

## **Libraries and Papers of Their Own: Auto/Biography, Memoir, and Arab Women Writers**

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My research aims to demonstrate how the study of lost personal papers, letters, and private libraries of Arab women writers could be immensely conducive to our understanding of Arab feminist dissent as expressed in the genre of auto/biographies and memoirs. It starts with the premise that Arab women writers' and intellectuals' auto/biographies, memoirs, and other forms of written personal narratives are almost always deemed in academic research sites of self-empowerment and socio-politically and culturally situated practices of self-representation in private and public spheres. This approach, I argue, primarily feeds literary scholars' and historians' curatorial urge to canonize, make-known, and contextualize works of Arab women intellectuals inside and outside the Arabophone world but does little in terms of mapping alternative analytical and epistemological trajectories that divert from classic conclusions about the scarcity of archival and written material on Arab women writers and intellectuals. By curatorial urge, I mean the scholarly tendency to collect stories, connect dots, forge plots of historical, cultural, political, and rhetorical relevancies, and find clues in the dynamic lives of Arab women writers and intellectuals to trace afterlives of historical periods. My research argues that such tendencies limit discussions about Arab feminist dissent to conventional dichotomies of self/other, religious/secular, traditional/modern, among others; these tendencies also mask the need to delve into the personal lives of Arab women authors and intellectuals not only for the sake of tracing patterns of empowerment and defiance but also for the purpose of examining how conditions of psychological and material loss, vulnerability, and self-preservation introduce new understandings of forms, movements, and originations Arab feminist dissent.

I believe that studying Arab women writers' and intellectuals' lost private libraries and personal papers will introduce new questions into the study of the genre of Arab feminist auto/biography and memoir: questions that have to do with the availability of archival material, cultural capital, knowledge accumulation, ownership, inheritance, accessibility, collecting, and material loss and how these notions allow for reconceptualizing and breaking conventionally identifiable patterns of Arab feminist dissent. My purpose in highlighting private libraries of Arab women writers is to bring forward a new theoretical approach that disrupts dominant literary and analytical approaches to Arab women writers' lives and works and presents the private library, with its multiple existences and absences, as an intriguing site for exploration. Scholars of modern Arabic literature need to address the under-highlighted status of many Arab women writers in Arabic and world literature anthologies through actively searching for Arab women writers' lives among personal papers, archives, collections, and spaces, such as private libraries.

**Short Biography:** I am currently a first-year doctoral student in Comparative Literature at University of Toronto. My research interests include modern Arabic literature, auto/biographies, memoirs, archival studies, material culture, Arab cultural and intellectual history, private libraries of Arab women writers, feminist epistemology, and political and feminist dissent. I have an MA in English Literature from the American University of Beirut where I taught academic writing and translation courses and worked as the program coordinator of the Center for American Studies and Research (CASAR). My published translations include “Writer and Exile” (by Abdulrahman Munif; in the Journal of World Literature) and “Mohammad Al-Attar: In Conversation With Sonja Mejcher- Atassi,” (in Sa’dallah Wannous: Syrian Playwright and Public Intellectual). I also have a recent article published in Manhajiyat journal about the role of educational leadership in the current Lebanese crisis: <https://www.manhajiyat.com/ar/لبنان-الأزمة-أي-دور-للقيادة-التعليمية؟/مقالات-المجلة>. Besides my academic interests, I am part of the Palestine forum at the University of Toronto and the co-founder of the Feminist Club at the American University of Beirut.