Arab and Arab American Feminisms

An Introduction

Rabab Abdulhadi, Evelyn Alsultany, and Nadine Naber

Episode 1: November 22, 2002

In Brooklyn, Yusra Awawdeh, a sixteen-year-old Arab American student at Franklin D. Roosevelt High School, wore a "Free Palestine" T-shirt, a Palestinian flag pin, and a *kufiya* (checkered Palestinian scarf) to school. A security guard removed her from class and took her to the dean's office, where a female school safety officer patted her down and told her to remove her shoes and socks while the dean looked on. The guard told Yusra to empty her pockets and then checked to see if she was hiding anything around her abdomen. "I was really embarrassed," said Yusra. "They made me feel like I was a terrorist with weapons." After the search, the dean told Yusra that she could no longer wear her scarf or flag pin. "The only flag I can represent at the school is the American flag," said Yusra, who was born and raised in Brooklyn. "I am American but I also want to represent my heritage. I felt like they were trying to take something away from me. They never said I broke any rules."[1]

Episode 2: June 16, 2008

At a Detroit rally for Barack Obama's presidential campaign, volunteers removed two Arab American Muslim women from behind the stage where Obama was to hold his speech to prevent their appearance in photographs and television frames with the candidate. In a statement released to the *New York Times,* the two women, Shimaa Abdelfadeel and Hebba Aref, explained that the campaign volunteers told them that they were not allowed to sit in that area because of the *hijab* each wore on her head. Koussan, Hebba's friend who also attended the rally, said that the Obama volunteer told her that it was "not good for her to be seen on TV or associated with Obama" because "of the political climate and what's

going on in the world and with Muslim Americans." Obama released a public apology following the incident, stating that "the actions of these volunteers were unacceptable and in no way reflect any policy of my campaign. I will continue to fight against discrimination against people of any religious group or background."[2]

Episode 3: January 5, 2009

"Get the F*** out of the USA . . . NOW!!!" wrote a Mark Redlich, responding to a statement issued by California Scholars for Academic Freedom that denounced the Israeli war on Gaza. In one of several hate e-mails the group received, a Keith Weinman accused the Arab media of lying and referred to what he claimed to be a prototypical Arab woman who appeared repeatedly in different contexts: "One fat arab cow has appeared in 3 different photos bewailing the loss of a home in Gaza, children in Baghdad, and a husband somewhere else and under three different names."

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Why do we begin with these three episodes, and what do they tell us about the subject of this book: gender, violence, and belonging and the relevance of these concepts to the lives of Arab and Arab American feminists in the United States today? Conventional analysis might suggest that the three episodes are isolated incidents that do not constitute a pattern especially now, in a country such as the United States that purports to be "postracial," as evidenced by the election of a Black man as president. We insist that the three episodes are anything but isolated and that, in fact, they represent a pattern of rising xenophobia against Arabs and Muslims in the post–September 11, 2001, United States. Backlash against persons perceived to be "Arab or Muslim or both" has become an increasingly widespread consequence of the construction of the "Arab and Muslim" as an Other in the dominant "American" imaginary, revealing how long-term trends of racial exclusion intensify during moments of crisis and war.[3] Episode 1 demonstrates how a dominant U.S. imperialist ideology inscribes meanings of anti-Americanness, foreignness, and treason upon certain symbols, such as the Palestinian flag and *kufiya*. New York City continually reinforces liberal multicultural notions of "diversity" in multiple ways within restaurants, theater productions, art installations, fashion exhibits, and so on. New York City is home to countless holidays, parades, and festivals—the Chinese New Year Celebration, St. Patrick's Day Parade, Arab American Day Parade, Puerto Rican Day Parade, Lesbian and Gay Pride March, Sweden Day, African American Day Parade, West Indian–American Day Parade, and Pagan Pride Day. These events are not seen

as threats, or instruments meant to undermine the "Americanness" of the city or its patriotism. They are, rather, cited as proof of the diversity New York City embraces. Yusra's case, however, reminds us of the clear limitations of multiculturalism when tested at this particular moment in history. Indeed, Yusra's experience illuminates the tenuous sense of belonging for diasporic communities while the U.S. government wages war on their homelands. But if Yusra's experience exemplifies tensions around nationness and belonging, how gender specific is it?

We part ways with conventional women's studies approaches that attribute any victimization of women, regardless of the cause, to gender inequality, we argue that what happened to Yusra could have just as easily, if not more violently, happened to someone perceived to be an Arab male, a queer Arab, or a transgender Arab. This episode calls for an analysis of gender oppression in relationship to collective engagements with racial oppression.

