diasporic contexts, it is noteworthy that El-Zein's writing, along with many other Arab-Australian authors like Nada Awar Jarrar, Jad El Hage, or Randa Abdel-Fattah, has not been assessed as a form of Australian literature or incorporated within the growing field of Arab diaspora writing in English. In the realm of Australian literary studies, one might argue that the neglect of Arab-Australian authors reflects the general marginalization of "multicultural" or ethnic writers among the Australian scholarly community. This, however, is an unsustainable argument when one considers that critical studies of Australian literature in the past included discussion of multicultural fiction, and that various anthologies of multicultural fiction, although not as popular now, had been published predominantly in the 1980s and 1990s.³ The scant attention paid to writers of Arab heritage has confused even the more established scholars of multicultural writing, evident in Michael Jacklin's observation, in his overview of the "transnational" turn in Australian literary research, that "it is odd that Arab-Australian writing has to this point attracted so little critical attention."⁴

Similarly, in the growing research of Arab diaspora writing in English, Arab-Australian literature has escaped considered scholarly and critical attention. While the recent and wide ranging collections *Arab Voices in Diaspora* (2009), edited by Layla Al Maleh, and *The Edinburgh Companion to the Arab Novel in English* (2013), edited by Nouri Gana, do include some discussion of Arab-Australian fiction, their primary attention is to Arab-American writing.⁵ This focus not only

marginalizes Arab-Australian writing, it also segregates it so that the transnational connections between it and other literature within the field of Arab diaspora fiction remain under-explored. A reason for the neglect of Arab-Australian fiction from both Arab diaspora and Australian literary studies most likely stems from the lack of a clear conception of how each of these fields are defined. Scholars of Australian literature are still contesting what set of characteristics can be used to define it, moving between thematic concerns and a globalizing imperative in an attempt to situate Australian writing within a broader, transnational context. Corresponding debates take place in the field of Arab diaspora literary research. As such, what constitutes Arab diaspora literature is still in the embryonic stages of definition, and the focus on Arab-American literature has overshadowed this field. Despite this lack of clarity, the goal of this article is to explore the Australian and Arab diaspora dimensions of literature, primarily novels, composed by Arab-Australia writers.⁶ It will do so by engaging with each field separately to illustrate how and in what ways Arab-Australian literature intersects with both. It will also reveal, by way of conclusion, how these two fields are not mutually exclusive but are interconnected, highlighting that Australian and Arab diaspora literary studies have much to offer each other.

ARAB-AUSTRALIAN FICTION AS AUSTRALIAN LITERATURE

As noted above, debates over what constitutes Australian literature have been a key aspect of Australian literary studies. Like most national literatures, the question of what defines "Australian literature" is an evolving discussion and one that has produced varied criteria and, importantly, schools of thought as to what makes a text part of Australian literature. These approaches are underpinned by three distinct yet interrelated criteria: the location of the author and the narrative setting; a select set of themes that are essential to Australian literature; and an emerging interest in Australian literary studies in the transnational dimensions of Australian literature.

In relation to an author's location and narrative setting, what has generally been considered essential by literary critics is that a writer should have some connection to Australia, by birth and residence, and a narrative should unfold, even if partially, in Australia. And yet these "essential" criteria quickly become problematic when questions like "Must the writer be born Australian?" or can he or she simply be "an Australian national?" are posed.⁷ Ironically, such criteria, especially the

former, would disqualify the most prestigious of Australian writers, the Nobel Laureate Patrick White, because he was born and educated in London. A further complicating consideration involves where the writing takes place. In this regard Jean-Francois Vernay, in his study *The Great Australian Novel* (2010), asks "To be Australian, must the work be written in Australia?" and notes in his response that many "contemporary writers of renown would be penalised" if this were the case.⁸ This includes one of the most significant authors of Australia letters today, Peter Carey, who lives and writes in New York.

When one considers Arab-Australian writers, the location of the authors and the settings in which their narratives unfold have proven to be equally problematic. Al Maleh raises a key issue when she states that Australia's more recent intake of Arab migrants, when compared to the American record, means that most "Arab-Australians currently writing . . . were not born on Australian soil" leading to a distinctly "expatriate perspective rather than . . . [one of] fully internalized citizenship."⁹ While it seems Al Maleh is suggesting that for Arab-Australian writers being born in Australia is not essential, relocating or migrating to it is important to identifying the literature as "Australian." Most Arab-Australian writers do reside in Australia but one important author, Nada Awar Jarrar, has relocated to Lebanon. And yet, when her debut text *Somewhere, Home* (2003) was awarded the Commonwealth Writers Prize in the South East Asia and South Pacific region, Australia was listed as the author's country of association. In light of this, it would be difficult to exclude her fiction from the field of Australian literature simply due to her relocation. Moreover, a narrative that is set at least partially in Australia, and contains characters that retain an ambivalent sense of "internalized citizenship" grappling with what it means to be an Arab in Australia are also central to recognizing literature by an Arab-Australian as Australian.¹⁰ Like Awar Jarrar, author Jad El Hage resides mainly in Lebanon. However, his debut novel, *The Last Migration* (2002), contains significant scenes in Australia, Sydney specifically, as well as the important final narrative twist which sees the detached and globetrotting protagonist Ashraf Saad make his "last migration" to Australia. Again, despite the author not residing in Australia, it would be difficult to exclude *The Last Migration* as a form of Australian writing in light of the setting and importance attributed to Australia in the novel.

Given the problems of these criteria, many critics of Australian studies, like Nicole Moore, David Brooks, and Graham Huggan, have focused on themes and issues as a way to circumscribe what constitutes

Australian literature. In this approach it is not an author's origins or the necessity of an Australian setting in the text that matters, but more so, in the words of John Ewers, that any form of literary writing needs to "have been conceived in the minds of the writers who have reacted to the conditions of life in Australia."¹¹ It is this way that we start to see what Huggan suggests is the "common view of Australian literature" which is "that it represents a collective national project."¹² Huggan goes on to state that Australian literature is considered "an index of national consciousness if, at the same time, a necessarily unreliable descriptor of the rapidly transforming realities of national social and cultural life."¹³ Perhaps because of this unreliability and transformation, practitioners of Australian literary studies have not reached a consensus on the list of themes that supposedly underpin Australian writing, although they still point to several central themes that recur within Australian writing. I will focus here on three overarching and interconnected themes: land, identity, and the violence of dispossession.¹⁴

While many Australian writers showcase these themes across their literary writing, David Malouf's work is especially significant because of his highly celebrated status as a contemporary Australian writer. This may be because his writing inventively illustrates the significance and inseparability of the three themes of land, identity, and violence. In novels like the critically lauded *Remembering Babylon* (1993) or even his earlier autobiographical *12 Edmondson Street* (1985) Malouf's focus on land and the relationship between the Australian landscape and characters invites readers to reconsider the dominance of white settlement as the starting point of Australia's history. In *Remembering Babylon*, Australia's settler colonial history is of particular concern, illustrated in the way the narrative dramatizes the encounter between the British metropole and the Australian colony through various characters. This encounter begins when the protagonist Gemmy Fairley, lost at sea at the age of thirteen while sailing from Britain to Australia, is saved by an Aboriginal community in northern Queensland and spends the next sixteen years in their care. He is reunited with the British world, albeit in a settler colonial version of it, when he leaves the Aboriginal community to reside in a white settlement located nearby. Due to this long sojourn with the Aboriginal community, Gemmy's identity is perceived as unstable and challenges the expectations of the British settlers. This is registered in the novel's opening scene where Gemmy, as he emerges from the bush, confuses the white inhabitants he encounters with his Aboriginal mannerisms

and yet white appearance. His speech is a further register of confusion, when he stutters “Do not shoot . . . I am a B-b-british object.”¹⁵ He himself recognizes, perhaps unconsciously, that he is not in the privileged position as the subject of empire, but more like the Aboriginals, is its object, irrespective of his British origins. The specialized knowledge that Gemmy has acquired of the land during his time with the Aborigines, a land that is alien, untamed, and foreign to the white settlers, makes him both prized and yet suspicious to the white inhabitants. His arrival not only disrupts, as Nicolette Bragg argues, “the settlers’ dreams of ordered habitations . . . homesteads and plantations” but concurrently exposes an alternate history of Australian settlement and the corresponding violence of Aboriginal dispossession.¹⁶ As Saadi Nikro succinctly notes, “Malouf’s writings explore a settler and indigenous dynamic in which identity is implacably provisional and relational, embedded in the arduous and conflicting tremors of imagining a spatial sense of self and place.”¹⁷

