

THE LITERATURE OF THE ARAB DIASPORA (MAHJAR) IN EUROPE: HISTORY, CHARACTERISTICS AND MAHJAR LITERATURE

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Abstract: The term diaspora (Mahjar) refers to Arab writers who move from their home countries to other countries by bringing Arabic literary works to be disseminated in the country's territory. Thus, diasporic Arabic literature (Mahjar) is a sign of the early stages of the development of Arabic literature in the modern century because it is the result of a mixture of two cultures, namely East and West. This research aims to trace Mahjar's history, characteristics, and literature in the European region. This research uses qualitative research with a library research method. The research data sources used in this research are secondary data sources only. The results of this study indicate that the emergence of Mahjar Arabic literature in Europe began with Napoleon's arrival in Egypt with political and pragmatic objectives in 1798, which at that time also had a vast influence on the Arab nation. The characteristics of diasporic Arabic literature (Mahjar) show that diasporic Arabic literature (Mahjar) is more decadent than classical literature and has literary themes more inclined to realism. The Mahjar literary figures in Europe include Khalil Mutran, Abbas Beydoun, Habib Abdulrab Sarori, and Osman Engin.

Keywords: *Arabic Literature, Diaspora (Mahjar), Europe.*

INTRODUCTION

Arabic literature is one of the pieces of literature that is quite important and interesting to study, historically and critically, to provide information to readers. At the beginning of the development of modern Arabic literature, there was a wave of Arab immigration to other countries such as the United States, Australia, and Europe. Therefore, Arabic literature was born, called Mahjar or diaspora literature, in the countries where they live (Surahman, 2023, p. 2).

Arabic literature of Mahjar or Diaspora is more decadent quantitatively and qualitatively, and its subjects are more diverse compared to the Classical and Renaissance periods. Because in this modern era, Arab society is more open to external influences from the East and the West. (Surahman, 2023, p. 2). Thus, there has been a mixing of cultures. Cultural interaction with external influences can often change the cultural system in terms of components or whole. (Masitoh, 2013, p. 208).

The influence of the cultural mixture between East and West is the birth of various literary schools such as romanticism, realism, symbolism, existentialism, and expressionism. These styles and influences are reflected not only in their themes and contents but also in their forms and styles. However, classical literary styles and genres still exist, although they are slowly declining. (Surahman, 2023, p. 2).

Arabic diaspora literature (Mahjar), as a sign of the early stages of the development of Arabic literature in the modern century, is the result of a mixture of two cultures, namely the East and the West, or even more with the help of spiritual strength and imagination of diaspora writers. The term diaspora comes from Greek, which means spreading or sowing seeds. Diaspora is usually directed at those who do not live in their region or settle in other countries. However, the term diaspora itself in the world of literature has a definition that refers to Arab writers who move to other countries by bringing Arabic literary works to be disseminated in the

territory of that country. (Dardiri, 2011, p. 299).

In line with Fuad Hassan's statement in his book entitled "Menapak Jejak Khalil Gibran" that the term mahjar is Arabic literature developed by the Muhajirs who migrated to other countries because their lives were entire of consequences of a very authoritarian government in their own country. In other words, mahjar is an Arabic literary work produced in non-Arab countries, as the emergence of Arabic diaspora literature (Mahjar) since the wave of Arab immigration to various non-Arab countries, such as the United States, Australia, and Europe. Thus, Arabic diaspora literature (Mahjar) is also defined as acculturation between language and literature between America/Europe and Arabia (Rohmatullah, 2007).

Arabic mahjar writers tend to create literary and dramatic autonomy not merely subject to the norms and social rules that apply to Arab society. They write more realistic Arabic mahjar poetry, namely the approach of literary works to social reality. In this context, realism is interpreted as "objectivity," whose meaning is the opposite of subjective things. (Manshur, 2007, p. 21).

As is known, this literature is the result of writers who live between two cultures. From this literary work, it can be seen how the two cultures influence each other. In addition, the works of Arabic diaspora literature (Mahjar) produced by Arab writers living abroad reflect their thoughts and social experiences in the country.