In Episode 2, the removal of the two Arab American Muslim women from the backdrop of Obama's rally is a variation on the long-standing vilification of Arabs and Muslims in the United States that has resurfaced with a vengeance in the post-9/11/2001 climate. Just as Zionist sympathizers have sought to equate Palestinian the flag and *kufiya* with "terrorist" symbols, so has Islamophobia marked the *hijab* as negative and threatening. Although we are troubled by this incident, we do not share its interpretation as evidence that Obama's campaign actively sought to exclude Arabs and Muslims. We suggest that the subtext of the removal of the young women resonates with the persistent construction of Obama not as a qualified Black candidate but as a qualified candidate who happens to be Black. In other words, in removing the young women from the backdrop, Obama volunteers merely translated what they understood to be the message of the campaign, namely, that Arabs and Muslims were welcomed to the ranks of Obama's diverse and broad-based campaign as long as they did not bring along telltale signs of who they were.[4] This "postracial society" notion is problematic on two levels: First, it inaccurately equates the election of a Black president with the disappearance of the wide gap between whites and people of color in all facets of life. Second, if Arabs and Muslims (or even Obama himself) must normalize themselves into hegemonic whiteness as the price of acceptance into the American imaginary, while the same is not expected of dominant white ethnic groups, we would infer that Arabs and Muslims would be welcome as long as they accept remaining in their marginalized place and do not demand more prominence.[5]

Supporters of the Republican presidential nominee, John McCain, sought to discredit Obama by labeling him as an Arab or a Muslim. This action demonstrates how Arabness and Muslimness have been seen as irreconcilably different from and

opposed to anything remotely resembling normalized Americanness. It speaks to an "America" that might be ready for a president who "happens to be Black" but not for a "Black president" or a president who "might 'happen to be Muslim.'" McCain's defense of Obama by announcing that the latter was not an Arab but in fact a "decent family man," and Obama's thanks to McCain for defending him against such libel, further indicates the extent of anti-Arab and anti-Muslim consensus in U.S. public discourses today. Obama's apology for his volunteers' removing the young women, which demonstrates the candidate's familiarity with the depth of anti-Muslim bigotry, is welcomed. His avoidance, however, of any mention of widespread anti-Arab and anti-Muslim bigotry—a topic that was a consistent staple of his stump speech before he started his presidential campaign—underlines the heavy price he must have felt that he had to pay in an environment in which there is a relative ease with which anti-Arab racist statements and actions could be made without fear of retribution or accusations of hate speech.

In Episode 3, four scholars received e-mails that attacked them and challenged the political stance of their group, the California Scholars for Academic Freedom; offensive and foul language, however, was reserved for the one scholar whose last name sounded as if she were an Arab or a Muslim.[6] These hate e-mails worked with and through racist and Orientalist U.S. discourses that dehumanize Arab women and further claim not only that Israeli violations of Palestinian human rights are fabricated but that they are not legitimate concerns for the U.S. population or the U.S. academy.

Each of the three episodes points to the intensification of ethnic profiling and rising xenophobia toward Arabs and Muslims in the post-9/11/2001 United States. Does this focus then mean that racial profiling against other communities of color has disappeared, that Arabs and Muslims are the most persecuted communities, or that we have a monopoly on oppression? We do not think so: we are not claiming an Arab or a Muslim exceptionality, but we do argue that historical and contextual factors related to the imperialist relationship between the United States and the Arab world have produced distinct forms of racism against and criminalization of individuals and communities perceived to be Arab or Muslim, especially in the aftermath of September 11, 2001. Our analysis is based on a historically specific approach toward gendered racialization that assumes that racial logics are flexible and mutable to accommodate imperialist power in different temporal and spatial contexts.[7]

The three episodes above, then, reflect the historically specific logic underpinning *anti-Arab* and *anti-Muslim racism*. We locate this logic within the histories of U.S.-led military, political, and economic expansion in the Arab world and

other Muslim-majority countries such as Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Iran. These histories are constituted by a racialized, Orientalist mind-set that constructs Arabs and Muslims as enemies of the "West." Such mind-set is but a continuation of centuries of Orientalism, or what Edward Said defines as the assumption of a "basic distinction between East and West as the starting point for elaborate theories, epics, novels, social descriptions, and political accounts concerning the Orient, its people, customs, 'mind,' destiny, and so on" that facilitate settling, ruling, and having authority over it. Combined with the Orientalist imaginary, normative American Judeo-Christian concepts of culture or civilization exclude Islam (and other religious beliefs) and enable the construction of Arabs and Muslims as backward, barbaric, misogynist, sexually savage, and sexually repressive.[8]