These themes of land, identity, and violence are also prevalent in Arab-Australian fiction. All three converge especially when Palestinians are either referenced or are the main subject in narratives by Arab-Australian writers. Randa Abdel-Fattah, a writer of children’s and young adult fiction, excels in exposing the political stakes and emotional turmoil in the convergence of these themes within the settler colonial and indigenous dynamic that shapes Palestinian dispossession. This is revealed in Abdel-Fattah’s novel *Where the Streets Had a Name* (2008), which features the young heroine, thirteen-year-old Hayaat, and her quest to reclaim a handful of soil from her family’s original home in Jerusalem. Hayaat’s quest is motivated by the specific wish of her elderly grandmother, Sitti Zeynab, to touch the soil of the family’s ancestral village of Beit Sahour, the village from which Hayaat’s family was forcibly expelled. It is not just the denial of access to that land that drives this story, but the effort that Abdel-Fattah makes to highlight the obstacles that have been built into and altered the landscape of Palestine, namely the Wall that serves as an almost impenetrable barrier separating the West Bank from Israel. In the process of writing the book Abdel-Fattah visited Palestine to assess the way the landscape prohibited movement and, as she explains, to think about how she would narrate the lived experience of occupation:

The landscape has dramatically changed since . . . [the] construction of the separation wall. So, I had to research the

impact of the Wall's route on the geography of the West Bank and Jerusalem, the way the roads have changed, the location of checkpoints, the travel permit system and who could go where and when . . . I spoke to many people and bombarded them with questions: people who live there, students, academics, taxi drivers, business-people, children, the Mayor of Bethlehem, lawyers, human rights activists, Israelis, Australians visiting Palestine.¹⁸

Abdel-Fattah conveys the significance of the landscape as obstacle in relation to Hayaat's journey to Jerusalem. The distance between Beit Sahour and Hayaat's current residence in Bethlehem is recorded in the novel as only six miles but it takes Hayaat hours to complete the trip.¹⁹ This is because the journey involves the negotiation of checkpoints, passing through roadblocks, and scaling the imposing Wall.

Beyond the physical barrier that the Wall imposes on the landscape, Abdel-Fattah stresses the significance of the land on characters' identity. What is revealed here, particularly in relation to Hayaat's father and grandmother, is the effect of being displaced from the land and the way it alters these characters' sense of self. For instance, Hayaat states that her father, who was once a "loud and jocular" man in Jerusalem, had become "in Bethlehem . . . [a man] who sits in silence, sucking his *argeela* or flicking through the news channels." His well-being is tied to "working on his land" and back in Jerusalem his family "felt [his] happiness when he came home . . . in the evening."²⁰ In fact so deeply intertwined is the identity of Hayaat's father with the land, that Hayaat describes him in terms that make him indistinguishable from it: "When we lost our land, he imploded. We have no way of seeing the evidence of this demolition – the rubble and ruins inside him."²¹ This conflation of land and person is just as strongly reflected in Sitti Zeynab. Throughout the novel she recites the features of Beit Sahour, the town's olive, almond, and jasmine trees, the limestone houses and their distinctly arched windows. The degree to which Sitti Zeynab identifies with the earth and topography of her first home is further reflected in her song, "The breeze of our homeland revives our body/ And surely we cannot live without our homeland," and in the fact that the only time in the novel that readers witness a sense of relief envelope Sitti Zeynab is when she is reunited with the soil of her home. In a moving scene, Hayaat "pours some soil into her

[grandmother's] open palms. 'Jerusalem soil,' I whisper. I see her eyes and I know that every step of our journey was worth this moment."²²

Unlike many of Abdel-Fattah's previous novels which are almost entirely set in Australia, *Where the Streets Had a Name* does not reference Australia. Nevertheless this text can be considered part of the field of Australian fiction precisely because it taps into and explores issues that are a significant part of Australian literary culture. This relates to Abdel-Fattah's narration of the plight of an indigenous people, the Palestinians, who have been displaced by a settler colonial population, an experience which reminds readers of the treatment of Aboriginal Australians. The character of Gemmy in Malouf's *Remembering Babylon*, then, is not unlike the characters in the *Where the Streets Had a Name*, all of whom are mobilized to reveal the trauma of dispossession experienced by indigenous populations in a context of settler colonialism.

Comparing these two experiences of dispossession aligns with existing studies by Australian writers and literary critics who have been composing narratives and essays that highlight the significance and relevance of Palestine to Australia's own troubled history with its native population.²³ In 1991, for instance, Thomas Keneally published *Flying Class Hero* where he merged the concerns of the Palestinians with Australian Aborigines. Likewise, in the Australian literary journal *Overland*, Michael Brull published an essay with the suggestive title "A Tale of Settler Colonies: Israel and Australia Compared" (2014), where he outlined not just the similarities between experiences of settler colonialism, but the need for better frameworks to explore the centrality of land and the way dispossession shapes indigenous identity. Abdel-Fattah's novel, then, is part of a literary trend that explores a settler colonial and indigenous dynamic, focusing on key issues like land and dispossession which are significant to Australia and its national literature.

Beyond dispossession in the Palestinian and Australian contexts, the significance of land is further explored by Arab-Australian writers, where they focus on the connection between land and identity as a way to narrate how characters register a sense of belonging within Australia. This is not unlike what takes place in more traditional forms of Australian writing. According to Huggan, the link between land and identity is reflected in Australian literature through the highly fraught issue of land ownership, and the corresponding questions of cultural heritage and belonging that have long

preoccupied Australian literature. While it is generally agreed that Australian literature possesses no single cultural heritage, what remains, in Huggan's words, is the "struggle over cultural ownership." This struggle is represented as a "fundamental dissonance between what we might call the politics of ownership and the poetics of belonging."²⁴ The tension is reflected in the work of early- and mid-twentieth century writers, like Christina Stead and most famously Patrick White, and late-twentieth century authors like Christos Tsiolkas. Regarding the former, a seminal example is White's *Voss* (1957), described as a colonial allegory of exploration into an unknown land. The titular character, Voss, is a German explorer who attempts not just to traverse the Australian desert but also act as its cartographer. When Voss states "The map . . . I will first make it" he both crowns himself as map-maker of the Australian continent and, according to Roslynn Doris Haynes, proclaims ownership of it.²⁵ Voss's possession of the land, his quest to give it form through exploration and cartography, are intrinsically linked to his European and white identity. Literary critics like Simon During have likened Voss to Hitler, with Voss assuming the role of an imperialist within a colonial setting.²⁶ The pairing of fascist politics with imperial domination highlight how in this novel "whiteness is an emanation of pure will, a confirmation of the greatness of [Voss's] own European . . . inheritance."²⁷

Similarly, Tsiolkas's critically lauded *Loaded* (1995), although a form of multicultural writing and not the kind of colonial narrative White presents, also explores the link between the land and subjectivity.²⁸ *Loaded* is an unabashed portrayal of Ari, a nineteen-year-old Greek Melbournian who clashes with his family and Australian society. Grappling with his homosexuality that is rejected by his parents, but also proudly identifying as Greek-Australian, while confronting an Australian national culture that racially and sexually marginalizes him, Ari is unsurprisingly unsettled about his sense of self. Tsiolkas ties this confusion of the self to place, illustrating that even though Ari refers to Australia as his home, it remains a home that is overlaid with conflicted senses of belonging. His homosexuality, for instance, is not an aspect of his identity that he openly embraces but one that he explores in Melbourne's hidden quarters. In one drawn out and vividly described scene, Ari descends into Melbourne's supposedly unsavory quarters, to its dark and unkempt alleys, and its seedy public toilets. It is here in Melbourne's underbelly that Ari engages in violent and emotionally detached sex with anonymous

partners. This portrayal of Ari's sexuality, one that he explores only in Melbourne's hidden sites, reveals his conflicted sense of attachment to and alienation within Australia.

