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New Wave Arab American Studies: Ethnic Studies and the Critical Turn

Umayyah Cable

Arab America: Gender, Cultural Politics, and Activism. By Nadine Naber. New York: New York University Press, 2012. 320 pages. \$74.00 (cloth). \$24.00 (paper).

Arab and Arab American Feminisms: Gender, Violence, and Belonging. Edited by Rabab Abdulhadi, Evelyn Alsultany, and Nadine Naber. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2010. 408 pages. \$45.00 (cloth).

Arabs and Muslims in the Media: Race and Representation after 9/11. By Evelyn Alsultany. New York: New York University Press, 2012. 272 pages. \$74.00 (cloth). \$23.00 (paper).

Between Arab and White: Race and Ethnicity in the Early Syrian American Diaspora. By Sarah Gualtieri. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009. 296 pages. \$55.00 (cloth). \$29.95 (paper).

Race and Arab Americans before and after 9/11: From Invisible Citizens to Visible Subjects. Edited by Amaney Jamal and Nadine Naber. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2008. 384 pages. \$55.00 (cloth). \$29.95 (paper).

In March 2011 some fifteen hundred activists, artists, academics, and public intellectuals gathered at the University of California at Riverside for the first Critical Ethnic Studies Association (CESA) conference. Its theme—"Critical Ethnic Studies and the Future of Genocide: Settler-Colonialism, Heteropatriarchy, and White Supremacy"—indicated a sense of urgency, as attendees congregated to assess, and even disrupt, the heretofore-established field of ethnic studies. The CESA conference sought to rethink ethnic studies by decentralizing race and ethnicity as primary vectors of analysis and emphasizing instead decolonial, antiracist, queer, Third World, and feminist of color analytics. The sense of rupture and possibility that existed in the CESA conference is evident in the recent publications in Arab American studies under review, including

the work of Nadine Naber, one of the conference organizers. These works represent a turning point within the emergent field of Arab American studies in their departure from the field's origins in postcolonial and area studies, their reclamation of Arab American studies as a distinctly *critical ethnic studies* project, and their careful attention to structures of power.

Situated for many years between the margins of Middle East, American, and ethnic studies, Arab American studies is now claiming its space in relation to these fields. The field originates in the United States in the late 1960s and 1970s with works like *The Arab-Americans*, edited by Elaine Hagopian and Ann Paden, *Arabic-Speaking Communities in American Cities*, by Barbara Aswad, and *Arabs in America: Myths and Realities*, edited by Baha Abu-Laban and Faith Zeadey, followed by major contributions to the field in the 1980s and 1990s with Alixa Naff's *Becoming American*, Michael Suleiman's *Arabs in the Mind of America* and *Arabs in America: Building a New Future*, Evelyn Shakir's *Bint Arab*, and Jack Shaheen's *Reel Bad Arabs*.¹ While the earliest publications in the field grew predominantly out of the social sciences—which their emphases on quantitative data reflect—the 1980s and 1990s saw a notable turn toward more qualitative analyses.

The past two decades have proved challenging for scholars working in the field, in terms of both political context and methodology. As Naber points out in the introduction to *Race and Arab Americans before and after 9/11*, although working in Arab American studies was once considered “academic suicide,” its intellectual and political importance has increased with the rapid expansion of US imperialism after 9/11 (4). The five works reviewed here employ a methodological approach that synthesizes the previously distinct quantitative and qualitative periods within the field while also prompting questions of disciplinarity, institutionalization, and belonging as the field negotiates its position within the academy at large. These texts represent a critical Arab American studies informed by decoloniality, radical feminist of color theory, and queer of color critique, and is invested in anti-imperialist and antiracist coalition-building both within the United States and transnationally. This shift in the field is part of a larger critical turn within ethnic studies, as exemplified by the founding of CESA.