In the United States, an Orientalist mind-set, coupled with a Judeo-Christian normative outlook, intersects with xenophobia and an imperialist foreign policy. These imperatives constitute the positioning of an imagined Arab or Muslim enemy as inherently foreign and outside the boundaries of U.S. nationness. This dominant U.S. discourse conflates the categories "Arab" and "Muslim" and assumes that all Arabs are Muslim, all Muslims are Arab, and all Muslim Arabs are the same.[9] It obscures the existence of Arabs who are not Muslim (including, but not limited to, Christians and Jews) and Muslims who are not Arab (including Indonesians, Malaysians, Chinese, South Asians, Africans, African Americans, and Latinos/as). It also erases the historic and vast ethnic communities who are neither Arab nor Muslim but who live amid and interact with a majority of Arabs or Muslims (such as Greeks in Egypt; Armenians in Palestine; Roma in Jordan; Kurds in Iraq, Turkey, and Iran; and Imazighen in North Africa, to name a few).

The rising xenophobia against immigrants of color and the fact that many Arabs and Muslims come from countries at which the United States is at war further contribute to the normalization of anti-Arab and anti-Muslim violence. Recent geopolitical developments have further enabled the vilification of Arabs and Muslims. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the socialist camp in 1989 eliminated the threat of what then U.S. president Ronald Reagan called "the evil empire." Out of this historical moment, the U.S. power elite constructed an alternative "viable" threat that has worked to justify weapons production amid increasing popular demand for a peaceful economy.[10] Twenty years later, former U.S. president George W. Bush and his speechwriters constructed another threat that they named "the axis of evil. The centrality of Israel to U.S. foreign policy, reflected in the U.S.-Israeli strategic government alliance coupled with the powerful role of the Israeli lobby in Washington, exacerbates the location of the Arab or Muslim in dominant U.S. discourses. This alliance places Arabs and Muslims

at the core of U.S. policy and denies them the benign neglect with which the U.S. government responds to the needs of the majority of the people of the world in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Unlike Arab and Muslim communities for whom Palestine lies at the center of political concerns, Palestinians in dominant U.S. and western European discourses are portrayed as villains who seek to destroy the "only safe haven" for the Jewish people.

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In this book, we use the term "Arab" to refer to people whose primary language is Arabic and who come from the twenty-two member nations of the Arab League: Algeria, Bahrain, Comoros, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates, and Yemen. At the same time, our use of the terms "Arab" and "Muslim" has been particularly challenging. We find ourselves obliged to clarify the overlapping as well as the distinctiveness of both terms primarily because of the ways in which Arabs and Muslims were lumped together by the "war on terror" during the eight years of the Bush administration. A similar logic has facilitated the racial profiling and the criminalization of diverse communities of Arabs and Muslims. This logic makes it imperative that we deal with individuals and communities perceived to be Arab or Muslim when we refer to anti-Arab racism, despite the many ways in which these categories do not perfectly fit onto one another.

In this book, Arab and Arab American women, queer, and transgender writers, scholars, creative writers, and activists express a multiplicity of experiences, identities, and social locations. We refer in the book title to "Arab" and "Arab American" to signal our rejection of categories that box persons or experiences within an either-or formula. While we were developing this book, most of us were living in the United States.[11] Yet whereas some contributors were born and raised in the United States, others were born and raised in the Arab world and other Arab diasporas. Most of us imagine home to exist on a continuum of "here" and "there" and consider both as the "here" of their/our belonging. Several of us, whether we were born in the United States or hold U.S. citizenship or not, do not comfortably identify as "American" because of the implication of patriotism, genocide, and colonization such hegemonic identification implies. The contributors to this book highlight how developments "back home" as well as the ways that our homelands are imagined and remembered within and between our immigrant communities in the United States are just as significant to our lives as what happens "here." In this sense, the interplay between homeland and diaspora, the

Arab context and the United States, shapes our identities, experiences, loyalties, and affiliations.