In Arab-Australian fiction, aspects of the Australian landscape are also used to explore the transformations of characters' identities and sense of belonging in Australia. Two novels – *The Last Migration* (2002) by Jad El Hage and *The Tribe* (2015) by Michael Mohammad Ahmad – highlight this, but notably explore alternate registrations of the nexus between land and identity. As outlined above, Nikro argues that *The Last Migration* is a diasporic text, suggesting that the Australian dimensions of this novel rest on the coincidental elements of characters' migration to Australia, as well as the author's own relocation to Australia. Nikro is not alone in stressing this novel's lack of Australian elements. In an earlier piece, Syrine Hout makes a strong case that *The Last Migration* is the first example of a Lebanese diaspora novel. While Nikro and Hout's arguments are not incorrect, what they underestimate is the significant and distinct role of the Australian land for the novel's migrant characters. For instance, two characters, Fehmy and Abdo Naji, friends of the protagonist Ashraf, are used to illustrate, according to Hout, the stability of diasporic characters, as opposed to the unsettledness that characterizes exiles.²⁹ Fehmy, a migrant from Lebanon to Sydney, and Abdo Naji, a Yemeni now residing in London, both reflect not just a sense of settledness in Australia and the United Kingdom, but also success and prosperity. In that sense they are both, as Rayyan al Shawaf describes, "islands of stability."³⁰ But what is noteworthy is the basis of their success. Abdo Naji's prosperity is related to his considerable artistic skill as a potter, and is listed in *The Sunday Morning Herald* as one of England's best ten potters.³¹ Fehmy's success, however, is attributed to his knowledge of the Australian land. Residing in the Sydney farming region of Glenorie, he has transformed himself from an actor in Beirut to a wealthy tomato farmer in Australia. Ashraf's comment, "Fehmy knows everything there is to know about [Australian] agriculture," is a clear indication of the latter's mastery of the Australian land.³² Fehmy not only adapts to the soil of rural Australia, but cultivates it for his own gain. It is the land, then, that ubiquitous and defining feature of Australian literature, that grounds Fehmy, an Arab migrant, and affords him a sense of attachment to and stability in Australia.

An alternate example of the significance of landscape to characters can be found in Ahmad's *The Tribe*. This narrative, unlike

The Last Migration, unfolds entirely in Australia, Sydney specifically, and records the story of the Adams, a Lebanese-Muslim migrant family, from the perspective of the narrator, Bani Adam. The landscape that Bani describes, though, is not one of the bush and desert, as depicted in many settler colonial novels like White's *Voss*, nor is it the rural farming land that is a feature of El Hage's text. Nor is it predominantly a city-landscape, like that of Melbourne in Tsiolkas's *Loaded*. Rather, it is complex domestic dwelling known as "Baat Adam," the House of Adam, that takes center stage. While the Adams's home is not a landscape in the narrow sense of the term, I include it here as a kind of landscape for two interrelated reasons. The first is the particular approach this narrative takes when documenting the lives of the Adams in Sydney. It minimizes recording their movements and interactions beyond the house and extended family. As a result it does not, as is legion in other narratives that focus on Arab-Muslim migrants, highlight experiences of racism, segregation, or racial misunderstanding. When it does, it treats them in a jocular manner. As Bani reports, "The house is in Alexandria. People think because we are Arabs, that I mean the city in Egypt, but the Alexandria we are from is actually a suburb in Sydney's inner-west."³³ What the novel succeeds in doing instead is, as Ghassan Hage notes, carving a "'resilient' . . . space where people live their lives with a sense of normality without being constantly haunted by the representations produced by the dominant culture about them."³⁴

This leads to the second reason why the house can be considered a kind of landscape. Because the narrative unfolds largely in the Adam house, with much stress placed on it as a resilient space, the house's structure is described in ample detail. The book's entire first section, "I: The House of Adam," is dedicated to mapping every corner and crevice of this domestic structure. Readers are taken down corridors, into various bedrooms, bathrooms, the external laundry, upstairs to the second story, into the backyard granny flat, and are introduced to a cast of characters that include not only Bani's parents and three siblings but also his two bachelor uncles, Ali and Ibrahim, his married uncle Osama whose family resides upstairs, and his grandmother, Yocheved. Readers peer into wardrobes, the large kitchen and living room, and examine the family portraits that decorate the Adam house.

Rich with description, it becomes increasingly clear that this "House of Adam belongs to everyone. We go upstairs and they come downstairs. We don't knock on doors and we don't say 'excuse me.' No

one has a special seat or private drawer. We share the backyard and the garage and our rooms and our clothes and our toys and our food."³⁵ Despite the lack of privacy and the crowded circumstances in which they live, in the novel's richly woven texture of description the house emerges as the solid base on which the Adam tribe build their lives in Sydney.³⁶ Retreating from the external landscape of Sydney, the novel substitutes the house as the site on which Bani Adam recounts the details of his youth as the child of Arab migrants. Thus again, the landscape, an important feature of Australian writing, is taken up by the Arab-Australian writer Ahmad, who distinctly molds this feature to illuminate a dimension of landscape that is uniquely and intrinsically suited to the migrant experience.

Alongside the fundamental themes of land, identity, and violence that are key elements of Australian literature, transnationalism has emerged as a feature of and methodology within Australian literary studies. Nicholas Birns and Rebecca McNeer have tracked the shift from defining Australian literature through its thematic concerns to the transnational analytical turn prevalent since roughly the 1990s. They argue that while "in the 1970s and 1980s, Australian writers were praised for the specifically Australian content" in their texts, the 1990s saw a sharp decline "of the appeal of the specifically Australian."³⁷ This supposedly signaled the "death" or decline of Australian literature, but for David Brooks and Robert Dixon it was the catalyst for a transformation to a "transnational practice of Australian literary criticism."³⁸ Inspired by Franco Moretti's technologically assisted "close reading" methods and David Damrosch's stress on translation in his study of world literature, Dixon has argued that "Australian writers and Australian literature have never been confined to the boundaries of the nation," and so should not be analyzed as such.³⁹ In his two-pronged study of Australian writers Robert Dessaix and David Malouf, Dixon points to what exists "in and between the spaces of national literature" and what transpires in "the translation zone."⁴⁰

Criticism of Arab-Australian literature needs to engage with the same transnational literary approach that is increasingly prevalent in Australian literary studies. For instance, in his analysis of Loubna Baikal's *Seducing Mr. Maclean* (2002), Saadi Nikro argues that as a multicultural text, it reflects a distinctly Australian sensibility. It tells the story of a Lebanese migrant family, who flee Lebanon's civil war and settle in Melbourne. The unnamed female narrator has to negotiate

the extent to which she belongs in Australia, a dilemma that is explored in the narrative while she studies medicine at the University of Melbourne. The novel's "Australianness" is, for Nikro, revealed in the way it "foregrounds the pathology of Australian multiculturalism" – a pathology that supposedly accepts and celebrates difference, while simultaneously maintaining the exotic allure of, in this case, the Arab "other." Professor Maclean, the narrator's university advisor, is attracted to the narrator's foreign charm, stating that she is "very different" and "very exotic," and inappropriately questions her about the dance of the seven veils.⁴¹ Other characters, like Mr. Whitesend, the minister for Immigration and Ethnic Affairs, and even her boyfriend Robby make similar statements to the narrator, emphasizing her beautiful olive skin, her accent, and her exotic, foreign appeal. Throughout the novel, the narrator expresses a deep desire to become Australian, to change her accent, her appearance and her "brain" but eventually realizes that she will always be "two people, one local and one imported, that wrestled." And in that wrestling it seems that not only would she "never be one again . . . never lose [her] looks, accent and family" but that acceptance as an Australian would remain unattainable because her "genes no matter what happened to [her] brain, would never disappear."⁴² Thus, the multicultural nation that the narrator encounters is not inclusive but restrictive because it reinforces the exclusion of the non-white Australian, maintaining what Ghassan Hage has called Australia's "white nation fantasy." It is in this way that Nikro domesticates this novel and argues for its "Australianness," stating that it is "symptomatically embedded . . . [in] the circumstance of multicultural Australia."⁴³

