

**UNIVERSAL PRO-HUMAN MESSAGE EXPRESSED IN DIANA ABU-JABER'S CRESCENT**

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**ABSTRACT:** *This paper attempts to tackle the most important humanistic themes dealt with in Diana Abu-Jaber's novel Crescent (2003). The novel explores universal human themes connected with exile and the quest for identity. The story of Crescent is the story of the whole Arab immigrants living in exile. The novel revolves around a multi-cultural love story between an Iraqi man expelled out of his country and an Iraqi immigrant chef named Sirine. Diana highlights in the novel the painful feelings of people who leave their countries and live in exile. In many places, she refers to the sufferings of immigrants and what may occur to them in the countries they settle in. She further laments the real loss of depressed and frustrated people who are forced to leave their homelands. The writer's prime focus on the humanistic, innovative, and compassionate aspects of Arab and Muslim culture is a proactive denouncement against the stereotyping viewpoints by which the majority of American people perceive refugees from middle-eastern countries. This biased view permitted the US government to rule the country over several years of military conflicts, binding force, and unattained human rights in Iraq with hardly any popular resistance. The researcher employs a critical and analytical approach in discussing the themes of the novel. This paper reveals the aesthetic dimensions in the story as realistic, romantic, and symbolic trends and how the writer combines them successfully to enhance the theme of human interaction within different ethnic groups.*

**KEYWORDS:** Crescent, exile, identity, immigrants, culture, Middle East.

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## INTRODUCTION

When Diana started writing *Crescent*, she derived the outline of the novel from *Othello's* story. In an interview by Shalal. Esa (2002) Diana stated that she wanted to tell the story of *Othello* differently. In this respect, the writer wanted to replace the character of Othello with a similar one from the Arabian context possessing the same outward features as being a black man. As a consequence, she was preoccupied with her ethnic background. She described the Iraqi instructor as "very black." However, Diana revised it and deleted everything. However, Diana found out that it is extremely difficult to adapt a story to a modern context because it is so profound and relies so extensively on the concepts of viciousness and patriotism. Concerning the presence of villains in modern literary works, she stated, after Freud, there were no other antagonists. She adds, western people know each other very well, but this is not the

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case when Arabs are mingled with western communities (Corney, 2006). Western people treat immigrants from the Middle East as aliens who must leave their countries because of the impression they hold about them as being savage and terrorists. The author has an overabundance of knowledge about the subconscious and family history. As a result, she believed everything must be more complex and multifaceted in dealing with the narrative of the novel. So, as she got closer to the characters, she realized, well, that the antagonist isn't a villain; in fact, he's experiencing pain as well. And the protagonist isn't anything particularly unique. It was just a kind of disappearance while she was continuing to work on it. But the only reminiscences she had of *Othello* were that the Iraqi instructor had dark skin and appeared dark, and the Iraqi American cook was quite white American. It's worth noting that her father is from the Arab world representing immigrant people from the Middle East, while her mother is American who represents white color people, which explains why she was straddling. This is what she was trying to reveal and talk about in the novel. To highlight the conflicting feeling of those immigrants when encountered with native people was the focal point of the writer. Abu-Jaber depicts racial discrimination that shattered the existence of exiled people from Arab regions. It is the calamity of the first-generation—immigrant children. They are trying to intercommunicate with generations as well as cultures. And, like so many other culturally diverse people, they have to accept the false claim that this is the entire community of race- since race is focused solely on the exterior. And the exterior is, at best, awkward. Abu-Jaber just happened to look like this. Her sisters appear to be more typically Arab with their outward appearance but she is the only one of her sisters who knows how to speak Arabic and has fair complexions. In this regard, it can be stated unequivocally that race has no bearing on who people are and is not a reality. People adhere to it even though it is a rigorous socially constructed concept. We stick to it as some sort of symbolic representation that means nothing (Corney, 2006). In the novel, Diana Abu-Jaber skillfully mingles romantic affairs, traditional tales, and current situations to illustrate the Arab American immigrants` experience (Abu-Jaber, 2003). Although the story of the novel is set against the background of a Los Angeles community of Iranian and Iraqi immigrants and exiled people, it revolves around an Iraqi-American woman called Sirine. Throughout the narrative of the novel, Abu-Jaber consistently shows her capacity to hold the reader in dramatic tension. *Crescent* is a splendid novel that exhibits cohesiveness between the legends and fairy tales of renaissance narratives and modern realistic narratives. Reading the novel, one finds that every chapter begins with an episode of a reimagined Arabian Nights-style story preceded by Sirine's contemporary story. By the end of the novel, one can see the obvious connection between the episodes in the literary works. One striking fact that holds the attention of the reader is that the reader has no clue what will happen with Sirine's affair with Hanif, the one who undergoes difficulties and pain in exile.