Race, Gender, and Nation

Returning to the three episodes with which we started and our discussion of gender, we propose that although markers of Arab womanhood might have inspired the attackers, the targets of the attacks were not gender specific: In Yusra's case, a male high school student wearing the Palestinian head scarf could have as easily been targeted. In Shimaa and Hebba's story, the Obama volunteers would just as soon have removed a Muslim or an Arab male had his dress code hinted at his background—for example, by wearing a *sirwal kameez, kufiya,* or an untrimmed beard. At the same time, we doubt that a Jew wearing a yarmulke or a Christian nun in her habit would have been removed in the current context. And in the e-mail over the Israeli war on Gaza, attempts to invalidate the suffering of Palestinians are not unique to women; all who speak in defense of Palestinians regardless of gender or ethnic background are at risk of being attacked, harassed, and charged with supporting terrorism and anti-Semitism. If gender is understood as a useful analytical category and a structural hierarchy, we can no longer continue equating "gender" with women.[12] The episodes are works of gender, but how do we understand them in light of our argument and the range of power structures at play?

This book builds on radical U.S. women of color's visions of the world that argue that the experiences of U.S. women of color should not be subsumed within the conventional dichotomies of *either* racism *or* sexism but must be seen as simultaneous, overlapping, and constitutive of each other. We agree with Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw that racism and sexism intersect in the lives of all women in ways that cannot be captured by looking at either the racial or the gendered dimensions of those experiences separately. This book also draws on critiques by radical queers of color that call feminists to task for reifying heteronormative visions of liberation.[13] 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."[14] Consistent with Mohanty's argument, this book offers historicized perspectives on gender, sexuality, and Arab and Arab American women, queer, and transgender experiences that are situated within multiple overlapping and intersecting structures of power and privilege.

We use the words "gender" and "nation" broadly and conceptually, not in terms of belonging to a singular monolithic national body. We are interested in

how gender and sexuality shape negotiations over belonging and nonbelonging within the context of multiple imagined communities that intersect and overlap, such as the ones produced by the workings of race, nation, and spiritualities. We take interest in how Arab and Arab American women, queer, and transgender writers make, remake, and transgress normative communal boundaries and the ways that we negotiate the relationship between concepts of Arabness and Americanness in the process. The writings in this book illustrate how boundaries of belonging and nonbelonging are often entangled within U.S. imperialist projects in Arab countries and within Arab experiences of displacement, immigration, and racialization to and within the United States. Many contributors prioritize the themes of displacement and diaspora and their negotiations over belonging and nonbelonging to the United States and the homeland. Emanne Bayoumi highlights a yearning for home, safety, and belonging as she narrates the life of a queer working-class Arab woman in the United States far from her family in the homelands. Randa Jarrar illustrates the diasporic conditions through which communities traumatized by displacement often hold on to idealized fixed meanings of what practices they deem representative of an "authentic" Arab homeland, lest they lose who they are. For Jarrar, idealized notions that imagine a singular "Arab culture" as fixed, rigid, and in opposition to an imagined "American culture" are gendered in that they disproportionately pressure daughters into conformity more than they do sons. Youmna Chlala's poems also address Arab identity as dislocated during political crises and concomitant tensions between the individual and the collective. As well, Christina Dennaoui's cover art, *Seeing Yourself in Fragments,* represents a transnational sense of displacement as the figure of the Arab woman is positioned in relation to cartographic imagery that questions the location of home and belonging.

Several contributors describe how assumptions that "real" Americans do not place their loyalties elsewhere make suspect their affinities to homelands outside the United States. The USA PATRIOT Act, signed into law by President George W. Bush on October 26, 2001, intensified the pressure on immigrant communities to keep their identification with the homelands of their ancestors underground. The USA PATRIOT Act expanded the reach of the government and law enforcement agencies under the guise of fighting terrorism. In this context, *belonging* to "America" becomes a site of intensified contradiction for Arab diasporas in the United States. Reflecting on this contradiction, Rabab Abdulhadi compares the post-9/11/2001 moment in New York City in which Arabs became suspect to how the Israeli security services treat Palestinians as potential terrorists. This heightened sense of insecurity impacts her everyday experiences as she anticipates being

targeted, searched, and harassed. Within this context, she questions where home as a safe haven might be, given the escalating criminalization of Arabs, Muslims, and Palestinians that further disturbs her sense of belonging to the United States as a home. Dena Al-Adeeb contemplates similar questions as she speaks of the multiple displacements she has experienced: displaced from Iraq for being Shia of Iranian descent, displaced from Kuwait because of the Iraqi invasion in 1990, and later choosing to move from the United States to Cairo. She outlines the ways in which violence impacted her ability to belong and subsequently inspired her involvement in political activism.

Violence emerges as a central theme in the experiences of many contributors. Dunya Mikhail writes of watching the war on Iraq from afar:

I search you on the Internet.
I distinguish you
Grave by grave,
Skull by skull,
Bone by bone.