Nikro's domestication of Baikal's novel implies that it is confined to the boundaries of one nation, but its insights into Lebanese and Arab culture suggest a more transnational quality that is overlooked in Nikro's nation-centered analysis. This is a curious omission from Nikro because he quotes, at length, the author's own insights into the transnational dimensions of her novel. For instance, in relation to the narrator Haikal states: "I constructed . . . [her] as the foreigner, the young Lebanese girl, the new comer who brings the goods from the old culture."⁴⁴ The narrator, along with her family, proudly represent these "goods" from their "old" Lebanese culture to various Australian characters by exposing them not only to Lebanon's "superior" cuisine, a maneuver that is common in narratives that feature Lebanese migrant families, but also by insisting that the Lebanese, namely the Christians, should not be considered Arab

because of their Phoenician roots. They also point out that Lebanese culture resembles western European culture, which they reinforce by scattering French greetings and other words in their everyday dialogue, and by reminding their Australian friends that they speak perfect French. This particular depiction of Lebanese culture, with its rejection of Arabic culture and language, might seem a refutation of the family's Lebanese heritage, but their Maronite Christianity, which is mentioned throughout the novel, explains why this is not the case. Although Maronite culture and identity are complex, the one expressed in the novel is not without a strong following. In this formulation, evident in the scholarship of Matti Moosa and Walid Phares, Maronites are the descendants of the ancient Phoenician civilization, making them both not Arab and, importantly, not Muslim.⁴⁵ This non-Arab, non-Muslim alignment is further reinforced when advocates of this view insist that Maronites share closer cultural affinities with the West than the Arab world, due to their Christianity and their immersion in French language and culture.⁴⁶ An appreciation of Maronite culture illuminates these complex particularities of contemporary Lebanese culture, particularities that require intimate knowledge of the politicized nature of religious identity in Lebanon. Although Nikro minimizes the importance of these aspects, a reading that is attuned to the novel's transnational dimensions sheds light on how Arab-Australian literature extends itself beyond the nation and how the context of this literature cannot be limited to the "multicultural circumstance" of Australia.

If, as I have so far argued, Arab-Australian literature has been overlooked in Australian literary studies, a similar oversight exists in the burgeoning field of Arab diaspora literary research. While it is the case that some critical attention is given to Arab-Australian writing in studies of Arab diaspora literature, there remains a notable lack of attempt to integrate Arab-Australian fiction into the wider field of Arab diaspora writing. In the following section I attempt to address this lacuna by pointing to several ways that Arab-Australian literature aligns with and is a part of Arab diaspora writing in English.

ARAB-AUSTRALIAN LITERATURE AS ARAB DIASPORA FICTION
As suggested above, research of Arab diaspora writing in English is rather recent, with three major studies appearing in the last decade. These include Gana (2013) and Al Maleh's (2009) anthologies, which attempt to cover the whole Anglophone Arab world, and Wail

Hassan's monograph *Immigrant Narratives* (2011), which focuses on writing from the Arab-American and Arab-British scenes. These studies, particularly Gana and Al Maleh's, have mainly adopted a world literature studies approach, signaling, as Gana alludes in his editor's introduction, that it is world literature that has opened a space for the analysis of a new and growing field like Anglophone Arab diaspora writing. But while these studies are important, the use of world literature frameworks explains the segregation of Arab-Australian writing within them. These studies are organized by a nation-centered approach, evident in Hassan's work where the chapters are divided between the Arab-American and Arab-British fields, with scant evidence of transnational comparison. The same is true of the edited works from Gana and Al Maleh. The chapters presented in these volumes are a series of predominantly text- or author-based case studies, and while they go further than Hassan by including discussions of Australian writing, the segregation of these literary geographies is upheld. In other words, what has been maintained is what some literary critics have described as the dominance of the national model.⁴⁷

A further, interrelated problem in these studies is that they reflect a clear bias for Arab-American literature. They begin with examinations of the earliest Arab-American writers, either Ameen Rihani or Khalil Gibran, and stress that the first Arab diaspora novel in English was composed by Rihani. While Britain receives some attention, in Gana's anthology only one chapter addresses Arab-Australian writing and in Al Maleh's two chapters examine two texts by Arab-Australian writers. This American bias is no doubt the result of the fact that the overwhelming majority of Arab diaspora writing takes place in America, especially in the first decades of the twentieth century.⁴⁸ In this regard, the focus on Arab-American literature is justified. What, however, is more problematic is the elevation of American writing as a kind of prototype within the Arab diaspora field. This is explicitly stated by Gana when he refers to Arab-American literature as "paradigmatic" of all Anglophone Arab writing.⁴⁹ Elevating the Arab-American field in this way complicates efforts to establish an approach that is less nation-specific and more attune to uncovering the transnational and diasporic connections that underpin this body of writing. Both Gana and Al Maleh's collections state that it is necessary to move beyond the nation, but the approach taken in their volumes does not reflect this.⁵⁰ Of course, while national specificities cannot be dismissed—they remain the backbone of modern literary

studies—and the significance of Arab-American writing difficult to challenge, sticking resolutely to these elements results in overlooking the broader socio-political issues and literary characteristics that tie Arab diaspora writing across national boundaries. Identifying some of these features will help to begin a discussion of how Arab writing composed in Australia relates to other Arab diaspora writing produced in Anglophone spaces.

A key preoccupation of contemporary Arab diaspora writing is undoubtedly the rise in racism against Arabs, and the related issue of Islamophobia. This has been widely noted by literary critics like Carol Fadda-Conrey, Steven Salaita, and Nouri Gana in their work on Arab-American writings.⁵¹ These critics uniformly suggest that discrimination against Arabs and Muslims in the United States is being actively addressed by Arab-American authors with a renewed sense of urgency. This preoccupation is hardly surprising when one considers, as Wail Hassan claims, that the September 11 attacks resulted in “the demonization of Arabs [that] reached heights unattained since the 1967 Arab-Israeli war.”⁵² What 9/11 considerably intensified, according to Fadda-Conrey, was a particular “rhetoric” that “separates the American from the un-American, the patriotic from the unpatriotic, with Arab and Muslim subjectivities being squarely cast in the latter category.”⁵³ This rhetoric has also, perhaps unwittingly, constructed a homogenous image of Arabs and Muslims, not only conflating these identity categories, so that all Arab-Americans emerge as Muslims and vice versa, but also collapsing the diversity of Arab cultures into a uniform whole. Responding to this rhetoric, which has manifested itself in material ways like “racial stereotyping, blanket labeling, and discriminatory profiling,” the work of literary writers challenges, as Fadda-Conrey further argues, such “homogenized depictions of Arab-Americans.” It does so primarily through the creation of what Fadda-Conrey terms “counterhegemonic spaces” that challenge homogenous tendencies and redefine, from the Arab-American perspective, the “exclusionary conceptualizations of US citizenship and belonging.”⁵⁴ This is precisely how novels like Alia Yunis’s *The Night Counter* (2009) and Diana Abu-Jaber’s *Crescent* (2003) marshal, respectively, the space of a house and a cafe to subtly question the dominant rhetorical construction of Arabs in the US.⁵⁵