### **Love in exile and late disclosure of passion**

*Crescent* is a love story in exile. Sirine who is the protagonist of the novel works as a cook at a restaurant called Nadia's Café. This restaurant is located near the Eastern area of Los Angeles. The recipes served to customers have remarkable qualities particularly Lebanese flavor. What is special about the food served in the restaurant is the ethnic

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food that is mixed with fantastic spices that taste as if one is at home. Such ingredients of dishes comfort and inspire the Arab immigrants who stay here, perform various works and join educational institutions nearby. The food is served with affection, which encourages Westerners to enjoy the restaurant's cuisine. Sirine is an affectionate and smart lady, who could have married at an early stage in her life, but she didn't find her mate's soul. Approaching the age of thirty-nine, Sirine is still single and has no plans to change her civil status. This might be attributed to the early loss of her parents. At the age of nine, her parents died in Africa. Left alone at that stage, her uncle took the responsibility to bring her up. Although she was brought up away from her native land, Sirine feels entrenched in her father's homeland. She is deeply concerned about her ethno-cultural identity.

For Sirine, life runs smoothly. She is an independent lady who runs a work she adores. Sirine's uncle, who loves her and lavishes her with enough affection and care to equal the value of a large family, is an instructor and a narrator of stories and fairytales that sound like the tales of Scheherazade in *Hundreds and Hundreds Night*. The storyline of "How to Love" is exactly equivalent to the actual story. It is about Aunt Camille and her son, Abdurrahman, who was accustomed to selling himself as a slave and falsifying his drowning. Sirine's close friends include King Babar, the cafe's owner, Um-Nadia, Nadia's daughter, and Nathan. King Babar is a remarkable photographer who has spent a memorable time in Iraq. He plays a vital role in the novel as his photos of various places in Iraq intensifies the feelings of Sirine to go back to her parent's homeland. Another important personality in the novel is the Syrian poet Aziz Abdo who is a regular customer of the café. He values greatly the qualities of Sirine in keeping people close to their native lands. This is because she understands the loneliness and depression of the immigrants. Moreover, she believes that immigrants live is a terrible one marked with loneliness and despair. Although immigrants live with their loved ones and lead a stable social life, they experience a feeling that they are being swallowed and consumed.

Hanif Al Ayad, an exiled Iraqi Arabic literature instructor, falls in love with Sirine. She can't deny her potent physical and emotional attachment to him. The experience of intensity, excitement, wonder, and confusion of love marks their love affair. As a young boy, Hanif went into exile, when Saddam Hussein ruled the country. At that time, he was much too young to understand the atrociousness of his decision, and the impact of going back to his native land. Hanif feels alienated in the US because of being away from his family. He has never seen his family members in almost two decades. He pines for his family members, landscapes, melodies, and flavors of his beloved homeland. In the company with Sirine, Han does not consider himself an exile. He says: "*You are the place I want to be you are the opposite of exile*" (Crescent 2003). However, Han's past remains an open question. What was the cause for leaving Iraq at a young age? Why is he reluctant to give answers to Sirine's inquiries? He confines to her that he will sooner or later respond to what is revolving in her mind, but he is reluctant to do so. Hanif's past life is marked with mystery for those who care about him specially Sirine. Providing no answers to Sirine marks a complexity in their love relationship. No one

denies the impact of exile on the complexities of the relationships between the two lovers who seek compassion and solace away from their homeland.