Arab American studies' historical marginalization from ethnic studies largely stems from the history of Arab racial formation in the United States, as outlined in Sarah Gualtieri's monograph. Gualtieri frames her study of Arab American racial formation with the concept of “common knowledge” (3), whereby Arab immigrants were juridically judged as “white” and therefore eligible for US citizenship. This framing is important for understanding the

contemporary paradox of Arab American racial classification, as this conception of common knowledge established the precedent for the questions of in/visibility that permeate the critical turn in Arab American studies. Gualtieri argues that the history of Arab American racial formation, in conjunction with the field's early "emphasis on assimilation, . . . led frequently to an uncritical acceptance of whiteness within Arab American studies" (10), resulting in the field's assumed incompatibility with the neoliberal institutionalization of ethnic studies along racial/ethnic lines.² However, as nearly all these texts demonstrate, Arabs and Arab Americans do not always benefit from white-skin privilege, and as Evelyn Alsultany argues, the particular visual aestheticization of Arabs in media and politics has systematically contributed to the construction of racialized enemies of the US nation. As such, the history and representation of Arabs and Arab Americans are central to ethnic studies' concerns with the hegemonic conception of a "postrace," or color-blind, society alongside the increased criminalization of people of color in the post-9/11 era.

Although anti-Arab racism existed in the United States long before 9/11—as Gualtieri's book demonstrates—the contributors to *Race and Arab Americans* offer perspectives from both sides of the 9/11 temporal fence, as the subtitle itself so poignantly expresses: *From Invisible Citizens to Visible Subjects*. Despite being published between 2008 and 2012 (because of the lengthy publication process), research for several of these texts was well under way in the late 1990s. This is noteworthy given the aforementioned pre-9/11 climate of "suicide" that existed in the American academy with regard to Arab American scholarship. Like Melani McAlister, whose *Epic Encounters* was published coincidentally in September 2001,³ the scholars behind the work in question were already deeply ensconced in vital Arab American research projects well before 9/11.

A helpful starting point from which to approach this new wave of Arab American studies is Naber's introduction to *Race and Arab Americans*, which provides a concise history of Arab racial formation within the social and legal contexts of the United States. The essays that follow offer an array of telling case studies and analyses of issues confronting the Arab American community, ranging from questions of representation in mass media (chapters 8 and 9) to intersectionality and identity politics (chapters 3, 10, and 11), institutionalized racism and civil liberties (chapters 4 and 11), racial formation in diaspora (chapters 2, 5, and 7), and the spectacle of violence as enacted through cultural racism (chapters 6 and 8).

Chapters of particular note are "The Moral Analogies of Race," by Andrew Shryock; "The Prime-Time Plight of Arab Muslim Americans after 9/11," by Alsultany; "Arab Americans and Muslim Americans in the *New York Times*

before and after 9/11” by Suad Joseph, Benjamin D’Harlingue, and Alvin Ka Hin Wong; and Naber’s “Look! Mohammad the Terrorist Is Coming!” Addressing the themes of identity politics, media, and cultural studies, these chapters demonstrate how this holistic, interdisciplinary volume synthesizes much of the previous work done in the field by highlighting both quantitative and qualitative aspects of the volume’s empirical research. For example, Naber’s and Shryock’s anthropological approach employs ethnographic research on Arab American communities in Michigan and California to convey the authors’ commitments to community-based social justice activism. Yet neither Naber nor Shryock focus solely on the social or cultural ramifications of 9/11 on the Arab American community. Both scholars also take into account the emotional dimensions of their research, examining the psychological effects of racism on Arab American youth who struggle to strike balances between notions of authenticity, in/visibility, whiteness, nationalism, and discrimination, or what Naber characterizes as “internment of the psyche” (292). This is also telling in Shryock’s discussion of identity politics within Detroit’s Arab American community, in which he traces the emotional dilemmas that many Arab American youth are painfully familiar with as they negotiate American assimilation and Arab “authenticity” (91). Although disciplinary in terms of their methodologies, Naber’s and Shryock’s essays afford excellent examples of quantitative methods being used for qualitative analysis, resulting in richly interdisciplinary, empirical scholarship. Their essays exemplify a contemporary emphasis on interdisciplinarity within the academy at large in that they represent a synthesis between the field’s distinct early periods of growth from the social sciences and the cultural studies turn.

