

Moving towards Home: An Ecofeminist Reading of Suheir Hammad's *Born Palestinian, Born Black*

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Abstract

This paper explores Suheir Hammad's collection of poetry, *Born Palestinian, Born Black* from the perspective of ecofeminism. The discussion is focused on investigating the representations of Hammad's double consciousness of Palestinianness and blackness and displaying the dual domination of women and nature embedded in the society of the homeland she left behind. The poems reveal that she depicts the two-ness of her consciousness by highlighting the psycho-social tensions she experiences in the two social contexts- the homeland and the current society of exile. Further, the anthology exhibits the sense of alignment between Palestinianness and blackness in her eyes that is manifested through a form of poetic kinship. They provide an understanding into her varied experience that transcends the limits of cultures and gives birth to a new ecofeminist perspective that promotes diversity. By explicating these crossroads imaged in her poetry, we hope to provide some insights into Hammad's endeavors that complement those of recent ecofeminists, thereby setting up a common ground for building a symbiotic and ecofeministic society in which there is no male oppression or human exploitation.

Keywords: ecofeminism, women, nature, double consciousness, poetry, Suheir Hammad

1. Introduction

Ecofeminism, in general, is a widely literary movement that focuses on studying the intersections between feminism and environmentalism. It was born from a combined view of feminists and ecologists that the oppression of women is directly connected to the exploitation of the natural environment in patriarchal societies. As a term, ecofeminism is used to describe "both the diverse range of women's efforts to save the earth and the transformations of feminism in the West that have resulted from the new view of women and nature" (Diamond & Orenstein 1990: ix). In her book, *Ecofeminist Natures*, Noel Sturgeon (1997:23) defines ecofeminism as "a movement that makes connections between environmentalism and feminism, more precisely, it articulates the theory that ideologies that authorize injustice based on gender, race and class are related to the ideologies that sanction the exploitation and degradation of the environment." Greta Gaard (2001:157) argues that "more than a theory about feminism and environmentalism or women and nature, as the name might imply, ecofeminism approaches and problems of environment degradation and social injustice from the premise that how we treat nature and how we treat each other are inseparably linked." Karen Warren (1997) in her introduction to *Ecofeminism: Women, Culture, Nature* argues that "What makes ecofeminism distinct is its insistence that the nonhuman nature and naturism (i.e. the unjustified domination of nature) are feminist issues. Ecofeminist philosophy extends familiar feminism critiques of socialisms of domination to nature (p.4)". The term "ecofeminism" was coined by the French writer and feminist Françoise d'Eaubonne in 1974 to signify women's potential for bringing about an ecological revolution to ensure human survival on the planet. As Carolyn Merchant (1990: 100) emphasizes, "such an ecological revolution would entail new gender relations between women and men and between humans and nature." Irene Diamond and Gloria Orenstein (1990: ix) in their introduction to *Reweaving the World: the Emergence of Ecofeminism* remark that "Ecofeminism is a term that some use to describe both the diverse range of women's efforts to save the Earth and the transformations of feminism in the West that have resulted from the view of women and nature." Furthermore, Marria Mies and Vandana Shiva (1993: 14) in the introduction to their book entitled *Ecofeminism* argue that "ecofeminism is a

bout connectedness and wholeness of theory and practice. It asserts the special strength and integrity of every living thing.” Such ecofeminist concerns and ideas get reflected in literature and literary works of many writers worldwide throughout the last four decades. Among these writers is Suheir Hammad.

