

# Mobilizing Literature for Self-Representation: Emerging Voices in Arab-American Feminism

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## Abstract

Media representations have reinforced images of the hyphenated Arab woman as suspicious, uncultured, and unassimilable. This paper highlights the creative endeavors of Arab-American women authors towards countering these stereotypes and offering more possibilities for the hyphenated female identity. Basing my study on the works of Arab-American feminist authors and scholars such as Mohja Kahf, Etaf Rum, and Evelyn Alsultany, I review the tropes of the liberated runaway and the oppressed veiled woman who needs saving. I explore how contemporary voices in Arab-American literature create a third space for hyphenated subjectivities. My paper particularly investigates literature's contribution to understanding the complexity of Arab-American women's experience, primarily the double oppression and surveillance in the public realm and within the patriarchal private sphere. Through a critical analysis informed by a postcolonial and feminist psychoanalytic framework, I examine the complex conflation of both facets of the Arab-American female identity and compare it to dominant images in the media and popular literature. The main finding of this analysis suggests the emergence of what I term the "post-secular feminist heroine," a hybrid existentiality that resists dominant representations. The primary aspiration of this paper is to acknowledge the multidimensionality of an emerging Arab-American literary feminism and its ability to redirect representations of the hyphenated Arab woman.

**Keywords:** identity, media, psychoanalytic, postcolonial, stereotypes