The chapters by Joseph et al. and Alsultany complement Naber’s and Shryock’s research on identity by exploring some of the structural components that contribute to this psychic internment, namely, representations of Arab Americans in mass broadcast and print media. Examining post-9/11 representations of Arab Americans in prime-time television dramas, Alsultany posits that the televisual discourse of the nation in crisis interpellates viewers by encouraging them to “participate in a form of virtual citizenship [that] serve[s] as a racial project to redefine US borders, U.S. citizens, and the position of Arabs and Muslims vis-à-vis the U.S. nation” (208). This discourse and the racial/racist project that it entails cannot be successful without reinforcement through other media outlets, a point reinforced by Joseph et al.’s scathing analysis of the *New York Times*’ representations of Arab Americans before and after 9/11. Examining the *Times* as a “representational apparatus” that employs rhetoric to frame reality, present decontextualized information as factual, and discredit the

voices of competing interests, Joseph et al. assert that the *Times* has contributed extensively to the racist essentializing of Arab and Muslim Americans (233). The dissemination of this racializing project under the purview of “news” demonstrates the cultural backdrop against which much of the “ripped from the headlines” television dramas of Alsultany’s essay are based.

Many of the circumstances discussed in *Race and Arab Americans* are informed by the history of Arab emigration and entry into the already racialized and violent social and legal landscape of the United States, as historicized in Gualtieri’s *Between Arab and White*. Gualtieri weaves a detailed narrative of the experiences of Arab immigrants in the late nineteenth- to mid-twentieth-century United States, paying close attention to the violent and exclusionary social and legal battles they faced in their struggle for rights and protections under the law, particularly in the Jim Crow South. While the question posed in Gualtieri’s title concerns Arab American “whiteness,” her careful rendering of the lives—and deaths—of Arab immigrants in the United States reveals that the story of their racial formation cannot simply be reduced to the monolithic trope of “becoming white.” Gualtieri argues that such oversimplification relegates the story of Arabs in America to the scrap-metal heap of history, as something to be melted down in the proverbial pot and refashioned into a uniform, liberal-multicultural narrative. Gualtieri argues against this type of rendering of Arab American racial formation largely because of the community’s pervasive attachment to and nostalgia for the homeland vis-à-vis the Arabic conception of *mahjar*, or diaspora (16). This transnational construction of identity manifests through a form of pan-Arab-Americanism, which Gualtieri argues developed in diaspora because of the very circumstances of colonialism and imperialism that forced emigration in the first place (167). It is here that *Between Arab and White* dovetails with a key argument that runs through *Race and Arab Americans*: at the intersections of homeland and host, race and nation, politics and society, there exists the psyches of racialized bodies that are at once ignored and surveilled while they struggle to maintain a sense of Arab self amid the American sociopolitical landscape.

Arab and Arab American Feminisms, edited by Rabab Abdulhadi, Alsultany, and Naber, emerges from the feminist turn of the 1990s—marked by the groundbreaking works of Shakir’s *Bint Arab* and Joanna Kadi’s (editor) *Food for Our Grandmothers*—and in many ways epitomizes the critical turn in Arab American studies.⁴ The volume’s thirty-two intensely personal and rigorous essays on media, forced migration, social justice organizing, pedagogy, and art praxis challenge racism, imperialism, heteropatriarchy, and gendered violence. Using intersectionality as a framework, experiential knowledge as a base, and

creative writing as a vehicle, Arab American feminists reinvent progressivism through a radical inclusionary epistemology. Unapologetically radical in its privileging of feminism and queer politics, *Arab and Arab American Feminisms* asks what Arab American studies would look like if issues of gender and sexuality were at the forefront of the conversation. The volume's essays assert experiential knowledge production as uniquely capable of demonstrating the multiplicity that exists under the reductive, divisive, and sometimes-violent categorizations of "Arab" or "American." The editors note that

there is no single site for Arab and Arab American feminist struggle. . . . [each contributor to the volume] take[s] his or her own history and experience as a point of departure. . . . we are not claiming an Arab or a Muslim exceptionality, but we do argue that historical and contextual factors related to the imperialist relationship between the United States and the Arab world have produced distinct forms of racism against and criminalization of individuals and communities perceived to be Arab or Muslim. . . . By centering the project on experience-based knowledge production, we hope to illuminate the structural forces that influence our lives as Arab and Arab American women, queer and transgender writers. (xxi–xxx)

As this statement indicates, the plural form of the word *feminism* in the book's title signifies a resistance to both essentialism and exceptionalism. For these authors, there is no single definition or representation of their experiences, identities, and struggles; the Arab and Arab American feminist struggle is emphatically plural, and the conception of intersectionality must be adapted to the specifics of their shared subjugation under US imperialism. It is this shared subjection and subjugation that also serves to ally Arab and Arab American feminists to women of color and Third World feminist movements organizing for transnational social justice.