Focusing on Abu-Jaber’s novel, the narrative is set in a culturally diverse district of Los Angeles preceding the 1991 Gulf War. Published in 2003, two years after 9/11 and just as the US led its

invasion into Iraq, the strained social conditions for Arabs and Muslims that the novel's 1990s period reflects had far from dissipated in 2003. While the novel conveys these tensions, it also creates a counterhegemonic space within Nadia's Cafe, where the protagonist, the Iraqi-American Sirine, prepares meals for her customers. The Arab and Muslim customers are carefully described in the narrative to highlight the diversity of their cultural and national origins. These characters come from Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Kuwait, Iran, and Turkey. Such information not only highlights the diversity amongst the cafe's Arab and Middle Eastern customers, but also exposes that racial stereotyping and blanket labeling that emerged in post-9/11 America are reductive and inaccurate.⁵⁶

But the racism against Arabs and the rise in Islamophobia following the September 11 attacks are not unique to America. In Australia, as Anne Monsour's article in this issue cogently argues, racism against various foreigners has been a significant aspect of the country's history. This racism has been thoroughly explored in Ghassan Hage's seminal *White Nation* (2000) and is, he argues, a foundational aspect of Australian culture, even if the targets of racism shift at different historical and political moments. The 1980s were characterized by discrimination against Asians, but from the mid-1990s attention moved to Arab- and Muslim-Australians. The 2005 Cronulla Riots exemplify the intensity of racialized and discriminatory attitudes toward Arab-Australians. In those riots, scores of Anglo-Australians converged on Cronulla beach to reclaim it from the Lebanese. The Lebanese were the focus of these attacks because they comprise the largest Arab community in Australia. Yet Lebanese-Muslims are neither more populous than Lebanese-Christians nor the most populous Muslim community. What this reveals is that in Australia, the label "Lebanese" has increasingly become, at least since that time, synonymous with Muslims and Arabs. Michael Mohammad Ahmad coins the term "Lebs" to describe how the categories of Lebanese, Muslim, and Arab have been collapsed into one another within Australian media sources and by conservative politicians. Ahmad argues that "Lebs" includes "men from Lebanese, Syrian, Jordanian, Palestinian, Iraqi, Iranian, Nigerian, and Egyptian backgrounds, as well as Turkish and even Indonesian."⁵⁷ If in the US cultural critics refer to a post-9/11 era of racism against Arabs and Muslims, then in Australia, as journalist Mohamed Taha writes, a parallel post-Cronulla era exists where "Lebs" have become the object of intense discrimination by politicians and in the media.⁵⁸ Recently, they were

the focus of Immigration Minister Peter Dutton's claims that Australia in the 1970s had made a mistake in granting entry to the parents and grandparents of current second generation Lebanese-Muslims.⁵⁹

A key specificity of Australian racism, which relates to the "Lebs," is the distorted preoccupation with refugees who arrive by boat. Referred to as "boat people" they are not exclusively Arab, Muslim, or Lebanese, though they have become assumed to be so in much media coverage. Boat people do not represent the majority of refugees, but their capacity to avoid borders through their arrival by sea has been used by politicians, starting with the John Howard administration (1996–2007), as well as conservative media pundits to heighten racially-based anxieties in Australia. In the aftermath of the Afghanistan war in 2001, the Iraq war in 2003, and the growing carnage in places like Syria, refugees arriving from these countries have only increased. These Muslim and Arab refugees have been successfully depicted, by conservative politicians and equally conservative commentators in the media, as a cultural, economic, and security threat to Australia. They are feared to challenge Australian cultural values, perceived as a welfare burden to the Australian economy, and represent a threat to the safety of Australians because of the conflation between Muslims and terrorists.⁶⁰ The "Lebs," although generally born in Australia, are parallel to the "boat people" in Australia's racist discourse, where the anxieties over the former are used to justify the harsh policies against the latter. Dutton's reference to Lebanese-Muslim immigration as a "mistake" cannot be read in isolation, but reverberates as a broader warning to not repeat past errors by softening Australia's approach to asylum seekers who likely fit into – although he does not adopt the term – the "Lebs" category.

Like their American counterparts, some Arab-Australian authors have used their novels to respond strategically to the dominance of racism and Islamophobia in Australia and have sought to complicate the reductive and homogenizing "Lebs" label by creating certain forms of counterhegemony within their narratives. The works of Randa Abdel-Fattah have distinctly sought to address these issues notably from the perspective of teenage female protagonists, like Amal Abdel-Hakim in the critically acclaimed *Does My Head Look Big In This?* (2002) or Jamilah in *Ten Things I Hate About Me* (2006), as they struggle to negotiate life in Australia as members of Arab-Muslim families. While Abdel-Fattah's novels have to date mainly explored this negotiation with a focus on the domestic lives of these female-led narratives, her latest title, *When Michael Met Mina* (2016), exposes the

inaccuracy of homogenizing Arabs and Muslims in a secondary school environment. Despite its setting in a school, the kind of counterhegemony that emerges in this novel is not in the form of a physical space, like Nadia's Cafe, but the relationship that develops in that school between the two titular characters – Mina and Michael.

Michael is an Anglo-Australian adolescent whose parents have established a conservative political party, "Australian Values," that is anti-immigration, especially of Muslims and boat people, and that seeks to protect Australia's white identity and culture. At the start of the novel, Michael unquestioningly supports his parents' politics, and even participates in a rally organized by his father where protesters are draped in flags, hold signs that read "Islam = Terror" and chant "Stop the Boats." The heated interactions between him and Mina, when she arrives to his school, complicate the many assumptions about boat people and Muslims that Michael had learned from his parents.⁶¹ Through their battle-like dialogue Michael learns that Mina, although a Muslim is not an Arab, and although a boat person represents no threat to Australia's values. He is unable to reduce or homogenize Mina's complicated identity. Beyond her identity, Mina further challenges certain perceptions held by conservative Australians like Michael's parents, such as, to focus on one example, that Muslims have overrun Australia and "come here and try to change things." She undermines this view by sarcastically pointing out that "turning Australia into an Islamic state" is precisely "what's on the minds of asylum seekers and all two point five per cent of Australia's Muslim population."⁶² Through their heated discussions, Mina not only shatters Michael's world view but exposes him to an alternate way of perceiving and relating to the Muslim "other." As Michael learns more about Mina's personal circumstances – her father was killed by US soldiers, her stepfather tortured by the Taliban, her brother died due to malnutrition – he starts to appreciate that fleeing from Afghanistan by boat was the only option for Mina and her family. Ultimately, his views shift and he rejects the politics he has "inherited" from his parents, realizing that he will always wear them as "hand-me-down clothes."⁶³ It is this alternate view, encapsulated in their dialogue and relationship, that forms the counterhegemony from which Abdel-Fattah's novel challenges the racism, Islamophobia and the homogenization of Muslims and Arabs that permeates Australian society and politics post-Cronulla, much like the American post-9/11 era.

This engagement with the issue of racism, and the way Arab writers located in various national spaces challenge the

homogenization of Arabs and Muslims in their novels illustrates why Arab-Australian literature is part of and should be integrated into a broader discussion of Arab diaspora writing. In other words, as the discussion of American and Australian fiction suggests, the Arab-Australian case is not separate from the concerns of the US Arab literary scene, notwithstanding the specificities of each. However, thinking through the transnational connections between texts is not merely as simple as identifying the common themes that authors address. It also involves recognizing that certain critics of diaspora focus on racism and suggest that as a concept diaspora can challenge racism. This is notable in Stuart Hall and Ashraf Rushdy's work where they argue that intrinsic to diaspora is a recognition of racial difference. Hall insists on the heterogeneity of diasporas, arguing that "diaspora identities are those that are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference."⁶⁴ Likewise, Rushdy, although focused on the African diaspora, notes that African dispersal did not originate from one nation but involved the scattering of a heterogeneous people from a region. This originary difference is what, for Rushdy, positions diaspora as "the antidote to racial essentialism" and "transnationalism . . . the antidote to cultural nationalism."⁶⁵ Diaspora, then, is necessarily attuned to the ways that identity, like race or religion, is not a stable or singular category. This particular conception of dispersal explains the nature of Arab diaspora authors' engagement with racism and Islamophobia, as revealed in novels like *When Michael Met Mina* and *Crescent*, and their investment in constructing narratives that resist the homogenization of Arab and Muslim migrant communities, whether in America or Australia.