Several previous studies have tended to discuss Mahjar Arabic literature (diaspora) in four aspects: first, Mahjar Arabic literature in America (Katsipis, 2018); Second, the influence of European literature on Arabic literature (J.P., 2022); third, Arabic literature mahjar in Australia (Surahman, 2023); Fourth, Arabic literature in Europe (Sellman, 2018).

There are several similarities and differences between previous studies and the current study. The similarities are in the object studied, namely Arabic literature in Europe. (Sellman, 2018). Meanwhile, the difference lies in discussing Arabic Mahjar literature in America. (Katsipis, 2018); Arabic

literature mahjar in Australia (Surahman, 2023); and the influence of European literature on Arabic literature (J.P., 2022). Apart from that, the difference lies in the history and characteristics of Mahjar Arabic literature and its literary figures.

Therefore, it can be seen that there is still very little literature on the Arabic diaspora (Mahjar), so it is interesting to study it more deeply, both historically and critically. Thus, this study aims to find new findings about the History of Arabic Mahjar literature in Europe, the characteristics of literary works, and the influential figures in it.

METHOD

This study uses qualitative research with a library research method. Library research observes various literature, such as books, papers, or writings related to research problems. (Roosinda et al., 2021, p. 36). The analysis tool is used in the form of historical analysis, namely by analyzing events that occurred in the past in order to find out the reasons for these events. (Dakhi, 2015, p. 65).

The research data sources used in this study are secondary data sources. Library research generally uses secondary data sources because researchers do not obtain data directly. (Dakhi, 2015, p. 64). Next, researchers process the data by citing references presented as research results, arranging them into comprehensive information, and interpreting them into findings to conclude.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

History of Arabic Diaspora Literature (Mahjar) in Europe

If viewed based on the periodization of Arabic literature, then this diaspora Arabic literature (Mahjar) emerged in the final stage. As previously explained, diaspora Arabic literature (Mahjar) is an early sign of the development of Arabic literature in the modern century. One of the characteristics of Arabic literature in the modern century is the renewal initiated by Khalil Gibran (1872-1949). Gibran is a Lebanese-born poet who freed Arabic poetry from the bonds of old prosody (the science of 'Arudh) and did not exaggerate in using allegorical and metaphorical expressions as found in several works of neo-classical poets. In the modern

century, there are three large groups of Arabic literature: the Mahjar group, the Diwan group, and the Apollo group.

The emergence of the mahjar group began with the immigration of Arabs abroad, especially to North and South America in the 19th century. In 1880-1924, Arab immigration to the Americas peaked. They consisted of children to adults, ranging in age from thirty-five years. These immigrants also had different professions: traders, mechanics, farmers, and writers. The immigration carried out by these Arabs was divided into two large waves, namely the first wave from 1870 to World War II. In this first wave, most immigrants came from Syria and Lebanon, which were predominantly Christian. The second wave of World War II immigrants did not only come from Syria and Lebanon but from various parts of Arabia with a majority Muslim population, such as Palestine, Lebanon, Syria, Egypt, Iraq, and Yemen.

Several factors can cause the occurrence of Arabic diaspora literature (Mahjar). Be it economic, political, or cultural factors or even natural disasters. In this case, the general factors causing the occurrence of Arabic diaspora literature (Mahjar) are as follows (Surahman, 2023):

1. Freedom, namely, writers avoid political pressure and seek personal freedom to make it easier to express their soul's desires without being responsible.
2. Fear of decline or even loss of Arabic.
3. Renewal, namely the desire to renew themes or topics in modern Arabic poetry and spread the spirit of renewal through Arabic poetry.
4. Communicating with missionaries who can provide new hopes in life.
5. Looking for a better and more comfortable living atmosphere.
6. Efforts to preserve Arab identity and Arabic literary creativity.
7. Arab diaspora in several regions, such as North America, South America, Australia, and Europe.