Researched over twelve years, Naber's ethnography *Arab America* (the introduction of which is excerpted in *Arab and Arab American Feminisms*) provides an intimate history of Arab American identity formation and social justice organizing in the San Francisco Bay Area. Naber's chapters guide the reader through a politically contextualized progression of Arab American history while situating her work in relation to diaspora studies and women of color feminisms. In the introduction and chapters 1 and 2, Naber argues that there is an articulation of Arabness in diaspora that manifests itself as a "politics of cultural authenticity" (43). Chapters 3 and 4 focus on the nuances of intra-communal tensions within the Arab Bay Area that resulted from the complex intersectional hierarchies of the specific development of this community, and address the risks and challenges of such a study. Chapters 4 and 5 explore a distinctly queer and feminist rearticulation of Arabness through social justice

activism of the Leftist Arab Movement (LAM) in the 1990s and early 2000s and the movement's accommodation of the growing diversity and changing needs of the community. Lastly, chapter 5 and the conclusion call for a "diasporic Arab feminist critique" and its potential for coalition building beyond masculinist nationalist models of liberation and heteropatriarchal conceptions of social justice activism.

The politics of cultural authenticity are a lens through which to view the latter parts of Naber's study. She argues that women's bodies and behaviors are the battleground on which articulations of Arabness and Americanness fight for primacy in constructing diasporic identities (2). As in *Race and Arab Americans*, Naber's ethnography highlights the affective nature of this battle, pointing to her conception of an "internment of the psyche" (40). More specifically, the politics of cultural authenticity, defined as "a process by which middle-class Arab diasporas come to herald particular ideals as markers of an authentic, essential, true, or real Arab culture" (63), is Naber's articulation of "reverse Orientalism." This term describes a rigid binary imposed by parents and community elders on Arab American youth and second-generation young adults to uphold conceptions of the good, morally superior Arab to ward off degeneration through bad, morally bankrupt Americanization. Naber argues that this reverse orientalism results in a sense of bifurcated identity for second- and third-generation Arab Americans (6).

Naber's first chapter situates her ethnographic research in the historical context of first-generation immigration to the Bay Area, US relations with the Arab world, and the early development of Arab American activism in the Bay Area. Here Naber also addresses the nuances between the first-generation immigrant experience and those of second- and third-generation Arab Americans. Naber further explains her "internment of the psyche" theory in Foucauldian terms, where first-generation Arab immigrants and second-generation Arab Americans developed a disciplinary strategy of self-silencing. Internment of the psyche refers to

a sense that one might be under scrutiny—by strangers, hidden cameras, wiretaps, and other surveillance mechanisms of the security state, as well as invisible arbiters of the legality and normality of behavior, rendering them vulnerable to the "truths" contrived by the state—even if they were engaging in lawful activity. (40)

Under these conditions, Arab immigrants to the Bay Area learned to negotiate their feelings of bifurcation between their racialization as Arabs living inside empire and the Americanness they needed to perform in order to survive.

Through this understanding of psychic internment, Naber guides the reader through the affective experience of Arabs in the Bay Area as they transition from “model minority to problem minority” (25). She asserts that during the 1990s anti-Arab racism dramatically increased because of the “consolidation of US Empire” through its military campaigns in the Persian Gulf and unflinching support of Israel’s settler-colonial and military actions in Palestine (53–55). This resulted in Arab Americans silencing themselves for the sake of emotional and physical survival amid a climate of anti-Arab hate.

Chapter 2 explores the politics of cultural authenticity. The dominant articulation of Arabness that stands out for Naber’s interlocutors is an idealized sense of family, one that provides comfort, community, and security while being deployed for social control. Naber writes that second-generation Arab American youth are subjected to unusually “rigid heteronormative, patriarchal structures of kinship and community” in their family’s attempts to preserve a pure Arab culture (74). A common thread that links Naber’s diverse interviewees to this articulation of Arabness lies in the scrutiny around and enforcement of normative gender and sexuality, particularly the pressure exerted by the nuclear family (and by extension the extended family of this relatively small community) on women and girls to uphold the perceived purity of Arabness in relation to the perceived degeneracy of Americanness (78).