Zeina Zaatari contrasts her growing up in war-torn Lebanon with her academic experiences in Iowa and California. She demonstrates the pervasive violence of war, in the racialization of Arabs in the United States and in the silencing of the Palestinian struggle for human rights and self-determination, which collude into a diasporic struggle over belonging and nonbelonging. Suheir Hammad responds to images of torture at Abu Ghraib prison and the impact of militarized "patriotism" resulting from the U.S. invasion of Iraq. She comments on her loss of words that would adequately express such horrors. Amal Hassan Fadlalla responds to the crushing violence with which communities live and die with a poem that expresses a longing for hope and freedom. For our contributors, gender cannot but be entangled with a range of power structures in the context of multiple transnational tensions, connections, and contradictions.

A Collaborative Journey

This book emerges out of a collaboration that began in 2002 to make critical Arab and Arab American feminist interventions at the academic conferences in which we participate, such as the American Studies Association, Middle East Studies Association, American Anthropological Association, and American Sociological Association. Not only were our voices rarely heard at these academic gatherings, but our collective perspectives were virtually absent from the very intellectual fields and their intersections such as American studies,

Middle East studies, U.S. ethnic studies, and gender studies. We brought together a collective of Arab and Arab American feminists with critical perspectives and located themselves not in an either-or Arab or American dichotomy but in a positionality from which they and we could conceptualize ideas and experiences for which conventional area studies fell short of accounting. This volume, then, argues against the limitations of academic boundaries and presents, analyzes, and reflects upon personal and collective experiences that are inflicted with gender, violence, and belonging.

It was a year after September 11, 2001, that the three of us sat at New Orleans's Café du Monde to discuss the challenges facing Arab and Arab American activist scholars at this historic moment that was characterized by rising xenophobia, racism, and the silencing of dissent in political and intellectual spaces. We noted with alarm the rise of McCarthyist-type groups such as Campus Watch that have launched smear campaigns against critics of U.S. and Israeli government policies and labeled them anti-Semitic, anti-American, and terror supporters. We were equally concerned that liberal multicultural diversity initiatives had inadvertently reinforced the crackdown on public dissent by funding nongovernmental tolerance projects and criticizing individual hate crimes while ignoring the intensification of systemic state violence—such as the targeting of immigrants under the USA PATRIOT Act and the massive killing in Iraq and Afghanistan. Opposition to the war in Iraq, the detention and deportation of Arab immigrants, and U.S. support for Israel's war against the Palestinian people had been deemed unpatriotic, undemocratic, and anti-American.

As contributors and editors, we were exasperated by the countless times we had received invitations to speak on "the veil," cliterodectomy, and suicide bombings.[15] Although none of us was in principle opposed to discussing these issues, the ways in which these issues were framed greatly hindered our abilities to offer critical and thoughtful analysis of Arab and Muslim women's condition without feeling suffocated. We were repeatedly forced to fit the varied, rich, and complex lives of Arab and Muslim women into limited stereotypical boxes. These stereotypes take "women's oppression" out of context and reinforce imperialist discourses that reduce Arab and Muslim social practices to misogyny, violence, and sexual repression and have the effect of justifying anti-Arab and anti-Muslim violence at home and occupation and colonization in the homelands.

We shared an urgent need to highlight a plurality of Arab and Arab American perspectives within and beyond the walls of the academy. Thus, we came together to organize a roundtable discussion at the 2003 meeting of the American Studies Association. Our roundtable was a response to the conference title,

"Violence and Belonging." In our invitation, we asked participants to address the following questions:

1. How have you experienced being racially marked in the U.S.? In the classroom? In academic and intellectual circles?

2. What are some of the struggles/tensions around issues of homophobia, sexism, and racism that you have experienced in the different communities to which you belong?

3. What have been your experiences with feminisms in the U.S.? What does women-of-color-feminism mean to you? (Or are there other feminist spaces that have meaning to you?)

4. When you hear "violence and belonging" what do these terms evoke for you?

5. What are some of the resources/spaces that have been relatively safer (if any) for you?

Out of the enthusiastic responses to our invitation, we organized two back-to-back roundtable discussions with twelve participants at the American Studies Association meeting, followed by the special issue of the *MIT Electronic Journal of Middle East Studies* (spring 2005) that we coedited.[16] This book builds on and expands this project. It includes several revised essays that were originally published in *MIT-EJMES,* along with many new contributions. This book presents our readers with a slice of the complex regimes of power that have circumscribed and shaped our lives. As our contributors show, despite the many points of unity that bring us together, there is no single site of Arab and Arab American feminist struggle.