Arabic diaspora literature (Mahjar) results from acculturation between language and literature between America/Europe and

Arabia. Since Napoleon's arrival in Egypt with political and pragmatic goals in 1798, it also broadly influenced the Arab nation. So Napoleon's arrival is considered the beginning of the absorption of Western culture into the Arab world and the cause of the modernization process with all its positive and negative problems. This Western culture then led to changes in several Arab lives, ranging from political and social to Arabic literature. The changes that can be seen since Napoleon's arrival in Egypt are the publication of the first newspaper in the Arab world called *Courier de l'Egypte* on August 29, 1798, the publication of the science and literature magazine *La Decade Egyptienne* in November 1798, the publication of other newspapers such as *Jurnal al-Khadyu* (1827) and *al-Waqa'i al-Mishriyyah* (1828) published by Bulaq Press which was founded by Muhammad Ali, the governor of Egypt at that time.

From the explanation above, we can see the influence of the West on Arabic literature with the arrival of Napoleon in Egypt. For example, the Egyptian government at that time sent many students to study in Italy, France, and England. The program provided by the government at that time aimed to bring new concepts, perceptions, and thoughts into the field of Arabic literature, such as Tahtawi (1803-1873). He was a graduate of al-Azhar who continued his education by studying in Paris. He read much French literature, such as the works of Voltaire, Montesquieu, and Rousseau, to which he then brought new insights into Arabic literary thought. In addition, in the study of modern Arabic literature, Egypt is a gateway for writers from Syria and Lebanon. They moved to Egypt to channel their talents. Moreover, there are several famous universities in Egypt, such as al-Azhar University in Cairo. It was in this Arab region, including Saudi Arabia, that the term *as-Syi'ir al-Mahjar* or The Emigran Poet began to be known, namely poets who generally immigrated to South America.

In essence, Arabic literature has interacted with various civilizations, cultures, and literatures ranging from Ancient Greece, India, Persia, and Turkey to Europe. However, contact with European culture and literature has been the most significant contribution to

developing Arabic literature in the modern century. French literature ranks first, followed by English literature and other European literature, so in this modern century, the term Arabic diaspora literature (Mahjar) emerged. This is because many Arab writers went to study in Europe, which also aimed to introduce Arabic literature to European society more intensively. Many Arab artists and writers studied in France, England, America, and others (Fuadi, 2023, p. 39), like Khalil Mutran and Khalil Gibran, from the many Arab writers who went to the West to study and introduce new understandings in Arabic literature, namely the romanticism movement. At that time, Western literature became the mecca for the influence of literary patterns from more advanced cultures. For some Arabs, the world community, America, and Europe were seen as models of progress and modernity of human civilization.

In addition, Arabic diaspora literature (Mahjar) in Europe contributes to Islamic civilization in Arabic literature. As Maro stated in (Latif, 2018), the contribution of Islamic civilization to the Roman nation was not only in the field of art, but also in the field of poetry. For example, in the work of Ibn Hazm, which was very famous then, namely *Thauq al-Hamamah*. Furthermore, it is stated that the contribution of Islamic civilization to Arabic literature is also seen in the field of novels. As for these European novels, they were greatly influenced by *maqamat*, stories of heroes, and the adventures of the heroes in achieving their love and honor. Some Arabic literary works that are very famous and have made significant contributions to European literary works are *Alfu Lailah wa Lailah* and *Hayy bin Yaqzhan* (Latif, 2018).

Characteristics of Arabic Diaspora Literature (Mahjar) in Europe

Arabic diaspora literature (Mahjar) is one of the modern literary movements that initially emerged in America (North America and South America), Australia, and Europe, especially the Western part. This began after World War II. In Western Europe, several countries are famous for their Arabic diaspora literature (Mahjar), including France, the Netherlands, Germany, and

Switzerland. In general, some of the characteristics of Arabic diaspora literature (Mahjar) in Europe are as follows:

1. Arabic diaspora literature (Mahjar) is more decadent than classical literature.

Quantitatively and qualitatively, Arabic Mahjar or Diaspora Literature is richer than classical literature, and its topics are more diverse than those of the classical and Renaissance periods. The diversity of Arabic diaspora literature is due to the fact that Arab society is increasingly open to external influences from the East and West in modern times. These influences gave birth to various literary movements such as romanticism, realism, symbolism, existentialism, and expressionism. These styles and influences are reflected not only in the topics and contents but also in the form and style. However, the style and genre of classical literature still exist, although they are gradually declining. (Surahman, 2023).

