

***Immigrant Narratives: Orientalism and Cultural Translation in Arab American and Arab British Literature.* By Wail S. Hassan. Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press. 2011. xvi, 259 pp. Cloth, \$73.00; paper, \$31.95; e-book available.**

***Contemporary Arab-American Literature: Transnational Reconfigurations of Citizenship and Belonging.* By Carol Fadda-Conrey. New York: New York Univ. Press. 2014. x, 243 pp. Cloth, \$89.00; paper, \$23.00; e-book available.**

Important studies on Arab American identity and anti-Arab sentiment have proliferated since 9/11. The trend has invited many scholars in the field of Arab American studies to locate the roots of Arab American experience in US Orientalist yearnings that render them as the racialized, gendered, and sexualized “other.” This conceptualization of Arab Americans relies on a sociocultural framework that positions them as a minority wrestling with assimilation, acculturation, alienation, and exclusion. It is predicated on a theoretical understanding imposed by using the “national” as the primary category of analysis. What happens when this category is unsettled?

The second decade of the twenty-first century has witnessed the rise of what could be considered the transnational turn in the field of Arab American studies. Works such as Nadine Naber’s *Arab America* (2012), Jacob Berman’s *American Arabesque* (2012), Hani Bawardi’s *The Making of Arab Americans* (2014), Salim Yaqub’s *Imperfect Strangers* (2016), and Pamela E. Pennock’s *The Rise of the Arab American Left* (2017) examine the Arab American diasporic experiences at different historical stages, ranging from the nineteenth century to the various periods of the twentieth century and post-9/11 era. The common ground in these works lies in the writers’ shared interests in locating their divergent questions concerning the Arab American community in a transnational context. Both Wail Hassan’s *Immigrant Narratives* and Carol Fadda-Conrey’s *Contemporary Arab-American Literature* contribute to this trend through critical readings of Arab immigrant and Arab American literatures. While Hassan’s framework consolidates a transnational reading of the Arab immigrant translational narrative both in the United States and in Britain, Fadda-Conrey’s transnational emphasis emerges at the intersection of generational differences among Arab American literary writers and their characters in imagining one’s citizenship and belonging.

The guiding argument in Hassan’s work is that Arab immigrants writing in English, willingly or reluctantly, have assumed a translational mission wrapped with varied, sometimes conflicting, responses to the Western heritage of Orientalism. His work exhibits analysis of key literary works and themes produced by Arab immigrants in the United States in three distinct

historical periods. The author challenges the celebration of early Arab American literary figures (1900–1920) like Ameen Rihani, Khalil Gibran, and Abraham Rihbany through a critique of their diasporic role as cultural translators, locating them at the intersection of “the native informant” and “the foreign expert” (29). He then examines works produced by Salom Rizk and George Hamid as representative of a period (1930s–1960s) that severely limited Arab immigration as a result of the nationality-based Johnson-Reed Act (1924). These works, he argues, reflected the assimilationist mood of the time by departing from earlier Arab immigrant interest in fostering cross-cultural understandings to capturing immigration success stories, narrated through a sense of US patriotism, filled with Orientalist imagery of their original homeland.

*Immigrant Narratives* sheds lights on the third period (1970s through the present), which marks the rise of many Arab immigrant writers in both the United States and the United Kingdom, with a sense of identity marked by conscientious and transnational critiques of hegemony and power. This includes critiques of Zionism in the Palestinian American autobiographies of Edward Said, Aziz Shihab, and Fawaz Turki and engagements with the discourses of US Orientalism and Muslim feminism in the Egyptian American autobiographies of Ihab Hassan and Leila Ahmed. Other issues of transnational significance to the work are politics of empire as featured in Egyptian British Ahdaf Soueif’s works; religiosity in the Muslim immigrant literature of Sudanese Scottish Leila Aboulela; and queerness in the fiction of Jordanian American Ramzi Salti and Lebanese American Rabih Alameddine.

Whereas Hassan’s work falls short in exploring with more depth the existing narratives in Arab American contemporary literature, Fadda-Conrey’s book fills the gap through a comprehensive reading of novels, essays, poems, memoirs, short stories, plays, and visual art produced since the 1990s that register transnational modes of representation of Arab American identity and citizenship. The multigenerational nature of Arab American characters selected for analysis in this work forges a space for the possibility of new portrayals beyond the rigid boundaries of US Orientalism that Hassan showcases in early Arab American writings. This space provides a sense of empowerment for Arab Americans, one implicated in firm assertions of US citizenship and simultaneous rejection of its nationalistic and exclusionary demands to amputate any sense of belonging to their Arab homelands. Arab American writers, Fadda-Conrey argues, engage with the same tools often used to otherize them—that is, racial, religious, national, political, and gendered—and produce new narratives of US citizenship and belonging that transcend its homogenizing and hegemonic sense of imperative patriotism.

*Contemporary Arab-American Literature* advances this transnational framework in four thematic clusters. Fadda-Conrey first examines representations of distant memories of the Arab homelands as initially shared by first-generation immigrants and later recorded in literary forms by a long list of second- and

third-generation Arab Americans that includes Lawrence Joseph, Therese Saliba, Suheir Hammad, Naomi Shihab Nye, and Diana Abu-Jaber. This illustrates the power of parents' and grandparents' nostalgia and transnational sense of belonging on the writers' conception of their identity as Arab Americans. Then, the author adopts the term *rearrivals* to denote the temporary journey of second- and third-generation Arab American characters to ancestral homelands, as portrayed in works of Arab American writers such as Mohja Kahf, Samia Serageldin, Pauline Kaldas, and Muaddi Darraj. Meanwhile, she explores the effects of wars and tensions in the Arab world on the development of "antinostalgic" (27) perspectives and the emergence of translocality in the literature of Patricia Sarrafian Ward, Haas Mroue, Rabih Alameddine, Etel Adnan, Edward Said, Laila Halaby, and Randa Jarrar. She also examines the echoes of 9/11 in Arab American identity formations as registered in works by Dima Hilal, Rabab Abdulhadi, and Yussef El Guindi, to name but a few. Fadda-Conrey envisions the transnational configurations of Arab American citizenship to challenge binaries and generate "a particularly American type of Arabness or, even more so, an Arab type of Americanness" (85).

Although not meant to be comprehensive surveys or historical accounts of the Arab American literary tradition, the two works offer a critical conceptual map of the development of Arab diasporic creativity and serve as complementary sources for learners and researchers interested in the topic. The timeliness of these projects responds to a moment in demand for further exploration of the transnational nature of the Arab American experience, given the contemporary politics of instability in the Arab world and the rising sense of anti-Arab paranoia in the West.

**Waleed F. Mahdi** is an assistant professor at the University of Oklahoma with a joint affiliation in the Department of International and Area Studies and the Department of Modern Languages, Literatures, and Linguistics. He is a comparatist with research and teaching interests in US-Arab cultural politics. His current book project explores the representation of Arab Americans in Hollywood, Egyptian, and Arab American filmmaking, comparing the politics and portrayal of identity, belonging, and cultural citizenship in each.