Experiences and Epistemologies

Our commitment to the production of knowledge that is drawn from individual and collective experiences informed our invitation to each contributor to take his or her own history and experiences as a point of departure. As valuable starting points, experiences allow us to identify, analyze, and understand structures of power and privilege that shape our lives. Not all contributors were equally willing to share what they saw as their personal experiences. Several participants at the original ASA roundtables feared what they saw as the potential trivialization of their individual experiences had they submitted such reflections to ink; others felt that focusing on personal experiences would classify them as theoretical lightweights in the eyes of their peers. In this volume, Kyla Wazana Tompkins muses on the problem of experiential narration because of the way first-person narratives by women of color are often used in women's studies classrooms as "the instrumental performance of suffering toward the end of bearing witness to

diversity." Women of color, Tompkins argues, bear the unfair burden of realism in their personal narratives that often result in their marginalization in academic spaces, especially when personal narratives are rendered as illegitimate sites for knowledge production. Writing of Arab Jewish identifications that are often misunderstood and misrepresented, she calls for strategic narration instead of confessionals or positivist testimonies. Our intention in this volume, then, is not to "valorize the experience of oppression as the alleged ground of truth or politics, but [rather to] investigate how we might transform lived experiences of discontent into critical knowledge and political consciousness [since] narration [is] key in the transformation of experience into useful knowledge."[17] By centering the project on experience-based knowledge production, we hope to illuminate the structural forces that influence our lives as Arab and Arab American women, queer, and transgender writers.

Earlier writings of Arab American women, such as *Food for Our Grandmothers* edited by Joe Kadi in 1994 (who previously identified as Joanna Kadi) and *Bint Arab: Arab and Arab American Women in the United States* by the late Evelyn Shakir in 1997, opened the door for collections such as this one.[18] Our volume belongs to the tradition of Arab and Arab American knowledge production, and further engages in a "theory in the flesh" or knowledge derived from narrating lived experiences and producing critical lenses through which we see and analyze the social and political world.[19] Agreeing with Shari Stone-Mediatore, we resist the formulation that assumes that personal narrative and theoretical analysis are mutually exclusive and antithetical: "When writers use narration strategically to publicize obscured experiences, they enrich not only language practices but experience itself, for they provide a new lens through which we can organize our everyday experience and historical world. Neither empirical reporting nor discourse analysis has this effect on our experience of our identity and history."[20]

From this standpoint, we decided not to separate essays that might be grouped under the rubric of social sciences as "factual" from those essays that might be considered "fiction." We consider this volume of knowledge production from personal experiences an act of strategic narration. This methodology allows us to record Arab and Arab American feminist knowledge productions, the histories through which they have emerged, and their convergence and divergence with a range of U.S. feminist frameworks and practices.

We attempted to incorporate multiple genres of writing: poetry, short stories, interviews, and essays by poets, creative writers, artists, activists, and academics. We sought to include authors from multiple geographical sites, religious commitments, occupations, sexualities, class backgrounds, and generations. Nonetheless,

this volume does not include writings or writers from every single Arab or Arab American community, nor does it include the full range of views that span the political spectrum. We do not subscribe to the liberal notion that defines diversity as the inclusion of each and every group irrespective of the content or purpose of such inclusion. In recognizing the historical and political realities of our communities, certain concerns become more visible, certain voices louder, and certain demands more pressing at any given moment or context. Ours is not an "add-and-stir" approach that merely represents contributors from every Arab country or every Arab American diasporic location. This volume also goes beyond liberal multicultural notions of *adding* Arab and Arab American feminist perspectives to the landscape of existing models of U.S. feminisms.[21] We agree with Andrea Smith as we shift the question from "how can we *include* Arab American women, queer, and transgender perspectives" to "what would analyses of race, gender, sexuality, and nation look like if we were to center Arab and Arab American women, queer, and transgender experiences?"[22]

This book centers upon lived experiences, emphasizing how contributors' essays articulate Arab and Arab American feminist agendas and the resulting themes that emerge: the post-9/11/2001 climate of intensified racism and violence; the resulting pressure on Arab and Muslim women to accept the Orientalist and racist notion that Arab society is inherently violent, misogynist, and sexually repressive; the linkage between these pressures and hegemonic U.S. feminisms; the impact of such a hostile environment on the struggles Arab and Arab American feminists wage within and outside our communities for gender and sexual liberation; the displacement of the experiences of Arab Jews from conventional Arab and Arab American narratives and their relocation instead in Israeli- and Zionist-centric narratives and discourses; the targeting and smearing of Arab and Arab Americans feminists (along with other Arab Americans) who publicly support justice for Palestine; the racial ambiguity of Arab American identities between their official classification as white and our own identification (and treatment) as communities of color; the centrality of homophobia to anti-Arab racism, exemplified by the torture in Abu Ghraib and our commitment to struggle against homophobia and the marginalization of queer and transgender people within dominant Arab and Arab American spaces and discourses; and the unsettled (and often violent) experiences of exclusion from home and homeland.