The poetry of Hammad, the Palestinian American poet, reflects a variety of concerns related to women and nature which focus on culture, conflict and consciousness. *Born Palestinian, Born Black* presents a voice of a young Palestinian woman who is highly conscious of the dilemma of the lost homeland. Not only that, she highlights the racial attitudes of the society she is living in towards black people. As the title of the collection suggests, she draws a map full of dots that we, as readers, can still take pleasure in connecting by describing herself as being Palestinian and black tiling a new ground for human domination of both women and nature as presented in the Palestinian situation. Addressing the parallelism of Palestinianness and blackness is a hint of being highly watchful of the dual domination practised in both her own country of birth and the surrounding American society she is living in. She sees the similarity between the experience of African Americans and that of Palestinians. In other words, her double consciousness is marked by the experience and affiliation with the Palestinian culture, America and her identity as a black African American young woman. Furthermore, she is a poet, faced the loss of her homeland, and now lives in the land of the Statue of Liberty but does not feel that this liberty is accorded to everyone. She shows that her birthright and identity comprises more than two cultures or nations and this blendedness results in not just double consciousness but also multiple consciousness (Bauridle, 2013). Indeed, her poems reveal the roots in a homeland full of tragedies and an exile home dominated by racial discrimination. Further, they mirror intently culture, conflict and consciousness of diasporic Palestinians and, therefore, lend themselves well to the ecofeminist interpretation. Not only has the meaning of being born Palestinian, but also she teaches us what is the meaning of being a black woman. The current study is motivated by this kind of experience that has been mirrored in Hammad’s work particularly *Born Palestinian, Born Black* (1996) which is regarded as the masterpiece of her poetry. The aim of this paper, therefore, is to interpret these poems in terms of ecofeminism and provide some insights into her endeavors that complement those of the ecofeminist, thereby setting up the common ground for building a liberated, symbiotic and ecofeministic society.

Hammad is an eminent feminist and award-winning Palestinian American poet who is also known for her political activism. She was born in 1973 in Amman, Jordan. Her parents were Palestinian refugees in Jordan but they migrated to the United States of America when she was five years old. She grew up in Brooklyn in New York City where she was surrounded by a variety of people of different minority groups such as Puerto Ricans, Afro-Americans, Dominicans and Haitians. She describes them as the integral part but frayed communities of the American fabric society. Her first exposure to poetry was made by her mother who introduced her to the Korean poetry as being the most perfect poetry in the world. Like her mother, her father also taught her some Arabic nationalist songs which she later came to realize that they were originally written as poems. She was highly influenced by the Palestinian poets of resistance, particularly the poetry of Mahmoud Darwish. She is inspired by everyone who speaks poignantly about her homeland’s plight.

Using ecofeminism as a lens, we hope to interpret some selected poems of Hammad’s *Born Palestinian, Born Black* and investigate and highlight the manifestations of her double consciousness which in return reflects the domination of weak nations which is seen analogously as the plight and exploitation of women. We have selected some poems which represent the thirty-four poems of the collection and lend themselves well to the current ecofeminist discussion such as “Dedication”, “Taxi”, “Scarlet Rain”, “May I Take Your Order”, “The Necklace”, “Children of Stone”, “Silence” “Dead Woman” and “Our Mother and Their Lives of Suffer”, and “Broken and Beirut.” These poems three facets of Hammad’s diaporic consciousness: her Palestinian rootedness and perception; her American consciousness of blackness; her pendulumic experience of unhomed from Palestine and being homed in America.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Literary Context of Ecofeminism

Over the last four decades, ecofeminism has been used as a tool to analyse literary works. It was coined for the first time by the French writer and feminist Françoise d’Eaubonne in 1974 to signify the intersections between women and the natural environment. It was introduced into literary studies as a call upon women to take an ecological responsibility to save the natural environment from devastation all over the universe. Some of the most prominent ecofeminist voices in the literary world are Greta Gaard, Susan Griffin, Alice Walker, Rosemary Radford Ruether, Allen, Warren, Luisah Teish and Andy Smith (Indue, 2013).

Commenting on the function of ecofeminism in literature, Gretchen Legler (1997) points out that the ecofeminist approach plays a stupendous role in the recent debates of literary studies field as it is “providing a vantage point

from which canonical nature literature may be critiqued” (p. 227). She further asserts the importance of such literature as a setting in which the representations of gender, class and race and assumptions about the natural environment can be investigated and interrogated through the lens of ecofeminism. Earlier to Gretchen Legler, Derborah Janson (1996) in her article “In Search of Common Ground: An Ecofeminist Inquiry into Christa Wolf’s Work” highlights the continuing relevance of the German writer Christa Wolf’s work to ecofeminism by drawing parallels between her work and that of western ecofeminists. She concludes her study affirming that Wolf’s work has suggested a strong connection between human health and the natural environment. She also displays that Wolf’s efforts complement those of ecofeminists and provides some insights into the ways of establishing an unbiased society whose members are well aware of the interconnected relations between human and nonhuman worlds.