In chapter 3 Naber focuses on an alternative articulation of Arab culture in what she refers to as “Muslim first, Arab second.” The articulation of “Muslim first” destabilizes the racialized logic of Arab cultural authenticity by putting forth a “religiously constituted political consciousness” to challenge the “racism, militarism, and white middle-class assimilation” so prevalent in the Arab Bay Area (113). Naber illuminates a more fluid pan-Muslim solidarity that transcends racial divisions and addresses the relationship between domestic racial justice activism and transnational anti-imperialism. This is just one rearticulation of identity that emerges from Naber’s ethnography, one distinctly focused on coalition building beyond rigid confines of race, ethnicity, or nation.

Following this exploration of cultural authenticity, Naber calls for a “diasporic Arab feminist critique” that “makes central a critique of the power structures of patriarchy and homophobia that are internal to Arab families and communities, while illustrating that these power structures are shaped by a range of intersecting histories and power relations” (109). Naber is acutely aware that any acknowledgment within the Arab and Arab American community of instances of sexism and homophobia risks reifying Orientalism and the justifications for US military intervention and the racist domestic politics

that follow it. The aptly titled chapter 4, “Dirty Laundry,” addresses this concern by examining the intracommunal tensions of the 1990s. Naber cautions that her assessment of the gendered hierarchies within the LAM movement and Arab American community are contingent on “a complex set of diasporic conditions” (161). She writes:

Hierarchies of gender and sexuality were enmeshed within a multitude of power relations, such as those of socioeconomic status, country of origin, immigration status, immigration histories, and histories of political activism [as laid out within the preceding chapters], producing a collision of subjectivities, political visions, and strategies. (159)

Naber’s ethnography charts how specific members of the LAM movement rearticulated Arabness away from a politics of cultural authenticity and toward “a politics of diasporic anti-imperialism,” a critique that was also distinctly feminist and queer in its approach (158). This encompasses what Naber means by a “diasporic Arab feminist critique” that employs experiential knowledge production, transnational feminist solidarities, and cross-coalitional social justice activism to disrupt Orientalist and masculinist nationalisms. A “logic of emergency” had developed in the Arab Bay Area, and so discussions of sexism and homophobia were actively suppressed to avoid any reification of Orientalist and racist stereotypes (195). The silencing that resulted from this tactic was exacerbated by a privileging of what were considered by some LAM activists to be more “authentic” sites of political resistance and urgency, namely, Palestine and Iraq, rendering local issues within the diaspora, such as sexism and homophobia within the movement, “illegitimate [sites] of politics” (196). This internally imposed taboo on the gendered hierarchies of LAM exemplifies the social manifestations of psychic internment and its political implications for social justice activism.

Naber’s final chapter, “Diasporic Feminist Anti-Imperialism,” weaves ethnographic interviews with close readings of the visual, written, and performance art that characterized the feminist turn within LAM at the turn of the twenty-first century. Through grassroots activism, the promotion of artwork as cultural work, and cultural work as political work, the women of Naber’s study worked to “redefine diasporic leftist Arab anti-imperialism as multi-axial” (246). By drawing on their Arab histories alongside their investments in multiple issues and forms of social justice activism—women of color feminism, queer collectivity, prison abolitionism, art praxis, gentrification, and immigration—the participants in Naber’s study “put forth a vision for national liberation that was not reliant on the ideal of a unified nation connected together through

concepts of cultural purity, genealogy, and by implication, heteronormativity” (234). The result, Naber argues, was a broad and distinctly queer and feminist Arab diasporic anti-imperialism.