Alongside this common concern with racism, thinking about Arab writing in English in a transnational, as opposed to national, manner also provides scope for highlighting certain literary characteristics that feature across diaspora narratives. One of these relates to the mode in which Arab diaspora novels convey or narrate stories of displacement, a topic which inevitably lies at the heart of almost all Arab migrant writing. In this instance, a key recurring feature is the mobilization of a cast of characters, usually family members, whose collective migration is indispensable to the narration of the displacement of one character, usually the protagonist. Ato Quayson refers to this as "genealogical accounting," and argues that it is an element that is inherent to diaspora writing and is used to narrate various forms of displacement, whether voluntary or involuntary.⁶⁶

In the case of Randa Jarrar's *A Map of Home* (2008) the story of the protagonist Nidali's multiple relocations, from Kuwait to Egypt to the US, drives the novel's plot and underpins Nidali's efforts to define the contours of her home within the context of her several forced displacements. These experiences are inextricably and, in Nidali's first person narration of them, consciously tied to the longer intergenerational history of her extended family's migrations and displacements. For instance, on her way to Egypt with her parents and brother, after they are expelled from Kuwait in 1991 because of her father's Palestinian identity, Nidali, in a stream-of-conscious sequence, informs readers of her "ancestors" who also went "from country to country." So significant is this history of relocation and movement to Nidali that she even makes a point of including the mode of transport each ancestor used. Nidali starts with her paternal Turkish great-great grandmother who travelled by carriage to Palestine and married Nidali's great-great-grandfather, and of her maternal Greek grandmother who boarded a ship to Alexandria before marrying Nidali's Egyptian grandfather.⁶⁷

While Nidali's story of displacement is bound by her extended family's connection to Palestine, thus making the need for probing and documenting a genealogy of displacement rather urgent, such accounting is not confined to stories of Palestinian exile. In Nada Awar Jarrar's *Dreams of Water* (2007), a similar mode of genealogical accounting is deployed to explain the voluntary relocation of the protagonist, Aneesa, from Lebanon to London. What differs in this narrative is the absence of any mention of the modes of transport used by Aneesa or other characters in the novel's attempts to document the genealogy of her displacement. It is important to note this because Arab-Australian writing, like that of Awar Jarrar's novel, does not, excluding few exceptions, provide details of physical journeys or modes of transport, and yet is replete with characters whose stories unfold through the narration of a family's migration-filled history. In this novel, Aneesa's departure from Beirut to London is triggered by the unexplained disappearance of her brother, Bassam, during Lebanon's civil war. After the war ends Aneesa realizes that she cannot remain with her mother who relentlessly searches for Bassam. Aneesa feels guilt for abandoning her mother, but is also frustrated by her mother's endless search. The latter is acutely conveyed when, upon her return to Beirut, Aneesa is agitated to learn from her mother that Bassam has been "found" through his reincarnation in the orphan Ramzi.⁶⁸ Born at the same time as Bassam's disappearance, Ramzi's age

makes possible the Druze belief in the transmigration of souls. Ultimately, Aneesa never solves the mystery of her brother's disappearance but the unfolding of her story, including her relocation to London, depends on and is linked to, as Quayson theorizes, a wider unfolding of the story of other family members, and the particular traditions of the Druze culture to which Aneesa's family and ancestors belong.

In addition to genealogical accounting, a further literary characteristic that is featured across Arab diaspora writing is the role of place. This role needs to be stressed because, as I have argued elsewhere, as diaspora has frequently been interpreted as the opposite of place, as a loss of place and a form of displacement, the experience of it is often overlooked.⁶⁹ The significance of place is echoed in the research of several diaspora theorists, like Avtar Brah and Lily Cho, who have suggested that more focus on and, importantly, a wider understanding of the relationship between place and diaspora is necessary, so that the two terms are not seen simply as opposites.⁷⁰ Arab diaspora literature greatly emphasizes the role of place, and explores how the meaning and character of places only emerge in comparative or relational contexts. Tony Hanania's *Unreal City* (1999), for instance, a story set in 1980s war-torn Beirut, utilizes the space of London to explore the degree of decay and destruction of another city, that of Beirut. The nameless male narrator's relocation from his native Beirut to London to escape the war explains, at the level of the plot, the significance of the latter city to the narrator's own understanding of his home city. London becomes the vantage point from where he watches the war unfold, his city reduced to rubble, his friends disappear and even die. More importantly, though, the novel emphasizes the degree of Beirut's decimation through the intertextual reference to London established in the novel's title. The phrase "unreal city" is taken from T.S. Eliot's poem *The Waste Land*, a text widely considered "English Modernism's definitive report on a [war decimated] city."⁷¹ Eliot's poem depicts London as a "fallen city" and a "waste land" in the aftermath of its destruction in World War I. Hanania's transposition of this London, through the "unreal city" reference, onto Beirut highlights how the former sheds light and meaning on the wartime state of the latter. Hanania's treatment and comparison of, as well as engagement with, these two cities illustrates the significance of place, and its presence, rather than absence, in diaspora narratives.

Such comparisons between two sites are also expanded in other diaspora novels so that the literary depiction of place becomes multi-

spatial. A key example of this is drawn from the Arab-Australian novel *Somewhere, Home* (2003) by Nada Awar Jarrar. This tripartite novel follows the stories of three women—Maysa, Aida, and Salwa—and their investment in finding home after their individual experiences of migration and displacement. The third installment, Salwa’s story, takes place mostly in South Australia, the place where this character and her husband settle after marriage. Forced to leave her home in an unnamed Druze village in Mount Lebanon, the elderly Salwa’s inner thoughts oscillate between South Australia and her Druze home. Much like London and Beirut in *Unreal City*, South Australia and rural Lebanon are drawn together in a literary comparison, where they converge in Salwa’s thoughts. In one scene, standing outside her home “in a small village on the eastern coast of South Australia,” Salwa recalls her “mother’s serenade” as she “listens to the gramophone play the music of back home.” The merging of these two worlds continues to intensify, illustrating that Salwa’s home village is ever present: “And as I listen, the sounds of this sprawling country suddenly silenced, memories . . . come over me, of mother’s voice.”⁷²

But while Lebanon and Australia are the first and final places where Salwa resides, she also travels to and temporarily settles in other towns and cities. Before arriving to Australia, Salwa and her husband attempt to build a life in Louisiana, in the US, with her brother-in-law. Unable to sustain themselves, they relocate to Australia to join other extended family members. Similar to Salwa, Aida’s story in Part II of Awar Jarrar’s novel is just as multi-spatial. Aida and her family flee Beirut during the war, and before returning for a brief period, Aida lives in various undisclosed European cities. The constant movement of Salwa and Aida suggests, as the novel’s title of *Somewhere, Home* intimates, that they are each searching for home. Ultimately, none of them finds a single place to call home and each remains, in Aida’s words, on the “run” looking for “that place . . . from which there is no further to go, somewhere home.”⁷³ Although this is the fate of each character, what the novel reveals is that the story of place and home in diaspora literature is multi-sited. It involves tracing the connections between places that migrants have travelled to and settled in, understanding place and home as a network of interconnected spaces, and making sense of a diasporic cartography that binds Australia, North America, England, and the Middle East in evolving and historically significant patterns.

CONCLUSION

This article has illustrated that the field of Arab-Australian writing can be considered a form of both Australian literature and Arab diaspora writing in English. To avoid continued marginalization of this literature, Australian literary studies and Arab diaspora literature research need to widen their analytical approaches principally by borrowing from one another. This involves a form of “boundary-crossing,” as theorized by Julie Thompson Klein. Klein argues that the task of any nation- or area-based discipline is to “unreify” what is assumed to be the primary category of analysis, or “to realize that the it in question is not a singular phenomenon.”⁷⁴ In saying this, Klein is not suggesting that scholars collapse all disciplinary boundaries, or abandon national or regional categories altogether; rather, her work highlights a need to identify the other areas, themes and issues that cross into and expose how “the it in question” can be contextualized in broader transnational frameworks.