Louise Thomason (2000) presents another argument about the vivacity of ecofeminism as a practical means of analysis in literature. In her work “Women, Nature and Poetic Dwelling: Ecofeminism and the Poetries of Phillis Webb and Judith Wright”, Thomason uses ecofeminism as a lens for reading the poetry of Phillis Webb and Judith Wright, highlighting the degradation and exploitation of the natural environment in relation to the domination of women in the human world. Further, Thomason emphasizes on the power of ecofeminism in the context of literature for growing the relations of human and non human entities in constituting the universe.

Cynthia Belmont (2012) in her article “Claiming Queer Space in/as Nature: An Ecofeminist Reading of *Secretary*” advances the scope of the ecofeminist approach to include the various aspects of the interconnection between women and nature as manifested in literary works such as that of *Secretary*. In the conclusion to her study, she remarks that ecofeminism is a useful means in the analysis of literary texts as it helps reflect and validate human concerns towards the natural environment. Likewise, Brandi Christine Clark (2004) applies the ecofeminist approach for interpreting Thomas Hardy’s tragic novels and illustrates that Hardy can be regarded as an ecofeminist writer in the sense that his work reveals some insights into the intersections between ecology and ecofeminism. Clark concludes his study remarking that the ecofeminist approach as necessary for developing human-nature relations in the current environmental crisis-ridden world. Matthew Toerey (2004) in the article entitled “William Wordsworth and Leslie Marmon Silko toward an Ecofeminist Future” anticipates some outlines of ecofeminism future in literary studies. Toerey considers that poetry such as that of William Wordsworth and Leslie Marmon Silko can promote the ecofeminist philosophies in the recent decade. Toerey even concludes that “both Wordsworth’s and Silko’s writing counter patriarchal attitudes and institution by advocating ecofeministic, symbiotic relationships that value harmonious coexistence, caring cooperation and reciprocal respect among humans and humanity and the natural world. (p. 53)

Barbara Bennett (2005) states that using the ecofeminist concepts in analyzing literary texts seems to be natural, then, because literature is defined as the medium that makes theoretical practical, to transform complex philosophy into concrete experience through the imagination. She argues that

Since ecofeminism proposes to be a way of life more than a theory, literature seems a natural medium for disseminating its ideas and practices. By evaluating the tenets of ecofeminism within literature, readers can create avenues for discussing leading to practical application of its theories and become more aware of the interconnectedness in life, of cause and effect, and of the importance of taking personal responsibility for the sequences of our action (p. 64).

Furthering the arguments regarding the role ecofeminism in literary context, Shareen Shehab (2010) argues, in her research “An Ecofeminist Reading of Some Selected Poems by Mary Oliver”, that ecofeminism, as a modern approach in literature, is rather effective in analyzing poetry. Using it as a lens, she investigates Oliver’s deep and constant communion with the natural environment. She also asserts that the combination of ecologists’ concern with that of feminists’ in literary texts can be played out through the lens of ecofeminism. Recently, Carol J. Adams and Lori Gruen (2014), in their book *Ecofeminism: Feminist Intersections with Other Animals and the Earth* demonstrates that the ecofeminist approach and its stress on human care, relations, emotions, affect and comparison have become more relevant than ever today.

Having overviewed briefly some previous studies on ecofeminism in the literary context, it is obvious that ecofeminism as literary lens offers fresh, revitalizing and inspirational scholarship on works that intersect relations between human and the environment. Attempting to investigate such scholarship in the current Palestinian diasporic writing, we intend to apply ecofeminism as a framework for reading some selected poems of *Born Palestinian*, *Born Black* as a step towards developing an ecofeminist framework for reading Arab diasporic literature.

3. Interconnectedness and Double-consciousness

According to Indue (2013) ecofeminism, as a framework for analyzing literary texts, can be viewed as “a concept that attempts to study the exploitation of nature as similar to the exploitation of women and visualizes a new humanism that resists and subverts all political hierarchies, social and economic structures” (p.7). In spite of the wide range of the ecofeminists’ conceptions and concerns such as women’s rights, nature’s exploitation, animals’ rights, natural and environmental concerns about water, land, pollution and wildlife problems, we would like first to point out that we will focus on the concepts which are relevant to the current discussion. Therefore, we have chosen for the present study two concepts subsumed under the umbrella term of ecofeminism. These two concepts are interconnectedness and double consciousness because Hammad, as the title of the collection suggests, seems to be deeply rooted in her Palestinianness and highly conscious of the patriarchal attitudes towards blackness in the current society of exile.