Alsultany’s *Arabs and Muslims in the Media* is a welcome intervention in the discourse on media representations of Arab and Muslims in the United States. Alsultany argues that “interrelated ‘government and media discourses’ . . . [form] a hegemonic field of meaning” that works to “frame the ways that people across the country thought and talked about the events of 9/11, and the ways that we should respond to such events”; in turn, such a discourse “provided the logic and justification needed to pass racist foreign and domestic policies” (7). Alsultany troubles the idea that all politically significant representations of Arabs and Muslims in media are inherently “bad” (as emphasized, say, in Shaheen’s work) and establishes a theoretical framework for understanding the ideological work done through the construction of “good” representations of Arabs in televisual and governmental discourses. In close readings of prime-time TV dramas, Alsultany puts forth a conception of “simplified complex representations” of Arabs and Muslims, which she argues contribute to the social and political phenomena of “postrace racism,” that is, the notion that US society has overcome racism despite the continued proliferation of racism, both inferential and referential, in society and politics (7). For example, although very shortly after 9/11 there was a surprising and noticeable shift away from the previous one-dimensional televisual representations of Arabs and Muslims toward more sympathetic depictions, these “new” representations coincided with a 1600 percent increase in hate crimes against Arabs and Muslims in the weeks and months after 9/11 (4).

Indeed, Alsultany’s book focuses on “the discrepancy between the proliferation of sympathetic images about Arabs and Muslims and the simultaneous enactment of racist policies and practices that criminalize Arab and Muslim identities” (16). She argues that simplified complex representations produce a “new kind of racism, one that projects antiracism and multiculturalism on the surface but simultaneously produces the logics and affects necessary to legitimize racist policies and practices” (16). Alsultany is astute in examining television and other forms of visual media for her exploration of postrace racism. She argues that the consistent casting of Latinos, South Asians, and actors who otherwise appear “dark,” as Arab or Muslim, “lends itself to the visual construction” and conflation of “brown” with “terrorist” (10). Alsultany’s attention to the visual component of these racialized representations is crucial for understanding mainstream American social support for the war on terror

and increased criminalization of people of color alongside celebrations of a so-called postrace society.

Alsultany organizes her book according to three themes: logics, affects, and challenges. Chapters 1 and 2 focus on representations on television and the ideological negotiation between negative images of “the terrorist” and the production of sympathetic images of Arabs and Muslims, which work to “reproduce logics of exception that are central to the War on Terror and justify the denial of rights to Arabs and Muslims” (16). Chapters 3 and 4 focus on the gendered dimensions of such representations and their accompanying ideological logics and sociopolitical effects. Chapter 5 and the epilogue address the challenges inherent in government, nonprofit, and civil rights organizations’ attempts to regulate the positive-negative binary of representations. Even these well-intentioned interventions, Alsultany argues, can lead to reification of simplified complex representations and postrace racism.

Chapter 1 examines how prime-time TV dramas that focus on torture and the war on terror reinforce support for US imperialism by producing sympathetic representations of Arabs and Muslims as either willing participants in the war on terror or victims of racist, ultrapatriotic acts of violence committed in the name of the war on terror. Alsultany argues that such representations fuel postrace racism by “deflect[ing] attention from the persistence of racist policies and practices post-9/11” (12). Such representations are constructed as complex because they break the preestablished pattern of Arabs and Muslims as solely being represented as “bad,” yet are simplifications in that such representations continue to operate only in relation to terrorism and war.

Chapter 2 focuses on the logic of exceptionalism and its role in the production of “benevolent affect” through sympathetic representations of Arabs and Muslims. Alsultany notes that

beyond the veneer of sympathy, many of the narratives in which these representations are located simply reinscribe, albeit more subtly, the logic that legitimizes suspending Arab and Muslim civil rights. . . . The use of sympathetic representations to create the illusion of a postracial era is how racism operates now, through a denial of itself. (69)

Alsultany argues later in her epilogue that the contemporary postrace discourse fetishizes the election of Barack Obama as president as the starting point of the so-called postrace era. However, as Alustany’s work elucidates, post-9/11 representations of Arabs and Muslims in the media helped reinforce the conception of “postrace” America—and the racism that such a conception allows—*before* the election of President Obama.

