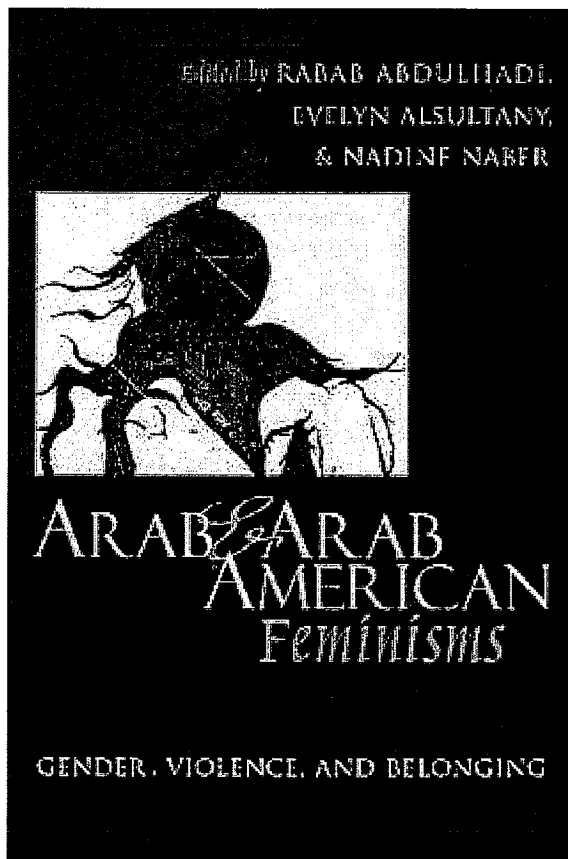


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REVIEW: Arab & Arab American Feminisms

by: [Amanda Quraishi](#) on April 14th, 2011 | [3 Comments](#) »



When I received my copy of *Arab & Arab American Feminisms* I wasn't quite prepared for the expanse of thought and emotion contained within its unassuming cover. My expectation was that it would be a collection of 'get to know us' stories written by Arab American women, designed to appeal to a paranoid American audience. What I found instead was a collection of some of the most heartfelt stories, persuasive arguments and bold declarations of individuality that I've read in any other collected volume.

Arab & Arab American Feminisms brings together writers, poets, scholars, and activists and provides them a space to define themselves individually and collectively as women, Arabs, Muslims, and feminists as well as an infinite combination of other facets each of these contributors embodies.

Writing frankly on topics ranging from politics to domestic violence to homosexuality, *Arab & Arab American Feminisms* puts to rest any doubt that Arab women are an intellectual force to be reckoned with. This is not an attempt to promote

any "kumbaya" interfaith/intercultural dialogue, or to extend an olive branch to those who might view Arabs and Arab women with anything but respect. It is a declarative statement made with multiple voices that the Arab woman's soul is above and beyond simplistic definitions – and that they do not need anyone's assistance to claim what is theirs.

In the introduction the editors emphatically state, "We part ways with conventional women's studies approaches that attribute any victimization of women, regardless of the cause, to gender inequality..."; while further on they say, "We share the postcolonial feminist critiques of the 'sisterhood is global' model. This critique contends that there is no universal woman's experience and that 'the category of women is constructed in a variety of political contexts that often exist simultaneously and overlaid on top of one another.'"

Whether you agree with the political statements or academic conclusions drawn by the contributors, the reader is genuinely compelled to respect their voices. It is clear that they are all writing with passion. These are not the pitiful Arab or Muslim women you see in prime time news exposés about the plight of women in the Middle East. These are women with the ability to simultaneously cherish and criticize their own culture without rushing into the arms of a patronizing, but oh-so-willing-to help western-style feminism.

I recommend this book to anyone raised in the west that truly wants to understand the point of view of Arab or Arab-American women. Be prepared to read viewpoints that will challenge preconceived ideas. Diplomats did not write this book, and it's not meant to soothe western insecurities. Rather, it is a powerful and refreshing look at a culture that we still know so little about and the women who insist on defining it for themselves.

Arab & Arab American Feminisms: Gender, Nation, and Belonging is available online now through Syracuse University Press.



3 Responses to "REVIEW: Arab & Arab American Feminisms"

says: Billie Knighton April 15, 2011 at 5:40 am

Yes! This review reminds me of women speaking out during UN Decade for Women meetings, arguing to be heard in their own authenticity and objecting to what they regarded as Western "maternalism."

says: Aminah Carroll April 21, 2011 at 4:35 am

What a terrific review and enticement to read the book! It seems disconcerting to me that there is not a rush to actually a stampeded. given your salient points, to acquire this book and to respond to your points, Amanda.

That there is mainly silence on this thread is to me an indication of the almost unassailable wall of hostility to Arab women and to muslim women being percieved as anything OTHER than victims and paeons.

This book has just becme a must red for me, thanks to your depictive essay of its essentiality as contemporary reading for authentic cultural engagement, not just for gender studies but for humanities.

says: Rehmat May 2, 2011 at 3:57 pm

The so-called "women Rights" supporters in the West – have the habit of projecting feminists around the world, who provide cover to western exploitation of female population. The Muslim woman, who received the glowing tributes from many immoral secularist and anti-Islam political leaders and 'intellectuals' – was Iranian Shirin Ebadi, who even received Nobel Peace Prize in 2003 – for her criticism of Islamic regime in Iran.

Pity, our Canadian feminist, Irshad Manji, the lesbian darling of anti-Islam Jewish groups – missed her