The ecofeminists propose the fundamentality of the interconnectedness in the existence of the whole universe. That is, they believe in the interdependence of the world in the sense that what happens in one part or one life or one society will affect the entire community of the world. Further, as Barbara Bennett (2005:63) asserts, “ecofeminists believe that until we change our perspective of community and see it as a system of cooperation for the betterment of all rather than competition for the success of a few, our world will experience an intensification of these serious problems”. In their analysis of any literary work, ecofeminists emphasize on exploring how men’s domination of women and exploitation of nature are viewed as identical and interrelated. Deborah Janson (2013:116) argues that “common to all varieties of ecofeminism is an awareness of connections between the domination of women and the domination of nature”. This is further echoed by Warren (1997: xi) who argues that one of the central tenets of ecofeminism is that “there are important connections between how one treats women, people of color, and the underclass on the one hand and how one treats the nonhuman environment on the other hand” Heather Eaton and Lois Ann Lorentzen (2003: 2) in their introduction to *Ecofeminism and Globalization* emphasize that one of most important concerns of ecofeminism as a theoretical approach is that “women and nature are connected conceptually and symbolically in Euro-western worldviews and these connections are articulated in several ways”.

Double consciousness is a concept that was coined by Du Bois to refer to a sense of looking at one’s self through the eyes of others. In his book *The Souls of Black Folk*, he defines the concept of double consciousness as

It is a particular sensation, this double consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt pity. One ever feels his two-ness, - an American, a Negro: two souls; two thoughts; two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder (p. 9).

Thus, Du Bois views the concept of double consciousness as a vital theoretical lens for understanding the racial divisions existing in societies such as the American society. In the light of these two concepts, our analysis and discussion of some selected poems of *Born Palestinian, Born Black* will be carried out in the following section.

4. Analysis and Discussion

To interpret the thirty-four poems of *Born Palestinian, Born Black* is to find a young poet grappling with a range of experiences, concerns and emotions that are illuminating and insightful. However, we will focus our discussion on how Hammad voices her consciousness of Palestinianness and blackness to investigate how she portrays the domination of women and land in an interconnected sense which ultimately makes overt her pendulumic experience between the two social contexts. Based on our reading of the thirty-four poems in the collection, we show that Hammad’s experience is woven between Brooklyn in United States-the host land, Ramallah in Palestine- the homeland and sometimes within the two contexts of the homeland and host land throughout the collection. Therefore, Hammad’s experience manifests in three major facets throughout the collection as can be discussed briefly in the following subsections of the analysis.

4.1 Facet 1: Hammad’s Palestinian Rootedness and Self-perception

This facet exposes Hammad’s consciousness that has its roots in a land which is in the ever-present moment of her current life and her self-perception as being a displaced young Palestinian woman who has returned to the place of her origin. Yet, she is deeply rooted to it as if they were in a blood relationship. In fact, for a 20-year old daughter of refugees to consider a plight to which she is inextricably linked, without the trauma of primary experience, is to read the poems of a young Palestinian woman struggling to understand her place adrift in what often feels like an uncontrollable current. This state of a limbo can be traced in 12 poems of the collection such as “Dedication”, “Blood Stitched Time”, “Taxi”, “Children of Stones”, “Ismi”, “Patience”, “Scarlet Rain”,

“Gaza”, “Jabaliya”, “Rafah”, “Tel elhawa” and “Zeitoun”. For instance, in the opening poem of the collection entitled “Dedication”, Hammad stares and speaks out her observation of a displaced father:

Standing on a mountaintop in Jordan
 Looking over the vast sea
 Saw the land his people had come from
 Land of figs and olive trees
 What should've been his *phalesteen* (p. 21)

Here is Hammad's sense of being a daughter of a displaced father who is deeply ingrained to his homeland, enthralled by a lost land of natural paradise and longing for Palestinianness that constitutes an unfilled space within them. She seeks to confirm that the dislocated father is the righteous owner of the lost land he is staring at. The tone of the poem in general and these lines in particular is nostalgic. The memory of her father becomes her memory and image of her lost homeland, and she makes a promise:

She vows she'd return to *phalesteen*
Ib rohi (with my life) *ib demi* (with my blood)
 I close my eyes
 And smell the ripe olives (p. 23)