The Centrality of Palestine

The recurring themes in this volume reflect issues that are most pressing to our contributors. The number of submissions focusing on Palestine reflects the

centrality of the liberation of Palestine to Arabs and Arab Americans. Palestine appears in different forms in specific essays focusing on topics such as exile and displacement, the effects of the Israeli occupation, U.S.-Israeli relations, as well as Palestine-centered activism in the United States.

Why is Palestine so central? There are several historical reasons. First, Palestine's vast diaspora exceeds the size of the Palestinian population of the West Bank, Gaza, and Israel combined. From this vast diaspora emerge Arab and Arab American imaginaries of longing, belonging, and exile. In her essay, Sherene Seikaly, a Palestinian who grew up in Lebanon and the United States, explores the disparities between the Palestine of her imagination and the Palestine to which she returns as a young adult, a doctoral candidate researching material for her dissertation. Seikaly calls for rethinking history as she takes up the challenge of archival research. She turns to her grandmothers' memories to document history in resistance to "the fragmentation of Palestine" and the "continuous process of removal and distancing—distancing people from one another, their land, and their history."

Second, Palestine lies at the center of the dominant U.S. and Israeli alliance that enlists the tragic events of September 11, 2001, to reinforce the campaign to vilify Palestinians, labeling their resistance against occupation as terrorism, while presenting Israeli colonial state violence against Palestinians as self-defense. Increasingly, after 9/11 the terrorist label has been extended to all persons perceived to be Arab or Muslim. In her essay on Rachel Corrie, the white student activist from the United States who was killed by an Israeli military bulldozer as she tried to prevent a Palestinian home from demolition, Therese Saliba reflects on the ways in which Corrie has been constituted as a violent person because of her association with Palestinians. Saliba further discusses how racial discourses that exclude Arabs by denying their racial marginalization simultaneously deny the racialized victimization of Palestinians by Israeli government policies and minimize the extent of their oppression.

Third, much like McCarthyism, anti-Arab racism is used to delegitimate those persons demanding justice for the Palestinians and to legitimate Zionist perspectives that enable Israel to maintain its denial of Palestinian rights.[23] Dominant U.S. and Israeli state discourses strategically conflate criticism of Israel with anti-Semitism. Such discourses are sometimes reproduced in U.S. civil society and social movements. This conflation, coupled with the association of Arabs with violence and terrorism, often serves to stifle criticism of Israeli government and military policies and strategies. As an activist and law student at the University of California–Berkeley's Law School, Noura Erakat recounts

how her progressive peers of color were silenced by a Jewish group that equated support for Palestinian self-determination with anti-Semitism. Nada Elia concurs with Erakat in how pro-Palestinian activism becomes silenced even in peace and justice circles. As she moves from one progressive circle to the next, she repeatedly confronts hostility for asserting that Zionism is a form of racism. Erakat's and Elia's experiences were not exceptional. At the World Conference Against Racism in Durban, South Africa, in 2001, the U.S. government used its opposition to the proposal that Zionism was equated with racism as a pretext to justify its withdrawal in order to avoid the very pressing issues of reparations and the legacy of slavery and genocide that mar its history. The United States banded with the Israeli government and the Zionist movement to accuse Palestinians of "hijacking" the conference to divert attention from issues raised by antiracist grassroots groups.

Palestine, however, is experienced differently by our contributors. Several challenge the framing of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as a problem between Arabs and Jews, convincingly arguing instead for defining it as a colonial context in which the colonized wage a struggle for liberation, thus problematizing this binary configuration of Arabs versus Jews that in addition to other damaging consequences denies the existence of Arab Jews. As Ella Habiba Shohat argues, the experiences of Iraqi (Arab) Jews should not be reduced to such a binary: "My parents used to say: 'In Iraq we were Jews, and in Israel we are Arabs.' Our Arab culture was taboo in Israel. Yet, even if we tried, we could not easily escape the mark of otherness. It was written all over our bodies, our looks, our accents. . . . If in the Arab world the Jewishness of Arabs gradually came to be associated with Zionism, and therefore was subjected to surveillance, in Israel their Arab culture was under watchful eyes, disciplined and punished."