2. Arabic diaspora literature (Mahjar) results from the acculturation of two cultures (East-West).

Arabic diaspora literature (Mahjar) results from the acculturation of two cultures in the East and West, even as multicultural acculturation is supported by diaspora writers' spiritual strength and imagination. In general, the works of this group can be characterized as romantic, humanistic, and often mystical literary works. Regarding the form of expression, Arabic diaspora literature (Mahjar) emphasizes the content of a work's message more than diction. It tends to be free and independent of the rules of creating Arabic literary works, especially in the genre of poetry, which always has a sense and rhymes (with dimensions).

3. Arabic diaspora literature (Mahjar) tends more toward realism.

The themes of realist literature became dominant in developing Arabic diaspora literature (Mahjar), especially in poetry. It tends more toward realism by approaching literary works to social reality. In this context, realism is interpreted as "objectivity," which is opposed in meaning to subjective things. So, the Author must set aside his subjectivity and avoid individual things. (Manshur, 2007).

The characteristics of Mahjar literature are that it emphasizes the content of the

message rather than diction, tends to be more accessible and free from the rules of classical Arabic literature, especially in the poetry genre, and is more reflective and straightforward in terms of expression. The following are themes that Mahjar writers often carry in their works.:

1. A dynamic blend of Eastern spirituality and Western romanticism.
2. Full of longing for the homeland.
3. Complaints about feeling foreign in a new place.
4. Focus on political and social issues in the homeland.
5. Themed on humanitarianism, which knows no boundaries or differences between creatures.
6. Love of nature (Palaloi, 2018).

Arabic Diaspora Literary Figures (Mahjar) in Europe

Some of the Arab diaspora literary figures in Europe are as follows:

1. Khalil Mutran

Khalil Mutran (1872-1949 A.D.) is recorded as the last neo-classical poet in Egypt. Khalil Mutran is a poet who worked in two periods of literary development, namely the neo-classical and romantic periods. He studied at a Catholic school in Beirut. His teacher was Natsif Al-Yazizji. At this school, he began to study Arabic and French culture. In 1900 A.D., he published a bi-weekly tabloid, Al-Majalla Al Misriyya, as a place for his works and also the works of Al-Barudi. In 1903, he began publishing the newspaper Al-Jawab Al-Misriyya, which supported Mustafa Kamil's nationalist movement. (Najib, 2021).

Khalil Mutran worked with Hafiz Ibrahim to translate a book on political economy in France. The translation activity also encouraged him to translate several drama scripts, including the script of Othello by William Shakespeare, which is called Utayl in Arabic. His poem entitled Al-Masa tells about the suffering experienced by the self, both mental and physical. Judging from the Author and its contents, this poem is romantic. (Najib, 2021). The following is an example of the Al-Masa poem by Khalil Mutran:

قصيدة المساء "خليل مطران"

المقطع الأول

داء ألم فيه شفائي

من صبوتي فتضاعفت برحائي

يا للضعيفين استبدا بي وما

في الظلم مثل تحكم الضعفاء

قلب أذابته الصباية والجوى

وغلالة رثة من الأدواء

والروح بينهما نسيم تنهد

في حالي التصويب والصعداء

والعقل كالمصباح يغشى نوره

كدرى ويضعفه نضوب دمائي

المقطع الخامس

ولقد ذكرتك والنهار مودع

والقلب بين مهابة ورجاء

وخواطري تبدو تجاة نواظري

كلمى كدامية السحاب إزائي

والدمع من جفني يسيل مشعشعا

بسنى الشعاع الغارب المترائي

والشمس في شفق يسيل نظاره

فوق العقيق على درى سوداء

مرت خلال غمامتين تحدرا

وتقطرت كالدمة الحمراء

فكأن آخر دمة للكون قد

مزجت بأخر أدمعي لرتائي

وكأنني آنست يومي زائلا

فرايت في المرأة كيف مسائي

The poem above is one of the literary works in the romanticism genre. Psychological, social, and political conditions greatly influence Romanticism in Arabic literature. Romanticism has brought an era of "enlightenment" and self-discovery in

modern Arabic literature in poetry and prose regarding form, content, and spirit (spirit). However, in terms of the form of literary works of poetry, Arabic literature no longer maintains the old model but uses free poetry (Najib, 2021).