The lines reveal the sense of obligation and patriotism instilled in the displaced young Hammad, a representative of Palestinian women in exile, who remains connected to her native land. Her “vow to return” is an indicator of the deep restlessness she feels in exile. Her use of Arabic phrases such as “*Ib rohi, ib demi*” and smelling the ripe olives are proof of being deeply rooted to her motherland, Palestine. She is even ready to give her blood and soul to free the captured home. In another poem, “Taxi,” she details the kind of oppression against Palestinian women which she indignantly declares:

In my father's city
 There's a baby girl
 Whose beautiful brown eyes
 (Centuries ago inspired poetry)
 Was eaten out by a fat Zionist rat (p. 26)

The baby girl, in these lines, represents the innocent Palestinian young girls victimized in Hammad's place of origin. Her expression “a fat Zionist rat” symbolizes the oppression and aggressiveness practised against the innocent women who are described ironically as being eaten by a rodent that destroys everything that is good. Metaphorically, rats are pests that carry diseases. The ironic tone of the stanza above displays how deeply Hammad's generation of young Palestinian girls are grounded in an oppressive society in the occupied Palestine. The poem “Children of Stone” is a symptom of her interconnected sense of Palestinianness both in terms of human females and nonhuman nature as can be traced in the following lines:

When did stones
 Become the confidants of young girls
 Whose clothes and pride
 Across the river were hurled (p. 43)

The question in these lines remains an open question to us. However, it is beneficial to highlight her ecofeminist visualization that links between feminism and environmentalism. Depicting the stones as close friends of the Palestinian girls reveal the poet's interconnected sense of the domination of women and nature in the occupied homeland. This kind of experience is detailed further in the poem entitled “Scarlet Rain” when she addresses Palestinian mothers in the form of her *mama* (mother):

Enough tears *mama*
 Enough because your tears
 Won't clot any blood
 Save these deep brown eyes

From any more rain
 Stop crying *mama*
 Let's miss Scarlet
 Burn in hell (p. 37)

These lines evoke the sense of her deepest bitterness felt by the Palestinian women. The image of "deep brown eyes" is an example of Hammad's descriptions of the deeper depression of the Palestinian women in society they are living in. Further, she tends to reveal some aspects of the interconnectedness between the domination of women and that of nature in Palestine as can be traced in the following lines of the same poem when she warmly requests mothers:

Save your tears your
 People need them to
 Water soil of uprooted olive trees (p.36)

The "tears" symbolize the tyranny against women in the occupied land of Palestine. "Uprooted olive trees" is an indication of the estranged Palestinians. However, the whole image of watering soil of the uprooted olive trees with women's tears represents her interconnected sense of oppression against women and the natural environment that exists in that society which, in return, represents her double consciousness. She furthers her rootedness to the land and her perception of being Palestinian in the poem entitled "Patience" when she depicts herself, as representative of all displaced Palestinians, waiting patiently to the moment of returning to the homeland. She addresses the oppressors and seizers of the land that if they captured the land, they could not deny its ownership from them and it remains Palestinian forever:

For these flowers & butterflies
 These rivers & this soul
 Belong to this land
 You cannot own them (p. 76)

These lines invoke Hammad's deepest rootedness to the lost land she has never ever seen. The expression "this soul" reveals the sharp sense of her Palestinianness that calls the connection between various aspects of nature in the homeland such as flowers, butterflies, rivers and her inner soul. Furthermore, Hammad attempts to publicize her experience of rootedness and self-perception when she concludes the poem with the declaration that:

These fields & shadows
 This spirit & life
 Belong to this land
 And you cannot own us
 And for you we wait (p. 77).

She remains connected to her motherland which highlights Hammad's psychological being that she does not waver from personal belief of returning home to a free Palestine. The poems show the strength of her conviction, drawn from the environment of her ancestor's homeland.

4.2 Facet 2: Hammad's American Experience of Blackness

This facet focuses on what Hammad means when she says she was "born black". For her, blackness is not just an ethnic sign but a political position in relation to a dominant power structure and racial discrimination in the American society she is living in. In her introduction to the collection, Hammad provides some meanings the word "black" connotes. However, in the current context of *Born Palestinian, Born Black* Hammad means to evoke her consciousness towards the racial discrimination towards the black in the American society. She addresses the issue of blackness and the oppression of the black both explicitly and implicitly in eleven poems of the collection, namely, "One Stop", "The Necklace", "Ya Baby Ya", "Fly Away", "99 Cent Lipstick", "Brown Bread hero", "May I Take Your Order", "Bleached and Bleeding", "Delicious", "Open Poem" and "We Spent the Fourth of July in Bed". For example, in the poem entitled "The Necklace" she uses the necklace gifted to her mother a long time ago as a symbol of her consciousness of blackness as can be exposed by the following lines:

