

Hornung, Alfred, and Martina Kohl, eds. *Arab American Literature and Culture*. American Studies. A Monograph Series. Volume 199. Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag WINTER, 2012. 299 pages. ISBN 978-3-8253-5891-4. €45.00

This highly informative and accessible book, which represents a significant attempt to promote a multivocal, transnational, and interdisciplinary discussion around the topic of Arab American Literature and Culture, will be of great value to scholars and researchers in the field.

The book consists of a preface and thirteen essays in which the authors explore a plurality of issues, among others recent developments in Arab American literature, the legal status of Arabs in the U.S. after 9/11, the transnational networks of Arab migrant families in the Americas and the Caribbean, the role of performance in contemporary Arab American theater and poetry, the history of mosque architecture in the U.S. Of particular value are observations on the politics of identity formation and representation, especially when identity is considered intersectionally with gender, class, race, religion. Some of the authors, more specifically, examine the stereotypical depictions of Arabs in Western media and the entertainment industry; they suggest, moreover, that this depiction becomes more complicated and multi-layered when Arab American writers and filmmakers start to craft their own image of Arab (American) identity and culture.

Lisa Suhair Majaj's essay on the origins and developments of Arab American literature is a particularly welcome contribution in the collection. Her excellent analysis of the emergence and recognition of Arab American literature in the ethnic literary panorama of the U.S. is detailed and critical. For example, her careful reading of a selection of Naomi Shihab Nye and Suheir Hammad's poems helps readers recognize the innovative and original literary output of these authors as crucial contributions to the canon of U.S. (ethnic) literature. Similarly, Alex Lubin's essay on the transnational networks of identification and solidarity among refugees in Palestine, Haiti, and New Orleans, is another significant and compelling contribution, as it considers economic asymmetries on a global scale and introduces the reader to a genealogy of Afro-Arab politics.

The book covers a long historical period spanning from the end of the 19th century to the present day and makes fascinating connections between disciplines. In particular, the volume successfully captures the challenges faced by Arab Americans, and, more in general, Arabs worldwide, after

9/11. As the editors explain in the preface that opens the volume: “The radical measures taken by the George W. Bush administrations, with the severe restrictions on personal rights, resulted in an increasing amount of racial profiling, often directed at the visibly ethnically different members of American society, especially Muslims” (1). Confronted with a series of new forms of discrimination and aggression that were directed against them, Arab Americans developed a set of creative counter-strategies to oppose the circulating stereotypes, claim their space in American society, and forge a more positive and less threatening image of Arab (American) identity and culture. Hence, on the one hand, the empirical material presented by the various authors suggests that Arab Americans have been an easy target for hate crimes, discriminations, and civil right infringements after 9/11; on the other, however, the essays collected in this volume further provide fascinating evidence as to the capacity of Arab Americans to promote their cultural achievements, change negative perceptions both nationally and transnationally, and build networks of intercultural and interracial alliances on a local and global scale.

The volume benefits from a tremendous breadth of coverage; at times, however, it felt somewhat disorienting to read an essay on a task-based project on Muslim Americans in an ESL German classroom followed by a critical and theoretical analysis of Arab American literature. Moreover, as is often the case in critical analyses of Arab American literature, most of the contributions in this volume focus on the sociological and political content of the works under examination, overshadowing the aesthetic qualities and achievements of the literary texts considered. Still, on the whole, *Arab American Literature and Culture* represents a valuable collection that initiates the reader to the history of Arab American literature and culture and illustrates some of the tensions particularly racial and religious ones that have characterized Arab American experience in the U.S. in the last century and particularly after 9/11.

This collection is a highly readable book that provides a variety of perspectives on Arab American literature and culture for both academics and interested readers alike. It is suitable for use in both graduate and undergraduate courses.

Lisa Marchi

University of Trento