Chapters 3 and 4 address the gendered dimensions of simplified complex representations, examining how gender is used to regulate the emotional affects integral to the logics of postrace racism. Chapter 3 is useful for understanding how the notion of postrace intersects with the rhetoric of postfeminism, particularly in relation to the simplified complex representation of the “oppressed Muslim woman,” which serves as the pitiful counterpart to the supposedly “liberated American woman” (83). This chapter illuminates how postrace racism and postfeminist rhetoric collaborate to marshal liberal feminists in the United States in support of US military intervention in the Arab and Muslim worlds under the pretext of “liberation.” This point is viewed from another angle in chapter 4, as Alsultany addresses the consequences of the excessive sympathy produced for the “oppressed Muslim woman,” and how that same sympathy is strictly regulated and in fact discouraged for Arab and Muslim men. Alsultany argues that these representations of men rely on two key facets: decontextualization of the material reality of Arab and Muslim men’s lives, and dehistoricization of how US imperialism affects the context of Arab and Muslim men’s lives. These omissions result, Alsultany argues, in the notion that what moves Arab and Muslim men to commit acts of terror is irrational, unfathomable, and thus futile to attempt to understand.

Alsultany’s final chapter and epilogue address how the simplified complex representations that she demarcates contribute to a narrative of Arab American racial uplift, which further perpetuates postrace racism against Arab Americans. Chapter 5 addresses what Alsultany refers to as “diversity patriotism,” or

a version of American patriotism that glorifies the notion of a diverse citizenry and emphasizes America’s multicultural unity . . . to produce inclusive images and discourses [that] are predicated on minimizing difference and ultimately reproducing restrictive forms of inclusion. (134)

Diversity patriotism performs integral ideological work in that it is crucial to perpetuating support for the war on terror and the enforcement of racist politics and social norms. As such, diversity patriotism is both symptomatic of and reinscribes the phenomenon of postrace hegemony by conscripting Arab American subjects into supporting the racist state that perpetuates their own subjugation. Here Alsultany’s work is markedly allied to the larger political and social aims of ethnic studies and links Arab American studies more closely to broader coalitions of racial justice movements by demonstrating how Arab and Muslim Americans, and their relationships to media and government, are integral to the construction of so-called postrace America.

These recent works assert the value and importance of Arab American studies to both American and ethnic studies projects at large. As Alsultany's and Naber's works in particular demonstrate, the new wave of Arab American studies is especially relevant to ethnic studies, as the latter field reevaluates its political investments and works to cultivate solidarities along lines of decoloniality, racial justice, and anti-imperialism. Testifying to the field's vitality, the University of Michigan recently instituted an Arab American studies minor, making it the first program of its kind in the country. It will be interesting to see how Arab American studies negotiates the aforementioned investments in relation to its own development as a field and its potential institutionalization within the academy. In the meantime, the polyvalent works under review provide scholars with much-needed interdisciplinary analysis of Arab America's negotiation of US racial stratification while also challenging and reimagining political, cultural, methodological, and disciplinary boundaries. This is highly recommended reading for scholars who are not only interested in the critical turn within ethnic studies but also invested in the further growth of Arab American studies as a field. Furthermore, these works solidify the sometimes-precarious relationships between Middle East, American, and ethnic studies by fortifying Arab American studies as a distinct and critical field in its own right.

Notes

1. Elaine Hagopian and Ann Paden, eds., *The Arab-Americans: Studies in Assimilation* (Wilmette, IL: Medina University Press International, 1969); Barbara Aswad, *Arabic-Speaking Communities in American Cities* (New York: Center for Migrational Studies of New York, 1974); Baha Abu-Laban and Faith T. Zeadey, eds., *Arabs in America: Myths and Realities* (Wilmette, IL: Medina University Press International, 1975); Alixa Naff, *Becoming American: The Early Arab Immigrant Experience* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1985); Michael Suleiman, *Arabs in the Mind of America* (Beltsville, MD: Amana Books, 1988); Suleiman, ed., *Arabs in America: Building a New Future* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1999); Evelyn Shakir, *Bint Arab: Arab and Arab American Women in the United States* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1997); Jack Shaheen, *Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People* (Northampton, MA: Interlink, 2001).
2. Ibrahim Aoudé, "Arab Americans and Ethnic Studies," *Journal of Asian American Studies* 9.2 (2006): 141–55.
3. Melani McAllister, *Epic Encounters: Culture, Media, and U.S. Interests in the Middle East since 1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).
4. Joanna Kadi, ed., *Food for Our Grandmothers: Writings by Arab-American and Arab-Canadian Feminists* (Boston: South End, 1999).