The field of comparative ethnic studies has seen a change in focus from approaches that underline commonalities in the experiences of ethnic groups to emphases on processes of comparative racialization. Some of the areas of inquiry that are starting to benefit from this shift—whose theoretical paradigms have been developed and refined by a number of scholars, such as Grace Kyungwon Hong and Roderick A. Ferguson—include Arab American and African American studies. Theri A. Pickens’s book, *New Body Politics: Narrating Arab and Black Identity in the Contemporary United States*, explores how this new focus can transform traditional approaches to both fields.

Focusing on Arab American and African American experiences of embodiment, this book analyzes how corporeality shapes and is shaped by the complex sociopolitical figurations of race, gender, class, ability, and sexuality. Specifically, Pickens’s work probes the significance of embodied experiences such as breathing, touch, illness, pain, and death, in the production of discourses around the body and its symbolic connection to family and nation-state. The focus on the body as a reflection of the individual and the emphasis on the liberating possibilities associated with corporeal fragility, Pickens argues, mediate a critique of hegemonic institutional structures, normative social practices, and oppressive forms of national belonging.

The book is divided into five chapters, in addition to the introduction and the conclusion. While three of these chapters focus on a single author or cultural figure, the remaining two juxtapose Arab American and African American authors. The first chapter, "Respiring Resistance: Suheir Hammad's Invocation of Breath," examines Suheir Hammad's poetry collections, namely *Born Palestinian, Born Black, ZaatarDiva*, and *breaking poems*, to show how this poet uses breath to denounce and resist oppressive forms of silencing pertaining to the occupation of Palestine. Stressing the influence of black feminist poetics and hip hop, Pickens analyzes breath as a metaphor for resistance to antiblack and anti-Arab racism. She also examines the links displayed in Hammad's poetry between Arab and black bodies and their position vis-à-vis nationalist discourses to show how embodiment serves to problematize political and racial ideologies relating to Arab Americans and African Americans. The second chapter, "Try a Little Tenderness: Tactile Experience in Danzy Senna and Alicia Erian," takes the notion of embodiment in the direction of touching to probe its role in disrupting the homogeneity of narratives of national belonging and projections of racial hierarchies. Pickens focuses on Senna's *Symptomatic* and Erian's *Towelhead* (and the filmic interpretation of that novel) to probe the power dynamics and political significance underlying instances of touching mixed-race characters' bodies, recuperative self-touching, or the healing touch by women.

The third and fourth chapters examine the ways in which bodily illness in Arab American and African American narratives allows for a renegotiation of national ideologies in relation to various forms of exile and displacement. The third chapter, "Unfitting and Not Belonging: Feeling Embodied and Being Displaced in Rabih Alameddine's Fiction," draws on novels such as *Koolaidas: The Art of War and The Hakawati: A Story* to probe Alameddine's formal and thematic experimentation with notions of displacement, exile, caring, cure and patients. Framing her analysis through W. E. B. Du Bois's and Moustafa Bayoumi's questions about nation and belonging, Pickens shows that Alameddine's representation of the hospital space implies that "healing and belonging are neither desirable nor necessary" for "othered" subjects (12).
The fourth chapter, "Beyond 1991: Magic Johnson and the Limits of HIV/AIDS Activism," probes the representation of Magic Johnson's body in narrative, using Johnson's autobiographies, various media accounts and articles relating to this figure, as well as a music video, in an attempt to understand "embodied" tensions surrounding his illness "amid contradictory narratives about Blackness, athleticism, and subjectivity" (111). In the final chapter, "The Big C Meets the Big O: Pain and Pleasure in Breast Cancer Narratives," Pickens examines Audre Lorde's and Evelyne Accad's breast cancer narratives. Through her in-depth analysis of these texts, the author unravels how representations of bodies in pain operate on the ethical, erotic, and political levels. In this respect, Pickens probes how Accad's and Lorde's extensive focus on the social, political, and gendered dimensions of illness and corporeality offers a platform to renegotiate power relations, environmental concerns, and sexuality.

Pickens's analysis highlights, through the use of multiple examples from Arab American and African American literature and culture, the sociopolitical implications of a redefined focus on elements of corporeality. This strategy provides a nuanced understanding of how literary and cultural texts attend to the specific conditions of their production and circulation while remaining open to the logic of comparativity Pickens's attention to the formal structure of the texts she analyzes adds a crucial dimension to the book, working against the transformation of these texts into mere sociological documents or their treatment as "typical" reflections of the ordeals of one particular group or another. On a related note, Pickens's critical approach reflects a rigorous sensitivity to the poetics of literary and visual production, as her powerful discussion of the mechanics of "respirating resistance" in Hammad's work, for instance, shows.

Pickens's stress on the interconnected political, social, and economic factors playing into the ways ethnic bodies are represented and the ways in which they resist oppression illustrates the generative forces unleashed by comparative studies of corporeality. While her choices of literary texts cogently elucidate Pickens's argument, the methodological impetus behind the discussion of some works, such as Evelyne Accad's The Wounded Breast: Intimate Journeys through Cancer, under the rubric of "Arab Americanness" is not particularly evident. A section on how Accad's work expands definitions of literary "Arab Americanness" would have been particularly relevant in this respect. Perhaps addressing this question would have helped negotiate larger theoretical tensions underlying the use of terms such as "black and Arab" as ethnic signifiers in the context of the United States. But to point out these issues only further attests to the rich and layered character of the critical conversations this book initiates. Through its original analysis of the complex dimensions of corporeality, fragility, and ethnicity, New Body Politics makes a significant intervention in the fields of American studies, comparative ethnic studies, literary and cultural studies, disability studies, gender studies, and phenomenology.

Sirène Harb
American University of Beirut