In the poem *Al-Masa* by Khalil Mutran, there are elements of romanticism. Namely, the content of the poem tells about me, who is depressed, using words that return to nature by calling himself "I," shows individualism tells about his past hardships, shows primitivism, uses elements of sentimentalism by expressing excessive emotions of sadness and describing life as if it were odd. This means that he describes his life as so depressed as if his life was in darkness. (Najib, 2021).

Khalil Mutran became a famous and excellent writer in modern times. He is one of the poets who greatly influenced Arabic literature. This is because Mutran is one of the Arab writers who lived in France for a long time, so Mutran's return to Lebanon significantly impacted Arabic literature. Mutran is also considered a writer who brought a new concept to Arabic literature because his poems are influenced by Western views, such as Shakespeare and Victor Hugo (Abshor, 2023).

2. Abbas Beydoun

Abbas Beydoun was born in Sur Village, Tyre, South Lebanon, in 1945. He is known as one of the most prominent and essential intellectuals in the Arab world. He is a graduate of Arabic Literature from Lebanese University, Beirut, and he is famous as a poet, novelist, literary critic, and journalist. In the 1970s, he migrated to France and continued his studies at the Sorbonne University, Paris. His studies were completed by receiving a Master of Literature degree. In the writing world, Beydoun has published many poems that have also been translated into several foreign languages, such as Italian, English, German, and French. Beydoun is considered one of the influential people of the second generation of modern Arabic poetry. He writes in simple language but uses complex and layered metaphors and tries to break the relationship between political, social, and literary conventions. (Nifiti, 2020).

Beydoun has also written several novels. The first novel, *Tahlil Damm* (2002), translated by Max Weiss and published by Syracuse University Press under the *Blood Test*, won the Arkansas Arabic Translation Award in 2008. Then, the novel *The Autumn of Innocent*, published by Beirut Dar al-Saqi, also managed to attract the attention of Arab readers, winning the literary category award at the 2017 Sheikh Zayed Book Awards. (Nifiti, 2020).

3. Habib Abdulrab Sarori

Quoted from Wikipedia (2024), Habib Abdulrab Sarori is a computer scientist and novelist from Yemen. He was born in Aden in 1956 A.D. and studied in France, earning a master's degree in Informatics from the University of Paris 6 in 1983 A.D., and then earning a PhD from the University of Rouen in 1987 A.D. Currently, he is a professor at the Department of Mathematics and Software Engineering in Rouen and also at INSA de Rouen. He has published many scientific papers over the past two decades. He is also an author of computer science textbooks.

Abdulrab has published literary works in both French and Arabic. His only French-language novel is *La reine étripée*, published in 1998. Other works include *Suslov's Daughter* and his latest novel, *Arwa*. *Suslov's Daughter* (ابنة سوسلوف) was longlisted for the 2015 International Arabic Fiction Prize, and Darf Publishers published its English translation by Elisabeth Jaquette in 2017. Her short story *The Bird of Destruction* was also published in English translation in *Banipal* magazine, in an issue dedicated to contemporary Yemeni writing. She also authorizes *Production System Engineering* (Wikipedia, 2024).

Suslov's Daughter by Habib Abdulrab Sarori is set in southern Yemen from 1962 to the 2010s through the eyes of its narrator, Imran, a native of Aden. After dying, he finds himself before a figure resembling the Angel of Death, who asks him about his life. The narrator then recounts his love affairs with five women, from a teenager in Aden to a middle-aged man living in Sanaa, the capital of Yemen. He examines Yemen's turbulent history through the lens of his romantic relationships, including the rise and fall of Communism in South Yemen, the rise of

militant Islamists, and the joys and disappointments of the Arab Spring. (Wikipedia, 2023).

Furthermore, it is also mentioned that the novel's title refers to a girl the narrator fell in love with as a teenager. The girl was the Daughter of a high-ranking communist official in South Yemen at the time, nicknamed Suslov after the Soviet statesman Mikhail Suslov. Later, after the unification of North and South Yemen, the girl's father lost his political influence and became very religious. Likewise, as an adult, the Daughter became a Salafi after moving to Sanaa.