The necklace
 Diamonds of South African rock

Piercing shine caught in eyes
 Charred bone of *der Yassin's* massacre
 Carried memories of my grandfather's
 Chocolate and nuts shop (p. 40)

Typically, the gifted necklace symbolizes the estimable connections between the giver and the receiver. It also symbolizes that the giver wants to develop the relationship with the receiver. In this poem, the description of the necklace in the context of Palestinian situation such as *der Yassin* massacre with an African stamp of originality evokes her sense of interconnectedness between women and the natural environment. The necklace is also a symbol of her consciousness of blackness and Palestinianness in the sense that the symbolic meaning of the necklace is the oppression and domination originally practised against the black African Americans but currently it is associated to the Palestinian situation and struggle as represented by *der Yassin* massacre. Therefore, the necklace conveys figuratively her message of double consciousness which regains force in the collection.

The questions of Hammad's consciousness continue to reveal her ecofeminist sense of the oppressed Palestinian women among the American society where they can express loudly their bitterness of the oppression in the country of their origin and double consciousness as in the poem entitled "Silence":

Did he hear the loud strong
 Voices of our women
 Voices so clear
 Songs so sad so beautiful
 Strained.... drained
 By years of crying (p. 48)

As the title of the poem suggests, she holds a view that women and nature suffer under patriarchal oppression and are treated as silent objects to be subdued, controlled, consumed, tamed and exploited. However, she tries to give a voice to the voiceless people who have been silenced. Similarly, in the poem entitled "May I Take Your Order", she depicts a picture of male oppression against the black women in the American society in a dialogic image as can be traced in the following lines:

He stir fries me w/
 Questions like:
 Where you from?
Brooklyn
 I mean originally?
 Yeah there is no hidden I'm original recipe
 From the region of
 Figs lentils & pomegranates (p. 62)

These lines reveal clearly the kind of racial discrimination in the Brooklyn society in which the black are victims of racism. The two questions asked by the victimizer to Hammad "where you from?" and "I mean originally" are symptoms of such a social disease inhabited in the body of the American society. Hammad's answer of being the recipe of the region of figs lentils and pomegranates is an attack of the American racism. She deliberately uses "figs lentils and pomegranates" which are native to the North Africa and the Mediterranean countries to represent the African Americans as well as other minorities living in the American society. What is more important is that Hammad's consciousness seems to be highly affected by these all-too-common dialogic questions in the American society. Consequently, the image of men as dominating and preying on women is obvious in the poem entitled "Delicious" when she questions the motives of American men:

Why it is men
 Describe our colors
 As edible?
 Chocolate skinned
 Sweet honey shade

Café au lait delicious
 Olive (an acquired taste)
 Peaches and cream
 Brown sugar
 Is it because they are
 Always ever so ready
 To eat us? (p. 57)

While the effect is to inject humor, the use of nouns to describe black women demeans them. They are seen as objects for gastronomic satisfaction – their value as human beings is diminished when they are merely perceived as edible food. This negative perception of men can have a catastrophic effect on the double-conscious Hammad akin to what Taylor observes (as cited in Bauridl, 2013:16) “the projection of an interior or demeaning image on another can actually distort and oppress, to the extent that the image is internalized”.

4.3 Facet 3: Hammad's Pendulumic Experience (of Home and Host Lands)

This facet demonstrates Hammad's two-ness of being black and Palestinian which, in return, reflects her pendulumic experience between the two social contexts of the homeland and the host land, between Brooklyn in United States and Ramallah in Palestine. In other words, she seems to swing between the two social extremes. This pendulumic experience manifests in many poems of the collection such as “Mariposa”, “Suicide Watch”, “Argela Remembrance”, “Silence”, “Dead Women”, “Tabla Tears”, “Good Word”, “Our Mothers”, “Exotic”, “Manifest Destiny”, and “Broken and Beirut”. To illustrate this kind of experience weaved in Hammad's *Born Palestinian, Born Black*, the following lines of the poem entitled “Dead Woman” reveal an insight:

I am a dead woman
 Until we inhale our collective breath
 Healing our pierced lungs
 Refilling our hardened hearts (p. 51)