### **Humanity and identity distorted between homeland and diaspora**

The target of Diana Abu-Jaber's novel *Crescent* is to reveal the sensual pleasures of life. She focuses on topics related to food, nature, storytelling, and music. In addition to the form of food and music, which are also aspects of nationalism, Abu-Jaber focuses on how the Arabic language and religion of Islam are practiced to denote belonging to the Arab nation. Moreover, the writer's keen intention is to reveal how memory functions to express one's nationalism in the diaspora (Wien 2017 & Brincker 2014). However, the central themes she deals with in the novel can be described as serious though they are dark in reality. These themes are passion, doubt, disloyalty, isolation, exile, and suppression on social and political levels. The author's depictions are profound and influential in both cases, whether racking up the sensual motifs or the underlying themes. In meaningful ways, Abu-Jaber emphasizes the valuable sensitivity of life, devotion, family, and humanity Carol (2002).

The prime focus on the humane, innovative, and fostering aspects of Arab and Muslim culture enrages a proactive blow against the negative stereotypes of the Middle East that almost all Americans have of it. It is because of this warped perception that the United States government has been able to exert control over decades of fighting, punitive measures, and unaccomplished rights in Iraq with little internal opposition. Stereotypes are omnipresent and they change drastically in terms of social, cultural, national, regional, ideological, gender, and so on. Racist and ethnic stereotypes are the most harmful, defamatory, hazardous, and aggressive inclinations Maria Lebedko (2014). In *Crescent*, Abu-Jaber asserts the power of literature to convey issues of political nature. According to the author, the target political fiction is not a controversial argument but one that discloses a universal pro-human message via a beautifully told story. Abu-Jaber skillfully handles this well in the ending of Sirine's love story because her primary purpose is to make it come true in both our own life experiences and the future. The writer believes firmly in what happens next is determined by human fate. Whereas the characters in the recreated legend travel from Aqaba in Jordan to the Nile in Egypt and lastly Hollywood, the setup of Sirine and Hanif's story revolves around two prominent locations in the world. These locations are Baghdad and Los Angeles. As a cook at an Arab-owned cafe on Westwood Boulevard, an Iranian suburb near UCLA, Sirine attracts a diverse crowd of Middle Eastern educators, emigrants, and Los Angeles residents, all of whom enjoy her exquisite and Arab-inspired cuisines. At the restaurant, Sirine understands the immigrant clients' loneliness and their restless pursuit of the generally bad news from their native lands. She shares with exiled people the same feelings of loneliness and loss. This feeling of loss was part of her life since she was a child after the death of her parents in Africa. Sirine is determined to lead a productive life despite the deprivation in her life. She is engrossed in both her cooking and her relationship with her uncle, but she has refused to accept love and marriage. She remarks, "I guess I'm always looking for a home, I have this feeling that my real home is somewhere else somehow," (*Crescent* 2003). She confesses to Hanif what she

feels towards him and the inability to find love away from her homeland who recounts his ordeal as an Iraqi exile and his frustration with the current affair. Hanif consistently reveals his deep attraction and passion to Sirine and reconciles with her Iraqi ancestry, but similar to the narrative itself, the man is not quite what he appears to be, and it is unclear how their infatuation will end.

