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RHODA KANAANEH, *The Right Kind of Suffering: Gender, Sexuality, and Arab Asylum Seekers in America* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2023). Pp. 216. $90.00 cloth. ISBN 9781477326381.

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With the increasing surge of regional and transnational anti-migrant and anti-refugee discourses and policies in North America, Rhoda Kanaaneh's new book *The Right Kind of Suffering* arrives with a timely ethnographic intervention on the politics of asylum in the US context. Looking at gender, race, and nationality registers, Kanaaneh's book carefully reveals systems of oppression facing Arab-speaking asylum seekers in the US in the past decades, allowing her experience as an Arabic interpreter during her postgraduate studies to guide this journey and bringing attention to the lived experiences of migrant and refugee communities arriving to the US from the Middle East. As readers, we are invited to witness policies of systematic racial othering, orientalist misconceptions, retraumatizing tropes, class hierarchy, and prolonging delays that shape the asylum system in the US, affecting the everyday lives of Suad, Fatima, Fadi, and Marawa, whom we are introduced to in the book, as well as many asylum seekers of color fleeing forced genital mutilation, domestic violence, statist homophobic arrests, and (post)colonial wars in their home countries. Kanaaneh's book is a valuable archive and accessible ethnography on the study of migration, border regimes, and asylum policies in the US in recent years. Kanaaneh's reflective ethnographic account acknowledges what she frames as her "complicit" role as an Arabic interpreter in retraumatizing Fatima and others throughout their asylum processes in the US (50).

The book is divided into six chapters. In the introduction, readers learn about Kanaaneh's motivation to write the book as an intern in her postgraduate studies when she was asked to assist her professor with the Arabic translation of interviews with asylum

seekers. Kanaaneh shares that these meetings and connections left a mark in her memory and compelled her to embark on an in-depth ethnographic study of the asylum regime in the US, specifically with Arab-identifying asylum seekers from Sudan, Egypt, Jordan, and Lebanon. Each chapter delves into their journeys in the US asylum system from the early nineties until contemporary times under Joe Biden's administration. Kanaaneh reminds her readers that the anti-migration and racist policies towards migrants and refugees in the US go far beyond Trump's Muslim ban and shows how these laws and policies have only gotten worse since then. Kanaaneh retells the stories of her interlocutors with reflexive awareness of her positionality as an Arabic interpreter and an offspring of migrants herself, which provides the book with a priceless perspective for scholars and practitioners in migration, asylum politics, and queer migration studies.

A significant theme in Kanaaneh's ethnography is class politics and its interconnected relationship with asylum regimes and racial Othering in approving or obstructing (Black and brown) asylees' applications into the US asylum regime. This is particularly illustrated by Fatima's asylum case, which is introduced in the second chapter. Fatima is perhaps the sole English-illiterate asylee we are introduced to in the book, with no connections or social capital despite her wealthy and abusive husband. Fatima's lack of IT skills and social capital did not allow her to access the needed networks of friends and contacts who helped the rest of the other asylees mentioned in the book: Suad, Fadi, and Marwa—all of whom benefited from their middle-class background and social capital despite their poverty. Fatima, on the other hand, experienced poverty, illiteracy, and lack of networks and support while also navigating the racial and gendered politics of asylum regimes since her arrival to the US. Nevertheless, Kanaaneh complicates this discussion of middle-class politics by showing her readers that Suad, Fadi, and Marwa's relatively privileged backgrounds shifted as soon as they crossed borders to the US, rendering them unable to successfully access the job market, afford precarious economic austerity policies, or hire migration lawyers to sort out their paperwork.

A second key concern Kanaaneh introduces in the book is what she calls "geographic homogenization" in the US asylum regime, where "applicants are incentivized to flatten their accounts of their countries by presenting them as oppressive everywhere, all the time" (28). This policy is particularly demonstrated by Suad, Fadi, and Marwa's asylum cases. Suad, introduced to us in the first chapter, fled Sudan and applied for asylum in the US as a survivor of what is known

in Arabic as *khitan,* or forced genital mutilation (FGM). Kanaaneh shares how the pro bono lawyers prepared Suad to "achieve a delicate balance between being well prepared and being over-rehearsed" to fit such white savior narratives (26). In one of the "role-playing" rehearsals with her lawyers, Suad shares she "was more comfortable walking and working [in Sudan] at the lab in trousers" (26). Suad's lawyers advised her against framing her description of Sudan as progressive and liberal. Similarly, Fadi and Marwa, introduced to us in chapters two and four, were taught by their lawyers to "flatten" their narratives and avoid sharing positive experiences in their home countries. Citing Spivak, Kanaaneh indicates that both Fadi and Marwa were granted asylum through "strategic essentialism" (96), focusing on prison experiences, as in the case of Fadi, and domestic abuse, as in the case of Marwa. Like Suad, Fatima also had to memorize telling her story about domestic violence, where pro bono lawyers taught her to "reduce nuance and eliminate uncertainties" (53).

A third prominent theme Kanaaneh investigates in the book engages with queer migration literature, where she critiques US imperial "rescue narratives" that perpetuate LGBTQ persons' victimization, especially those coming from Third World countries, including the Middle East region. Kanaaneh outlines how Fadi's nostalgia for his family in Jordan and his wishes to visit them were discouraged by his lawyers, warning him that these visits would further weaken his application (104) as a fugitive from his homophobic experience as a former prisoner in Jordan. Kanaaneh demonstrates how (white) rescue narratives inherent in the US asylum regime perpetuate LGBTQ persons' victimization, especially those coming from Third World countries, including the Middle East. Similarly, Marwa, who identifies as "Lebanese, Shia, and queer" (119), was discouraged by her lawyers from using the term "queer" instead of "lesbian" since there is "no room for queer in the law" (124), forcing her to use the mainstream liberal heteronormative terminology that police and discipline Middle Eastern sexualities into "gays and lesbians" who are in need of saving from Western states. Throughout the book, Kanaaneh reveals the process in which asylum courts perpetuate binary and racialized narratives of demonized Third World countries and their cultures, rendering the US in comparison as a civilized savior Western state.

In conclusion, Kanaaneh complicates the stories of Suad, Fatima, Fadi, and Marwa with great care and attention to her positionality as both an Arabic interpreter and ethnographer, showing how the asylum regime in the US gives priority to "saving" asylum seekers based on gender and sexual violence, over political claims and

prosecutions. Kanaaneh's ethical reflections woven carefully into the pages are refreshing, inviting readers to witness yet another ethnographic investigation of the asylum regimes in the US from Clinton's era through Bush, Obama, Trump, and until today under Biden's administration. The book is a valuable addition to the growing literature on the gendered and racial politics of asylum regimes in the US, queer migration, and Arab American studies. It is an accessible resource for undergraduate and graduate courses on migration and gendered politics in the US and North American contexts. Having said that, the book could have benefited from a broader discussion of racial politics, border regimes, and borderlands by engaging with relevant literature and ethnographies addressing similar lived experiences of non-Arab communities and racialized migrant communities encounter in the US. This approach might help situate US migration politics toward Arabs and Muslims from the Middle East within larger anti-migration and anti-refugee policies targeting other migrant of color communities. Similarly, Suad's chapter is an excellent opportunity to highlight Black Arab subjectivities within asylum narratives, especially in relation to her sentiments about assimilation to citizen aspirations in the US. Apart from these suggestions, *The Right Kind of Suffering* extends a valuable resource for academics, activists, and practitioners on racial and gendered politics of migration and asylum regimes in the US in the past decades.