“Transnational Arab American Feminist Studies”

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Since its articulation in the early 1990s, Arab American/Arab Canadian Feminist Studies has been deeply indebted to Said’s critique of Orientalism, as well as to the emerging fields of Arab and transnational feminisms, and gender and sexuality studies. Feminist scholars have sought to gender Orientalism, and to situate their critique at the intersections of American ethnic studies, postcolonialism, and third world feminism in their efforts to anthologize and theorize what has become known as Diasporic Arab Feminism. As Nadine Naber asserts, this field is “entangled in multiple forms of power--such as the structures of religion, class, gender, sexuality, and immigration, as well as the changing realities of US racial politics, and constructions of citizenship and belonging.” In this sense, Transnational Arab (North) American Feminist Studies--through literature, history, theory, and creative expression—epitomizes and negotiates the tensions inherent in Transnational American Studies, particularly in its relationship to the Middle East (MENA). As Arab American feminist scholars and writers who have participated in the articulation and re-articulation of the field, we will examine how feminists have sought to gender Orientalism, to critique the unequal exchanges inherent in transnational processes, and to understand how postcolonial theory, the diasporas of Empire, and post-9/11 politics have shifted the field of American Studies to become more transnational and inclusive. What can we learn from Transnational Arab American Feminism in terms of the shifts in American Studies prescribed by Said? In what ways does transnationalism allow us to examine intersectionalities, complexities, linkages, and solidarities within and across national borders? Or is the Transnational another form of US hegemony, as some have suggested? And with diasporic movements how much does locational politics influence the mobility of these travelling theories?

Therese Saliba, Evergreen State College, Washington, USA “Arab American Feminisms: From Unspeakable Subjects to Transnational Feminist Solidarities” From the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon to post-9/11 politics, Arab American feminists have negotiated the fissures, silencing, and solidarities within broader US feminist movements. Critiques of Orientalism, Imperialist Feminism, and particularly Israeli policies were often cast as unspeakable, or as divisive to feminist movements. This paper argues that Arab American feminists, inspired by Edward Said and a range of feminist writers, have brought these issues to the forefront, thereby opening up significant spaces in transnational feminist scholarship and activism. In the post-9/11 era, US transnational and women of color feminists have shown increasing attention to and solidarity with Arab issues in their writing, theory, and activism, contributing further to the visibility and legitimacy of these issues. I will examine these new (and some cases long-standing) points of feminist solidarity, their transracial and transnational linkages, and how they provide new ways of looking at complex identities impacted by war, internal repression, and multiple forms of violence.