### **The dark reality of exile**

The pain and anguish of asylum and loss are themes that run throughout the narrative of this outstanding novel. Abu-Jaber explores how people experience the feelings of pain and despair residing outside their homelands. It is this feeling that shatters the hero of his manly ideals that is generally associated with nationalism and honesty. The protagonist reveals his internalized exposures to "homeliness," because he has been disconnected from his real environment (Abdul-Jabbar 2017). Sirine's uncle poses a question to a waiter from Italy who works in a restaurant in Los Angeles, "*would you say that immigrants are sadder than other people?*" The waiter's response, "*Certo! When we have our home we fall in love with our sadness*" (Crescent 2003). Sirine's uncle points out why he refuses to talk about his country Iraq, the place he used to live with Sirine's parents. For him, talking about home means talking about the differences between how we used to live there and how we live now, and that often causes disappointment. That's why expatriates are always a bit disappointed by the beginning of their existence in the US. The important thing is that they can't return. It is sad to say that the place where they were brought up does not exist anymore. "*When your old house does not exist anymore, that makes things sadder in general*" (Crescent 2003). Abu-Jaber illustrates the tumultuous reality of exile and the frustrated lives of immigrants with allegories that are well-known in the American context. This is vivid in Hanif's description of his experience as an exiled man living far away from his homeland. He compares his current life in America to people who lost their homes, and the only refuge for them is the street, the place where they spend their whole life. He remarks in the novel, "*Sometimes I think I've never felt so close to anyone as those people. They know what it feels like, to live in between worlds so they are not anywhere, exiled from themselves*" (Crescent 2003).

### **Preserving one's own culture**

A further important theme is the effort of immigrants to preserve their own native culture and heritage through cultural aspects such as food, cognition, language, and folk stories. As a result, food and its perspectives are extremely important in *Crescent*. Although Sirine is brought up in America, she learned to cook Middle Eastern dishes. Her parents played a major role in teaching her how to prepare Middle Eastern cosines. Her favorite memory is watching them being engaged in the process of making the sweet dish called baklava. Preparing such delicious sweets, they moved together like in a dance. It is striking to observe that love and intimacy are important ingredients that add to the protagonist's determination to achieve success in her profession as a cook at Um-Nadia's café.

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As a writer of prose, Diana Abu-Jaber's prose is lush, lyrical. It is used as a medium to reveal elements of cultural aspects of her people. It captivates the sensations by evoking glamorous depictions, sounds, flavors, odor, and even styles. Berrebbah (2020) provides an argument about the strategic use of storytelling pace to reveal the culture and progress of Arab American literature in the contemporary era. For political and cultural reasons, the book arouses American readers to read till the last episode. In the novel, the handling of the rich Iraqi culture provides a crystal clear picture of the land and people that are not known to many immigrants from Iraq who are supposed to be familiar with these cultural aspects of their homeland. It is in the round talks at the café that immigrants show their keen desire to share memories of their parents in their lost homeland.

### **Interethnic communication**

Abu-Jaber proposes in *Crescent* the integration of works about Arab Americans in the ethno-cultural studies category. She does so by proposing ways to reduce the impediments that completely separate Arab Americans from other racial communities. This is reflected in the concept of 'imagined community' by Benedict Anderson. Anderson (1983) reveals how language and press contribute to the formation of a sense of national identity. He remarks that the mingling of financial, social, and scientific changes with increasingly rapid communication resulted in new, potentially perplexed with the origin of the universe and humans, their relationships, and history (Anderson, 1983). In *Crescent*, Abu-Jaber deftly creates a positive and effective space in which cross-cultural connections can be built and maintained between and within different marginalized groups. *Crescent* denotes Arab American literature in the ethno-cultural boundary, while also embodying, albeit on a small scale, such a frontier. The representation of Arab national identity and the urgent need for unity and solidarity among Arab communities, whether nationally or across borders, are the fundamental issues of ethnic literature (Berrebbah 2021). The novel accounts for interrelated cultures and layouts of various ethnic minorities such as Arabs, Arab Americans, Hispanics, Turkmen, and Iranians who share the same geographic location and ethnic backgrounds. The location where most of the actions of the novel happen is centered in a part of the Los Angeles area named "Teherangeles" because the majority of residents there are from Iran. This eventually gives the novel's borderland more shape. Thus, by utilizing literature as a medium to highlight stories of people crossing borderland. Abu-Jaber exemplifies a necessary addition to the diversity of countries' borders, which eventually leads to ethnic intercommunication.