Judging from his story, Habib Abdulrab Sarori is a poet of Arabic diaspora literature (Mahjar). It is said that his work is entitled "ابنة سوسلوف" is an Arabic work written while in France and published in 2014. In this Arabic literature, mahjar has many issues circulating. One of them is the problem of language and identity. According to the personal experience of the Yemeni novelist living in France, Habib Abdulrab, who describes the challenges of interacting with a new language and learning opportunities, as well as the role of the writer himself in opening up insights for himself that allowed him to change his relationship with his first identity, and gain a new identity based on positive interactions with others to enrich his personal experience. These positive interactions were conveyed by Habib Abdulrab Sarori in a forum and quoted from the Al-Syarq Al-Awsath website.

4. Osman Engin

Osman Engin is a German writer of Turkish descent. He was born in Turkey; in 1973, A.D. immigrated to Germany when he was 12. He is one of the first generation to go to Germany. He majored in sociology and now lives in Bremen. He started writing at the age of 10. At the age of 12, he had completed his first novel. He can be categorized as a productive and accomplished writer because he often receives awards in literature. The characteristic of his work is in the form of satire. He tries to write about the reality of the lives of Turkish immigrants and how they find it difficult to communicate because they are hampered by language. Until now, his works have been translated into several languages ,

such as French, Canadian, Dutch, and Swedish. (Setiawan, 2010).

His background greatly influences his satirical works. He migrated to Germany at the age of 12. This means that Turkish culture is still very much embedded in him. For him, Turkish is his first language. The language used in his writings is in an everyday style, relaxed, simple, and full of humor. The themes raised in his writings emphasize the characters' daily lives in the story that other Gastarbeiter may also experience. In one of his satirical works, *Tag der Beschimpfung der deutschen Sprache*, Osman writes about the story of the character "Osman," who deals with German as his second language. (Setiawan, 2010).

Because Osman lived in Turkey from childhood until 12, Turkish culture was already very attached to him. That is why his background, significantly as an immigrant, greatly influenced his works. Osman wrote about what happened every day in the form of writing or literary works. There have been many exciting incidents when two ideologies met, such as the first one, and until now, they are still considered second-class citizens in Germany. This way of thinking still sticks to them even though they have become German citizens. (Setiawan, 2010).

In Germany, the Mahjar writers often get terrorized by words like the word "Kanaken," which belittles the Turks—words as sarcastic expressions. In general, Turks must be able to speak German and integrate into German culture. On average, this early generation can only integrate somewhat. Furthermore, the first generation of immigrants finds it difficult to adjust because they were born and raised in Turkey, so Turkish culture is already ingrained. All of these problems lead to existential problems. Because he is still considered a second-class citizen, the problem arises from the early generation of Turks in Germany (Setiawan, 2010). These everyday problems are the inspiration for creating a literary work. Authors from the early generation usually take more themes from their personal experiences as those who came into contact with foreign cultures.

CONCLUSION

Arabic Mahjar literature in Europe began with the arrival of Napoleon in Egypt, who had political and pragmatic goals in 1798 and had a vast influence on the Arab nation. This is simultaneously the cause of the modernization process with all its positive and negative problems. This then gave rise to changes in some of the lives of the Arab nation, starting from political and social life to Arabic literature. Some characteristics of Arabic diaspora literature (Mahjar) in Europe are: Arabic diaspora literature (Mahjar) is more decadent than classical literature, Arabic diaspora literature (Mahjar) is the result of the acculturation of two cultures (East-West), and the themes of Arabic diaspora literature (Mahjar) tend to be more realism. Some of the Mahjar literary figures in Europe include Khalil Mutran, Abbas Beydoun, Habib Abdulrab Sarori, and Osman Engin. The works brought by these Mahjar writers greatly influenced the progress of Arabic literature in the West so that progress can be seen from there.

In compiling this article, the researcher has several limitations, so the results could be better because the study was only conducted on the history and figures of Mahjar Arabic writers. The researcher sees that many things can still be studied from this Mahjar Arabic literature. Therefore, the researcher suggests further research on Mahjar Arabic literature in Europe in terms of its development and influence in the present, the ideology brought by Mahjar writers, and their works. Further researchers can also study Mahjar Arabic literature in other countries.

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