For studies of Arab diaspora fiction this means adopting the transnationalism that is increasingly becoming a key part of Australian literary studies. Research of Arab diaspora writing has, to a certain extent, “unreified” the Arab category, recognizing its hybrid connection to other national categories, like the American, British, Canadian, or Australian categories. But what it has in turn established is the atomization of the field along national lines so that it is principally Arab-American fiction, and sometimes Arab-British literature, that gets analyzed and discussed. A transnational approach would encourage us to think about how Arab-Australian literature aligns with other Arab writing in English, and what specificities it may bring to Arab diaspora literature in general. Such a wider perspective promises to broaden and complicate the “paradigmatic” status of Arab-American fiction.⁷⁵

Likewise, Australian literary studies need to gain a better appreciation of Arab migrant writing, the history of Arab migration, and perhaps even the history and politics of the Arab world. The transnational reading practice of Australian literature has, ironically, excluded work by transnational writers like Arab-Australians. Australian literary studies can “unreify” or overcome its focus on the Australian canon by adding a further dimension to its understanding of transnationalism to include literature by writers of Arab migrant backgrounds, whose texts also address issues that relate to Australia and beyond. In the words of Robert Dixon, Australian literary studies needs to “think beyond the boundaries of both the national and the

literary – beyond the boundaries, in fact, of [exclusively] Anglophone culture.”⁷⁶ Crossing over and drawing on the research and methods that are being developed in Arab diaspora writing will help to address the absence of Arab-Australian writing in the field of Australian literature.

NOTES

¹ Abbas El-Zein, *Leave to Remain: A Memoir* (St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 2009), 156.

² Abbas El-Zein, “Interpreting Oneself: On Memoirs, Essays, and Travel Writing,” public lecture, Macquarie University, 11 May 2009, 03:50–04:10.

³ See Graham Huggan, *Australian Literature: Postcolonialism, Racism, Transnationalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), especially pp. 114–20 for an overview of the emergence and dissemination of multicultural literature in Australia.

⁴ Michael Jacklin, “The Transnational Turn in Australian Literary Studies,” *Journal of the Association of the Study of Australian Literature*, Special Issue: Australian Literature in a Global World (2009): 5.

⁵ Laleh Al Maleh, ed., *Arab Voices in Diaspora: Critical Perspectives on Anglophone Arab Literature* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2009); Nouri Gana, ed., *The Edinburgh Companion to the Arabic Novel in English: The Politics of Anglo Arab and Arab American Literature and Culture* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University, 2013).

⁶ This article will concentrate predominantly on novels produced in the Anglophone Arab sphere of Arab diaspora writing. There are a couple of reasons for this. The first is that the novel is the most prevalent and prolific form of Anglophone Arab writing especially in the Arab-Australian sphere, which is the focus of this article. In order to demonstrate how Arab-Australian literature can be integrated into Australian and Arab diaspora writing, this concentration on one type of literary text is essential. Secondly, while the Arab diaspora is vast and extends beyond the Anglophone world, literary comparisons between English-language texts is apposite for a study that seeks to examine, as this one does, a type of literature (the Arab-Australian) that has yet not been well researched. Certainly, a larger and longer study would incorporate the range of fictional varieties available, which include poetry, short stories, and plays, and would extend the research into other linguistic zones.

⁷ Jean-Francois Vernay, *The Great Australian Novel: A Panorama* (Richmond: Brolga Publishing, 2010), 2.

⁸ Vernay, *The Great Australian Novel*, 3.

- ⁹ Al Maleh, *Arab Voices in Diaspora*, 45.
- ¹⁰ See Al Maleh's "Anglophone Arab Literature: An Overview," in *Arab Voices in Diaspora*, pp. 45–52, where she outlines the basic elements of Arab literature composed in Australia.
- ¹¹ John K. Ewers, *Creative Writing in Australia: A Selective Survey* (Melbourne: Georgia House, 1957), 5.
- ¹² Huggan, *Australian Literature*, 5.
- ¹³ *Ibid.*, 5.
- ¹⁴ Vernay lists ten – the quest, conquest, voyage, geography, topography, isolation, the antipodes, abundance, religion and disappearance – while Huggan offers three core themes – “the quest for belonging and identity, the pull between land and language, and the continuing attempt to recover and come to terms with an often violent past.” Vernay, *Australian Novel*, 4–10; Huggan, *Australian Literature*, 2–3.
- ¹⁵ David Malouf, *Remembering Babylon* (New York: Vintage, 1993), 3.
- ¹⁶ Nicolette Bragg, “Between Belonging and Dwelling: The Hospitality of David Malouf’s *Remembering Babylon*,” *Cultural Studies Review* 21, no. 2 (2015): paragraph 1.
- ¹⁷ Saadi Nikro, “The Arab-Australian Novel: Situating Diasporic and Multicultural Literature,” in *The Edinburgh Companion to the Arabic Novel in English*, ed. Gana, 299.
- ¹⁸ “Randa Abdel-Fattah,” accessed 9 December 2016, <http://www.randaabdefattah.com>.
- ¹⁹ Randa Abdel-Fattah, *Where the Streets Had a Name* (Sydney: Pan Macmillan, 2008), 50.
- ²⁰ Abdel-Fattah, *Where the Streets Had a Name*, 24.
- ²¹ *Ibid.*, 25.
- ²² *Ibid.*, 237.
- ²³ Comparative approaches to Indigenous scholarship are increasingly becoming available in Australia and beyond. Recent studies include Steven Salaita, *Inter/Nationalism: Decolonizing Native America and Palestine* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016) and from Australian historian, Patrick Wolfe, *Traces of History: Elementary Structures of Race* (London: Verso, 2016).
- ²⁴ Huggan, *Australian Literature*, viii.
- ²⁵ Patrick White, *Voss* (1957; Ringwood: Penguin, 2011), 23; Roslynn Doris Haynes, *Seeking the Centre* (Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 241.
- ²⁶ Simon During, *Patrick White* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1996).
- ²⁷ Huggan, *Australian Literature*, 86.

²⁸ Multicultural literature in Australia describes a category of fiction by writers who have an ethnic, non-Anglo-Australian identity, such as Greek-Australian, and whose texts deal with issues related to alienation and reflect on negative and positive dimensions of Australia's cultural diversity. Despite its relevance, Arab-Australian literature has also not been explored within this category.

²⁹ Syrine Hout, "The Last Migration: The First Contemporary Example of Lebanese Diasporic Literature," *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 43, no. 3 (2007): 290-1.

³⁰ Rayyan Al-Shawaf, "The Last Migration: Jad El Hage's Tale of Diaspora and Love: Novel Draws on Author's Experiences as a Journalist in Europe," *The Daily Star*, 23 March 2004, paragraph 10, <http://www.dailystar.com.lb>.

³¹ Jad El Hage, *The Last Migration: A Novel of Diaspora and Love* (Melbourne: Panache, 2002), 117.

³² El Hage, *The Last Migration*, 41.

³³ Michael Mohammad Ahmad, *The Tribe* (Artarmon: Giramondo, 2014), 4.

³⁴ Ghassan Hage, "Writing Arab Australian Universes," *Overland*, 15 May 2014, paragraph 12, <https://overland.org.au/2014/05/writing-arab-australian-universes>.

³⁵ Ahmad, *The Tribe*, 22.

³⁶ Ahmad's privileging of the domestic space in this narrative, as a kind of safe haven, is not unlike the role of the domestic sphere in African American literature. In *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics* (London: Turnaround, 1991), bell hooks explains "We could not learn to love or respect ourselves in the culture of white supremacy on the outside; it was there in the inside, in that 'homeplace' most often created and kept by black women that we had the opportunity to grow and develop, to nurture our spirits" (47).

³⁷ Nicholas Birns and Rebecca McNeer, "Introduction," in *A Companion to Australian Literature Since 1900*, eds. Nicholas Birns and Rebecca McNeer (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2007), 4-5.