In the novel, Abu-Jaber articulates narratives about individuals and their social identities, attempting to devise strategies for making the ethno-cultural borderland a space of interaction for various ethnic minorities. It is a scope that, in time, will lead to the rejuvenation of ethnic relations. Nevertheless, the process of creating borders between segregated communities more fluid should not result in an extravagant form of cultural diversity. Today, the recognition of common culture occurs within the context of difference, which creates unnatural bridges (Anzaldúa 2002). Understanding the differences within and between ethnic minorities becomes an essential component

of Abu-Jaber's portrayal of the connections that bind them together within *Crescent's* ethnic border region.

The intimate relationships between *Crescent's* actors from different ethnicities demonstrate the tension of the plot. This tension emphasizes the minute details of ethnic identity around the love affairs of Sirine and Hanif. Their relationship disseminates all of the affiliated dialogue of American and Arab identity and culture with the ethno cultural actors around them, both donating to and confirming such dialogue. The café where the various characters meet becomes a reconstructed home in a strange and alienating culture. Indeed, the café emerges as the focal point of *Crescent's* ethnic borderland, serving as the focal point of complex ethnic and cultural interactions between Arabs and people of other ethnicities.

Representing groups who are café regulars from various countries in the Middle East is a means for cross-cultural interactions between Arabs, Arab Americans, and Americans. This grouping not only transcends any simplistic distinction based on Arab or non-Arab dichotomies, but it is also sophisticated by including people from a variety of Arab backgrounds within the Arab American group. Indeed, the novel emphasizes some of the differences that these backgrounds imply, both directly and indirectly.

It is striking to notice that Arab students' names who come from different Arab countries convey geographically distinct entities with individual and group characteristics that confront the reductive features that the term Arab frequently connotes. Even though these Arab and non-Arab actors come from different cultural backgrounds, they manage to overcome the obstacles that their differences may create. They integrate with the interpersonal Arab culture supplied at the café in the wide range of news from Arabian films and American reality shows with Arabic social conventions. Moreover, in the introduction of characters sharing the same national origin, like Iraqis, Abu-Jaber demonstrates some remarkable features related to people who come from different ethnicities.

Abu-Jaber confirms *Crescent's* intricate depiction of the ethno cultural borderland by including significant differences between racial and ethnic groups of Latinos origin. Victor Hernandez from Mexico and Cristobal from El Salvador are the two main characters of Latino origin who provide help to Sirine in the kitchen. Despite their simplicity, the two characters emerge at various points throughout the novel as strong and highly personalized representatives of the diversity of Latino personal struggles in the United States. Nonetheless, they reflect feelings of marginalization experienced by characters in the novel, particularly from an Arab background. Victor who is Sirine's close personal friend confines to her: "I was born here [the US] and all, but sometimes I wish I could just go off to someplace like Mexico" (*Crescent* 2003). Cristobal, on the other hand, is an asylum seeker who fled El Salvador after the "Guardia" murdered his entire family. Despite his longing for his uninhabited homeland, Victor's personal and national histories differ from Cristobel's. He demonstrates the diversity of Latino heritage. Furthermore, when Hanif abruptly returns to Iraq, where he is under the threat

of being killed, Sirine mentally associates Cristobal with Hanif, "*thus blurring the ethnic disconnections between them*" (Crescent 2003). Given their shared experience of deportation and oppression, the former appears to be secretive about the latter's fate: *what will happen to Han now? What are they going to do to him?*" (Crescent 2003). Sirine is perplexed; it appears that Cristobal must have a term for the answer. Even though Cristobal does not know of Han's future, the existence of such links between the two political expatriates, the first from El Salvador and the latter from Iraq, alters the underlying layout of the ethno cultural borderland by merging boundary lines between the different nationalities that live within it. In the novel *Crescent*, Abu-Jaber demonstrates a realistic situation of individuals who are trapped in the mid of no way. Those individuals negotiate their mixed identities within the context of the American way of life (Esa 2020). The writer doesn't only discuss the predicaments of exiled people, but she also brings to light the stress and concerns of those people who are forced to leave their homes and live in the diaspora.