These lines exhibit Hammad's identity crisis of being a victim of displacement, oppression and social racism in both societies. She belongs to a family of dislocated Palestinians who lost their verdure once they were exiled from their homeland. She describes herself as “a dead woman” to convey the loss of freshness and vibrancy. She inhales the stale air of Brooklyn in the city of New York where she is doubly oppressed for being Palestinian and for being black. The lines also present her louder call for Palestinians to make their own way towards home. In her introduction to the collection, Hammad describes the context of the poems as “none of them are pieces that I could write now, because I'm no longer living those spaces. But they are still real and breathing, because those spaces are within me. The road I've travelled, the land beneath my feet. I make my way home (p.13). However, she, the representative of all alienated young Palestinian women, does not lose her spirit. She validates her spirit and consciousness of Palestinianness and blackness by asserting that the essence of the whole world, human and nonhuman, is one and eternal. In the poem “Our Mother and Their Lives of Suffer”, she addresses Palestinian women who suffer the trauma of the homeland like her.

When your land is raped you
 Thank God you still have husbands
 When your husbands are jailed
 You thank God for your sons
 When your sons are murdered ... execution style
 You hide your daughters and
 When they are found and jailed
 You fast till they return
 And pray some more and
 When they are as their land raped
 You prepare bandages and some
 More prayer and when your family

Loses all faith you

Pray for their souls (p. 66)

Hammad transmits her pendulomic experience to the public as a way of touching theirs. She once declares that “I know every time I read a woman’s work that touches me, I am that much stronger and firmer in believing I could make this world better, not just through my writing but through my activism and just by being me. If other people can do that for me then I know I can do that for people” (Hammad, 1996, p. 7). Just as she finds strength and purpose in other people’s works, her own articulation gives strength to others in psychological limbo.

Finally, we would like to conclude this discussion asserting that Hammad’s *Born Palestinian, Born Black* has revealed the tenets of oppression and racism in the societies of homeland and exile. She suggests rebuilding a camp of interconnectedness and consciousness between human and nonhuman worlds, between women and nature, and between Palestinianness and blackness. Further, in the poem entitled “Broken and Beirut” she expresses her oscillation to the reader:

I want to go home

Not only to mama and baba here

I want to remember what I’ve never lived

A home within me (p. 83)

She attempts to draw a guiding map for the displaced Palestinians all over the world to start making their journey home in the indomitable and inspiring spirit of June Jordan’s lines of the poem “Moving towards Home”:

I was born a black woman

And now

I am become a Palestinian

Against the relentless laughter of evil

There is less and less living room

And where are my loved ones?

It is time to make our way home.

The expression “I was born a black woman and now I am become a Palestinian” indicates the poet’s pendulomic experience as “I am become” means that the speaker is always in the ever-present moment of occurring, of being simultaneously Palestinian and black. Ultimately, Hammad has achieved the broad goal of the collection to take back the negative attitudes associated with blackness and Palestinianness, reclaim them and show that they are positive and they are about continued existence both in the home and host lands.

5. Conclusion

In the analysis of the selected poems of *Born Palestinian, Born Black*, we have shown Hammad’s two-ness of being Palestinian and black which indicates the psycho-social tensions she experiences in the two social contexts- the homeland and the current society of exile. We also have highlighted three crossroads for her wide-ranging comparison in the African American experience and that of the Palestinians Americans. However, our special focus has been made on her experience and self-perception as merely a black young Palestinian woman- the adjective she nevertheless uses to describe herself in public as well as in poems. She views herself, like other Palestinians in exile, as insider and outsider and this reflects that her identity fluctuates between the cultures and thus results in her double consciousness which, as Du Bois (1993) describes, “a sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others in the mirror” (p. 9). Further, it reveals that her varied experience has transcended the limits of cultures and given birth to a new ecofeminist perspective that helps unify diversity. By explicating these intersections made overt in Hammad’s poetry, we hope that we have revealed her endeavors that complement those of the ecofeminist, thereby setting up the common ground for building a liberated, symbiotic and ecofeministic society in which there is no male oppression or human exploitation. We also hope that we have provided some insights into the Palestinian diasporic writers’ ecofeminist perspective and their renderings of the dilemma of homeland and exile in their writings as a step towards developing an ecofeminist framework for reading Arab diasporic literature.

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