³⁸ Robert Dixon, "Australian Literature in the Translation Zone: Robert Dessaix and David Malouf," in *Resourceful Reading: The New Empiricism, eResearch, and Australian Literature*, eds. Katherine Bode and Robert Dixon (Sydney: Sydney University Press), 88.

³⁹ Dixon, "Australian Literature in the Translation Zone," 88.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 90.

⁴¹ Loubna Haikal, *Seducing Mr. Maclean* (Sydney: Pan Macmillan, 2008), 31-2.

⁴² Haikal, *Seducing Mr. Maclean*, 195.

⁴³ Nikro, "The Arab-Australian Novel," 310. For further information on sociopolitical dimensions of Australia's multiculturalism see Ghassan Hage,

White Nation: Fantasies of White Supremacy in a Multicultural Nation (New York: Routledge, 2000); Jock Collins, Greg Noble, Scott Poynting, and Paul Tabar, *Keababs, Kids, Cops, and Crime: Youth, Ethnicity and Crime* (Annandale: Pluto Press, 2000); and Scott Poynting, Greg Noble, Paul Tabar and Jock Collins, *Bin Laden in the Suburbs: Criminalising the Arab Other* (Sydney: Sydney Institute of Criminology, 2004).

⁴⁴ Loubna Haikal quoted in Magdalena Ball, "Interview with Loubna Haikal, author of *Seducing Mr. Maclean*," *The Compulsive Reader*, 24 March 2003, paragraph 2, <http://www.compulsivereader.com/2003/03/24/interview-with-loubna-haikal-author-of-seducing-mr-maclean>; emphasis added.

⁴⁵ See Matti Moosa, *The Maronites in History* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1986) and Walid Phares, *Lebanese Christian Nationalism: The Rise and Fall of an Ethnic Resistance* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1995).

⁴⁶ For insights into this aspect of Maronite culture see Sarni Ofeish and Sabah Ghandour, "Transgressive Subjects," in *Etel Adnan: Critical Essays on the Arab American Writer and Artist*, eds. Lisa Suhair Majaj and Amal Amireh (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company Inc. Publishers, 2002), 122–36, and Yasir Suleiman, *The Arabic Language and National Identity: A Study in Ideology* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2003), especially 204–17.

⁴⁷ See, for instance, Walter Veit, "Globalization and Literary History, Or Rethinking Comparative Literary History-Globally," *New Literary History* 39, no. 3 (2008): 427, and Linda Hutcheon, "Rethinking the National Model," in *Rethinking Literary History: A Dialogue on Theory*, eds. Linda Hutcheon and Mario Valdes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 3–49. The claim that the national model still dominates in world literature approaches is reflected in Gana's collection, where three of the book's nineteen chapters draw on texts that cross national boundaries. Likewise, in Al Maleh's anthology two of the eighteen chapters engage with literature across the Arab diaspora.

⁴⁸ Nouri Gana, "Introduction," in *The Edinburgh Companion to the Arabic Novel in English*, ed. Gana, 3.

⁴⁹ Gana, "Introduction," 24.

⁵⁰ Both Gana and Al Maleh make this explicit in their editors' introductions. Commenting on current definitions of Arab diaspora writing, Gana notes that "a more comparative, transnational and multidirectional framework" needs to be developed for an analysis of "the entire phenomenon of Arab fictional writings in English" (10). In a similar move, Al Maleh writes that with "human mobility on the rise and new identities being formed and reformed, inclusion and exclusion [of Anglophone Arab literary texts] under a national rubric become increasingly difficult" (52).

⁵¹ Carol Fadda-Conrey, *Contemporary Arab-American Literature: Transnational Reconfigurations of Citizenship and Belonging* (New York: New York University Press, 2014); Steven Salaita, *Arab American Literary Fictions, Cultures, and*

Politics (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); Nouri Gana, "Introduction: Race, Islam, and the Task of Muslim and Arab American Writing," *PMLA* 123, no. 5 (2008): 1573–80.

⁵² Wail Hassan, *Immigrant Narratives: Orientalism and Cultural Translation in Arab American and Arab British Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 212.

⁵³ Fadda-Conrey, *Contemporary Arab-American Literature*, 139.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 139–40.

⁵⁵ For further discussion on the role of home in relation to the suspicion around the mobility of Arabs, see "Home and Movement in Alia Yunis' *The Night Counter*," in Jumana Bayeh, *The Literature of the Lebanese Diaspora: Representations of Place and Transnational Identity* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2015), 139–67.

⁵⁶ See Carol Fadda-Conrey, "Arab American Literature in the Ethnic Borderland: Cultural Intersections in Diana Abu-Jaber's *Crescent*," *MELUS* 31, no. 4 (2006): 187–205 and 197–216, for further discussion of this aspect of the novel.

⁵⁷ Michael Mohammad Ahmed, "Lebs and Punchbowl Prison," *Sydney Review of Books*, 29 November 2016, paragraph 3, <http://sydneyreviewofbooks.com/lebs-and-punchbowl-prison>.

⁵⁸ Mohamed Taha, "Generation Cronulla: How the Riots Shaped Who I Am," *ABC News*, 11 December 2015, <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-12-11/taha-how-the-riots-shaped-who-i-am-today/7019998>.

⁵⁹ Stephanie Anderson, "Peter Dutton suggests Fraser Government Made Mistake by Resettling Lebanese Refugees," *ABC News*, 21 November 2016, <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-11-21/peter-dutton-fraser-made-mistake-resettling-lebanese-refugees/8043624>.

⁶⁰ There is a wealth of research that notes the projected nature of the threat that Arab and Muslim migrants supposedly represent in Australia, starting with Jock Collins et al., *Kebabs, Kids, Cops, and Crime*, and Poynting et al., *Bin Laden in the Suburbs*.

⁶¹ Randa Abdel-Fattah, *When Michael Met Mina* (Sydney: Pan Macmillan, 2016), 2.

⁶² Abdel-Fattah, *When Michael Met Mina*, 48.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 32.

⁶⁴ Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," in *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, ed. Jonathan Rutherford (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990), 235.

⁶⁵ Ashraf H.A. Rushdy, "The Quality of Diaspora," *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies* 18, no. 3 (2009): 299.

⁶⁶ Quayson asserts that “genealogical accounting” involves addressing “questions of ancestry, ethnicity, tradition and culture” and usually includes “detailed descriptions of the journey itself on foot, by ship, plane, train, and other means of transport.” See Ato Quayson, “Postcolonialism and the Diasporic Imaginary,” in *A Companion to Diaspora and Transnationalism*, eds. Ato Quayson and Girish Daswani (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2013), especially pp. 151–3.

⁶⁷ Randa Jarrar, *A Map of Home* (New York: Penguin, 2008), 159.

⁶⁸ Nada Awar Jarrar, *Dreams of Water* (London: Harper, 2007), 147.

⁶⁹ Bayeh, *Literature of the Lebanese Diaspora*, 2–6.

⁷⁰ Avtar Brah, *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities* (London: Routledge, 1996), 177; Lily Cho, “The Turn to Diaspora,” *Topia* 17 (2007): 13.

⁷¹ Michael Long, “Eliot, Pound, Joyce: ‘Unreal City,’” in *Unreal City: Urban Experience in Modern European Literature and Art*, eds. Edward Timms and David Kelley (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1985), 146.

⁷² Nada Awar Jarrar, *Somewhere, Home* (London: Vintage, 2003), 169.

⁷³ Awar Jarrar, *Somewhere, Home*, 145.

⁷⁴ Julie Thompson Klein, *Crossing Boundaries: Knowledge, Disciplines, and Interdisciplinarity* (Charlottesville: The University Press of Virginia, 1996), 111.

⁷⁵ Gana, “Introduction,” 24.

⁷⁶ Robert Dixon, “Boundary Work: Australian Literary Studies in the Field of Knowledge Production,” *Journal of the Association of the Study of Australian Literature* 3 (2004): 41.