Sirine herself is considered an important bridge by cooking dishes from the Middle East. She serves as an essential connection bringing together different community members from *Crescent's* ethno cultural borderland. Regular customers from the Arab region sometimes reveal to her their painful feelings of living a life of immigrants. Therefore, she becomes a bridge between lost or abandoned people of different cultures. Thus in the novel, Sirine plays the role of a bridge joining different people from various ethnic communities. She facilitates interethnic connections within the borderland, even though she may face inherent misrepresentations and animosities. Concerns about cultural identity, national belonging, and citizenship, exacerbated by her relationship with Han. These concerns become central to Sirine's character, with issues of hybridity preventing her from embracing any superficial forms of identity.

Even though Sirine fosters connections between Arab and non-Arab ethnicities, she is still constrained by mainstream culture's insistence on categorizing ethnic concepts into clearly defined and straightforward identities. The protagonist was raised by an Iraqi father and an American mother. Experiencing this hybridity has become a source of contention for Americans on the one side, and Arabs and Arab Americans on the other side.

Abu-Jaber's novel *Crescent*, by endorsing cross-cultural communication, provides a pathway for further exploration in Arab American literature and critical analysis of ethno cultural borderlands. Instead of inoculating different ethnic characters against one another by highlighting what divides them as communities and individuals, *Crescent* rejects the "us" versus "them" dichotomy that may categorize some racial minority cultures' perceptions of one another. The constant discussion and formation of ethnic conflicts become a significant realm from which immigrant minorities can reject the dual adversaries that emerge between them and collaborate to dissociate stereotypes that reshape all ethnic identities into impotent and indiscernible culprits. In this reference, it is striking to remark that Arab American playwrights have introduced performances on the American stage that dispel the recurrent image of the vicious Arab.



They attempted to replace the stereotypical monolithic perception of Arabs/Muslims with a more humanized portrait (Suaad Alqahtani 2018). In his talks about Arabs and Arab Americans, the poet Aziz says, "*They think we're all terrorists anyway,*" to which Victor responds, "*Who are they? I don't believe so*" (Crescent 2003). When discussing the distinctions among Arab Americans and Latinos, Aziz proclaims the widespread racial bias against not only Arab Americans but all ethnic groups when he persists, "*You? .....Do you think any of the white guys at the post office could tell the difference between you and me? They'd think you were one of my terrorist pals.*" (Crescent 2003). It is this state of discrimination between people of color that causes pain and disappointment to almost all immigrants in the US.

Striking to notice that *Crescent* highlights an interesting point about the pervasive ethnic nuances that frequently overwhelm people of different races and ethnicities in the United States. Furthermore, the author emphasizes a physically and mentally ethnic heritage in which various ethnic communities coexist and interact. The basis of cross-cultural interconnection; however, motivates a quest for cohesiveness that is anti-essentialist, since it is involved in an insightful awareness of the apparent inconsistency within and between immigrant communities. With the help of such strategies, the ethnic borderland surpasses exclusionary restrictions and becomes a transcendent location that goes beyond what Castillo identifies as "*the refused other*" (Crescent 2003).

### **Food is a medium to connect different ethnicities**

In the novel, food becomes another effective means that integrates the novel's different nationalities while emphasizing the ethnic tensions that prevail between and within them. In Abu-Jaber's *Crescent*, the language of food offers a portal to ethnic history, culture, and roots. This language forms a gastronomic contact zone situated in cafes, kitchens, and homes where displaced individuals meet and reestablish identities and communities (Gardaphe and Xu 2007). Sirine uses food as a medium of connection with the help of which a bridge is created to connect people from diverse ethnic societies. When applied to *Crescent*, the type of harmonious involvement regarding food consumption and production reflects the complex features, variety of logical contradictions, or completely contrary innate in the characters' racial composition, even when they adhere to the same Arab/Arab American marginalized group. Sirine's cooking, as well as the act of partaking in it, highlight their diverse ethnic, national, and ethnic identities. For example, the meals prepared by Sirine draws Arab American students and teachers relatively close to the native home that they have left behind, revealing the diverse range of locales and distinctions of these homelands, making a contribution to a more intricate depiction of Arab American identity (Carol Bardenstein 2002).

