

BOOK REVIEW

Nadine Naber. *Arab America: Gender, Cultural Politics, and Activism*.
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Nadine Naber's *Arab America: Gender, Cultural Politics, and Activism* provides context, cultural understanding, and criticism for what it means to be an Arab American and activist for both insiders and outsiders within the Arab community and academe. This text uses quantitative and qualitative investigation, which will appeal to women's studies centered in both the social sciences and humanities. A reader less familiar with Arab America gains a working historical knowledge as well as a sense of the diversity within this community and readers more familiar with this community gain insights that challenge what they believe to be true.

The methodology and scope of Naber's research focuses on Arab Americans in their twenties in the Bay Area. The majority of her interlocutors are women varying in religious identities and degrees of devotion as well as Arab nation affiliations. The moderate to moderately left political positions of these women and their roles as activists within their Arab American community serves as the lens through which these identities are viewed and shaped in Naber's text. Through Naber's awareness and acknowledgement of the limitations of the scope of her study she creates a text that, by not claiming to represent all of Arab America, conveys the varying and complex identities of Arab Americans.

Arab America represents the diaspora of Arab American culture through the approach to a history that is Arab, American, and Arab American. The displacement of these identities moves beyond a theoretical understanding of Edward Said's orientalism and into its humane embodiment through the coping and navigation strategies of Naber's interlocutors. It is not just the stories of the immigrant generation and the first generation but is the stories of Yara, Aisha, Dahlia, and other twenty-something Arab

Americans and the relationships they have with their parents, one another, and community members. The personalization alongside the historical timeline of Arab communities within the Bay area gives voice to the multitudes found within a micro sampling of a larger group.

One of the strongest components of Nadine Naber's text is the reappropriation of feminism and feminist criticism amongst men and especially women within the Arab American community. Feminist liberation has been used as justification of Western colonization of Arab nations. ". . . racist media images of Arab Muslim patriarchy and misogyny help to consolidate dominant U.S. imperial discourses about an apparently backwards, uncivilized Arab Muslim culture and superior, civilized American culture" (55). The women and world of women in Arab and Muslim America is told *by* the women rather than *for* the women. One example is how the *hijab*, a commonly used signifier of "oppression" by Western feminists, is often considered freeing by Arab women. One of the women interviewed by Naber explains, "People do not judge me for my body but for my mind" (128). The agency and voice of women throughout this text does not depict a group that needs Western intervention liberation but understanding and support.

As any text that attempts to describe an entire population within 254 pages cannot fully address all facets and concerns of the group equally *Arab America* must choose what to introduce and what to expand upon. A reader centrally concerned with queer politics and queer culture in Arab America will find the commentary and information both sparse and tangential. Queer culture and voices occupy few paragraphs towards the ends of the chapters they are mentioned. Naber decides not to directly address the queer Arab activism but to "weave queer Arab narratives throughout the book" (24) and in doing so this community gets lost. The queer community within the Arab American culture achieves acknowledgement and acceptance in Naber's representation but is still lacking strong voice and salient agency.

As a text whose purpose is to question dichotomies and power structures, which inhibit a reimagining of "Arabness" in America, Nadine Naber succeeds as an introduction to these topics through her strong methodological investigation. *Arab America* addresses feminism and feminist activism's relationships to Orientalism and anti-Orientalism in regards to Arab and Muslim cultures with

strong clarity and culturally relative understanding. Though not all voices are able to receive an equal representation throughout this text, Naber makes a conscious effort not to purposely silence any members of the Arab American community; the introduction she does provide to these smaller subsets, such as the queer community, is non-biased and encourages further investigation.

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