

Namesake: Reflections on a Warrior Woman

N. S Nuseibeh

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N. S. Nuseibeh's *Namesake* is a brilliant collection of essays threaded together by reflections on an early Muslim warrior.

Nuseibeh's family members believe they are direct descendants of Nusaybah bint Ka'ab, one of the first women to convert to Islam in seventh-century Arabia, who accompanied and defended Muhammad during battle. Reflecting on stories from Muslim canon, the book links these to Nuseibeh's life as a British Palestinian woman, exploring topics of identity, anxiety, and cuisine.

Each essay is both personal and general, starting from the former to draw connections to the latter. "Warrior, Worrier" is about anxiety, both how it affects Nuseibeh's personal life and how Palestinians have the highest levels of anxiety in the Middle East. "Aubergines" begins by recounting Nuseibeh's relationship with food, and then expands to explore how food remains a gendered issue and the ways in which food is crucial to preserving cultural identity. Scholars and experts in the respective topics are appealed to, including Mona Eltahawy and Noam Chomsky, as are studies and statistics.

The prose is beautiful and evocative. Its lyrical imagery involves all of the senses: when recounting a dinner party, Nuseibeh describes the way the music sounded, the textures on the table, and the flavor of the food. Metaphors are frequent and stunning, connecting a Palestinian meal to home for instance, or every new religion to a seed that grows into a tree. Wordplay is also present: the essay on anxiety plays on the opposites established by Nusayba (warrior) and Nuseibeh (worrier).

Namesake is a raw and dazzling essay collection about identity and how the personal is inseparable from the general.

CAROLINA CIUCCI (July / August 2024)

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