In the novel, Sirine's cooking conjures images and occurrences that transport many of the novel's Arab or Arab American characters back to their homelands and traditions. For Sirine, her Middle Eastern food transfers her to the lost world of her parents. In this sense, it can be said that the most important connection between people of different ethnicities is Sirine herself and the Middle Eastern food she prepares. Sirine plays an

outstanding role in bringing together the various communities and individuals of *Crescent's* ethnic borderland (Carol Fadda-Conrey 2006). In other words, the cuisine she cooks is not so much a return to a lost native land as it is a corporeal representation of the heritage that her Iraqi father attempted to resurrect by cooking native foods and passing on his gastronomical knowledge to his American wife. Sirine tried to cook different cuisines, including French, Italian, and Californian ones, but she has that intensity of desire to return to Middle Eastern recipes that stimulate her to recall memories of early days in her parents' small kitchen.

Sirine's preparation of different kinds of food from Arabian traditional cuisines such as lentils with rice and shallots, roasted lamb, and baba ghannuj are insufficient to reenact what Shirley Gesk-Lin Lim refers to in the novel as a "recalled past." In an introspective piece of writing, Lim depicts yearning during pregnancy for specific types of traditional local food from her native Malaysia. Lim comes to the touching assertion that such passions extend beyond food to include a burning desire for the feminist community that she remembers as being linked to motherhood. Similarly, the writer's reshaping of her earlier days and recollection of her caregivers would be incomplete without the involvement of a community having shared the same ethno-cultural borderland and partaking in both the preparation and production of the symbolic recipes. Victor and Cristobal, in the novel, reaffirm a notion of flexibility and consistency between one minority community and another. This is maintained with food serving as integration between different ethnic groups. Talking about Sirine's, Victor remarks, "*Chef is not American cook.....Not like the way Americans do food-just dumping salt into the pot. All the flavors go in the same direction. Chef cooks as we do. In Mexico, we add cinnamon in with the chocolate and pepper in the sweet cakes so things pull apart, you know, make it bigger?*" (Crescent 2003). This allegory of expanding the spiciness of food can be envisaged to come to terms with the interaction and integration between diverse nationalities characters within the ethno-cultural borderland. Such mixture transforms ethnic relations to the stage where minority groups can thrive in relating to one another. Thus it is a way of reshaping and broadening the ethnic structure. Therefore, these various ethnicities are not treated as existing closed communities.

In *Crescent*, the process of preparing food serves as a vital distinguishing tool between one regional and cultural association and another. Pulling apart flavorings in preparing food enhances the final product by bringing out the distinct flavor of each ingredient. Similarly, broadening the ethnic borderland obfuscates the boundary restrictions between ethnic communities. This also fosters border crossing between people of different nationalities. In this sense, the specific characteristics of each group become more apparent as a result of the mixing of what can be considered ethnic recipes.

Abu-Jaber highlights another significant difference between the Middle Eastern and American styles of preparing food. In the American kitchen, they use butter in preparing dishes instead of olive oil and potatoes instead of rice. This becomes much more sophisticated when delineating the various cooking intricacies within the same Arab American ethnic fabric, even within the same national fabric such as Palestinian,

Syrian, Iranian, and so on. Although Sirine is a proficient cook who skillfully prepares dishes from the Middle East, she is still stimulated by her intimate relationship with Hanif to seek out Iraqi dishes, particularly the pies called sfeeahas. These pies are full of meat and spinach. Another recipe that is admired by Hanif is known as mansaf which is a famous recipe in Jordan. In this respect, Sirine attempts to prepare Iraqi cosines that her soul mate would like to eat. She believes that preparing food that her lover craves makes their relationship profound and strong. The writer's quest for ethnic cousins from homeland highlights, through food, the disparities in the experiences and personal upbringings of Arab Americans, particularly people of Iraqi origin, whether they are living in exile, first- or second-generation expatriates, or of mixed ancestry.

