



PROJECT MUSE®

Arab & Arab American Feminisms: Gender, Violence, & Belonging ed. by Rabab Abdulhadi, et al (review)

Laila Farah

Mashriq & Mahjar: Journal of Middle East and North African Migration Studies, Volume 1, Number 1, 2013, (Review)

Published by Moise A. Khayrallah Center for Lebanese Diaspora Studies



➔ For additional information about this article

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/779797/summary>

**RABAB ABDULHADI, EVELYN ALSULTANY, AND
NADINE NABER, EDS.** *Arab & Arab American Feminisms:
Gender, Violence, & Belonging* (Syracuse: Syracuse University
Press, 2011). Pp. 408. \$45.00 cloth. ISBN 9780815633860.

REVIEWED BY LAILA FARAH, Associate Professor, Women's
& Gender Studies, DePaul University, email: lfarah@depaul.edu



This germinal collection includes poets, creative writers, artists, scholars and activists from varying perspectives, geographical sites, spiritualities, occupations, sexualities, socio-economic backgrounds and generations. They voice intimate experiences to “challenge simplistic and long held assumptions about gender, sexuality, and commitments to feminism[s] and justice-centered struggles.” This text highlights multiple feminist perspectives that simultaneously inhabit overlapping and intersecting geopolitical locations that offer radical, feminist, and queer spaces. The contributors “explore themes as diverse as the intersections between gender, sexuality, Orientalism, racism, Islamophobia, Zionism, and the place of Arab and Arab American histories.” The authors question how their diasporic communities “navigate their sense of belonging when the countries in which they live wage wars in the land of their ancestors.” The anthology offers new conceptualizations of how the author’s positionalities and analyses create new pathways for understanding the complex intersection of the axes of axes of anticolonial, racist, and hetero-normative oppressions.

This anthology answers the urgent need for a collection of transnational feminist voices with both historical and current personal responses to systemic and systematized gendered, xenophobic, and particularized racisms in the U.S. and beyond in a post 9/11/2001 world. The inclusions offer original theoretical, methodological, interdisciplinary and creative frameworks and responses to the varied forms of violence[s] resulting from global neo-imperialist laws and covert anti-Arab and anti-Arab American populations. The fields of Migration and Diasporic Studies, Arab and Middle Eastern Studies,

Women's & Gender Studies, Cultural Studies, and Literary Studies have a significant volume of writings that are valuable to all areas in their breadth and depth. In fact, it is no small feat that this text was awarded the Arab American Book Award of 2011. Many years have passed since such a momentous collection with such varied perspectives and diverse genres has been published, and it is made all the more valuable by the expansion of conflicts across the globe effecting these populations.

The extensive introduction presents comprehensive and complex arguments and theoretical frameworks for the five segments in the text. The editor's innovative structure divides the text into the following sections: 1) Living with/in Empire: Grounded Subjectivities, 2) Defying Categories: Thinking and Living Out of the Box, 3) Activist Communities: Representation, Resistance, and Power, 4) On Our Own Terms: Discourses, Politics, and Feminisms, and 5) Home and Homelands: Memories, Exile, and Belonging. The overarching themes reflective in each of the five sections overlap generally, while articulating specific thematic linkages to each section; each of these sections combine the accurate diversification to represent the multiplicity of experiences in such considerable gendered diasporic communities.

Perhaps the most significant aspect of the book's organization is the manner in which the reader can see the intricacies of experience as they weave within one section, before being echoed again in subsequent sections, and the life stories and analyses of other writers. The three subthemes in the book's title, "Gender, Violence, and Belonging," are the most pronounced thematic strands seamlessly holding the book together. The transnational aspects of forecasting marginalized voices is very much in line with the refutation of the roles cast on the writers that are stereotypical, victimizing, diminishing, or racially/ethnically/religiously oppressive. Rather, the authors use their experiences to give deeper meaning to the phrase, "the personal is political," and turn that phrase most saliently on its head—"the political is personal." On the other hand, the experiential narratives and analyses offer sharp critiques of the various forms of violence against Arab and Arab American women, feminist identified or otherwise, particularly promulgated within or by U.S. government policies. As Suheir Hammad states, "Over there is over here." The multiple forms of resistance evidenced in these chapters further exemplify the agency and fierce capacity of these writers, and the opposite depictions constructed by the Western media, institutions,

and governmental policy agencies. The strategies employed in the face of (c)overt racism and discrimination, embody the courage in reaching across difference to build solidarity with other marginalized groups, to forge coalitions with others who are seemingly enemies are remarkable. Further, the commitment to respectful representation across the spectrum of sexuality, spirituality, social status and other identity-based criteria is commendable.

For these writers, their articulation of the struggle to belong, whether by imposed exile, necessary migration, or geographical moves made by choice, is poignant, painting one of the best three-dimensional pictures of the rich diversity of Arab and Arab American women this writer has ever witnessed. Regardless of how fragmented the lives are as narrated on these pages, the themes woven through this collection are powerful as an addition to Middle Eastern migration stories, and essential in considering the gendered particularity of what we can all gain from reading/witnessing them.