In *Crescent*, the concept of food is linked to the dynamic relations between many of the characters of the novel and their extremely complicated identities. The process of preparing and serving food adds to the intermixture of culinary cultures. This reflects the cultural blending in this novel's ethnic borderland. When working as an assistant chef with Sirine, for example, Victor brings some chili peppers, which she adds to the Arabian famous recipe known as baba ghannuj, as well as a condiment for the kabobs. This combination of cooking ingredients results in a unique and flavorful version of Sirine's Middle Eastern cuisine. The mixture of interethnic ingredients from different ethnicities and identities ultimately involves the emergence of new identities not known in the original ones. Such hybrid outcomes establish new ways for interaction and communication among distinctive minority groups. Moreover, they draw people's attention to the unique ideological divisions that mingle Arab Americans, as well as other ethnic groups such as Latin Americans, from being confined together into a unified whole.

## CONCLUSION

The literary production of Abu-Jaber is simply a solution to her literary predicament. It is a vehicle through which she writes about her experiences as an Arab immigrant growing up in America. Abu-Jaber employs the power of narrative to pinpoint the plight of the Iraqi people as well as the horrendous situation in which many ethnic families currently find themselves in the United States. Abu-Jaber not only transcends the apparent adversaries in her daily existence between her American and Arab perspectives, but she also asserts that art and food are the effective means by which people can be connected and establish mutual cultural communication. In Abu-Jaber's literary works, the combination of food and art transforms both. The experiences of both Arab immigrants and their children in America become a part of modern American literature. Their language and perceptions become westernized. It is this humanistic message that the writer successfully builds in writing *Crescent*.

In her literary works, Diana's concern is to present issues of identity and culture of people from various ethnic backgrounds. Diana thinks the quest for and creation of personal identity is one of the most fascinating projects that she is given space for during her lifetime. In *Crescent*, she focuses on exploring this idea through cultural

heritage because her father's immigrant culture was so much a part of her upbringing. But as she has grown older, she has formulated that feeling of being more of international American identity, and she wanted to find out more of the place and people that formed her childhood in upstate New York.

Abu-Jaber is known as one of the best writers of contemporary Arab Americans. Her literary works that talk about individuals and group identities explore out means by which the ethnic borderland turns out to become a communication scope for various ethnic minorities. It is a scope that will undoubtedly result in the restructuring of ethno cultural dynamic interactions. What is noticed here is that the procedure of eroding the borders between diverse ethnic communities should never result in an ethnocentric form of cultural diversity. In her literary works, Diana believes that the recognition of commonality takes place today within the context of different superficial bridges. Recognizing differences between and within ethnic minorities becomes an integral part of the portrayal of the connections that bring them together within ethnic borderland. The complexity of the representations of Arab American cultural identity is asserted in the novel. The writer does so by unveiling how certain misconceptions are not only attributed by a white majority but can also be emulated and eventuated by members of different ethnic backgrounds. The white majority cast such a prejudiced stare on Arabs occupying the same ethnic space which is against humanity.

Abu-Jaber's characters serve not only as a cross-cultural bridge but also as a source of diversity for a more nuanced understanding of cultural communities, mainly the Arab American one. As a result, Abu-Jaber graciously transmits the somewhat inflexibly drawn lines that create segregated communities. This segregation only divides one community from another and traps members of the same minority community against one another.

Abu-Jaber deftly emphasizes the insight and understanding of a need to strengthen interconnection beyond the confines of racial identity. Her focal target is to depict identity not only within but also across ethnic lines, from a position of mutual inter-communal. Thus the novel *Crescent* is a literary work that conveys a clear humanistic message about the importance of interethnic communication. It is this universal theme that is manifested in the writings of modern writers who try their best to bring to light the suffering and pains of people who are expelled from their homes and forced to live in the diaspora. No doubt, readers sympathize with people who are forced to live such a life of depression and isolation. The message of the writer is to create mutual understanding and communication between people of various ethnic backgrounds.

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