Reinforcing the notion that Arabness and Jewishness are not mutually exclusive categories, the Toronto Just Peace Seder Community rewrites in this volume the traditional Jewish seder into a peace seder for the Passover holiday. Composed of Arab Muslims, Christians, and Jews, as well as Ashkenazi Jews, the peace seder rescripts the ritual from a perspective of narration of "the Jewish ethos of fear of persecution and exile" to an acknowledgment of how "Jewish freedom" in the dominant Israeli discourse has been constituted and enabled by the denial of Palestinian freedom.

Whiteness, Race, and Identifications

Some contributors criticize the contradictory positioning of Arabs and Arab Americans within dominant U.S. racial schemas as different from and inferior to

whites or, more generally, as potential foreigners, enemies, criminals, or terrorists, made evident in the portrayal by corporate media and the U.S. government, especially during the eight years of the presidency of George W. Bush. At the same time, the U.S. Census classifies Arab Americans as white/Caucasian. Scholars have theorized the racial positioning of Arabs in the United States as "not-quite white," "not-quite people of color," or "between Arab and white."[24] Some contributors (Majaj, Erakat, Elia) reflect on how this ambiguous positionality operates to obscure Arab and Arab American critiques and experiences of racism and further impacts their relationships to other communities of color, especially to activist organizations of women of color.

Some contributors who may pass as white, or non-Arab, stress that "passing" is not always as simple as it might seem. Although they may pass because of the way they look, they are nonetheless targeted as non-white/Arab/Other because of other markers such as an accent or an Arab- or a Muslim-sounding name. Lisa Suhair Majaj's poem ironically offers her Arab and Arab American reader "guidelines" for navigating the ambiguous terrain of U.S. racial categories. She advises:

If they ask you if you're white, say it depends.
Say no. Say maybe. If appropriate, inquire casually,
Have you always been white, or is it recent?

Several contributors tackle these questions, sharing experiences of exclusion from debates on race and racism or experiences where others perceived them as Latinas, Greeks, Italians, South Asians, or African Americans depending on the context or on assumptions about race, ethnicity, and skin color.

Some contributors illuminate the ways in which Muslims have come to be visualized and racialized. Mona El-Ghobashy's and Evelyn Alsultany's pieces reflect opposite sides of the same coin. El-Ghobashy recounts her experiences as a Muslim woman who wears the *hijab,* while Alsultany recounts her experiences as a Muslim woman who is unidentifiable because she does not wear the *hijab.* Both explore the assumptions projected on them in their daily lives while raising questions around the rigid assumptions of who they are. Both face a variety of reactions depending on the context. El-Ghobashy recounts a range of reactions, including what seemed to her as surprisingly pleasant interactions on New York City subways or the curiously bizarre encounters at an academic lecture where she is called upon to speak on behalf of "the Muslim woman," even though it was not remotely the topic of her talk. Meanwhile, Alsultany finds herself challenged by some white Americans who insist that it is not possible to be both a Muslim and a feminist and by some devout Muslims who insist that she is not a "real" Muslim

because she does not wear the *hijab.* The two contributors bring up questions of how Islam and Muslims are imagined and politically identified.

Some authors speak to the ways in which progressive U.S. politics have taken the problem of anti-Arab and anti-Muslim racism more seriously than ever before in the aftermath of the events of September 11, 2001. As the U.S. war machine continues to be fueled by an anti-Arab and anti-Muslim discourse, some contributors—including Hammad, Hyder, Ameri, Attia, and Toronto Just Peace Seder—underline the urgent need to continue struggling against racism, empire, and war and to envision a world without violence.

Whose Feminism?

This book coalesces around a specific political vision broadly shared by our contributors that excludes homophobic, prowar, and racist perspectives. Recognizing that no single book can be inclusive of all the voices that share the editors' vision, the writings here specifically tackle the (discursive, epistemic, and materialist) themes of violence and belonging. We imagine a radical feminist politics that insists on the simultaneity of racial justice, gender justice, economic justice, and self-determination for colonized women, men, queer, and transgender people "over here" and "over there." This transnational feminist vision inspires us to imagine a world without oppression and think about alternatives to exclusionary heteromasculinist and xenophobic politics. We hope that this book will contribute to efforts aimed at alliance building between Arab and Arab American feminists, on the one hand, and Native feminists, U.S. feminists of color, diasporic feminists from the global South, and feminists in other parts of the world who struggle for justice and peace, on the other.

Although this volume is about Arab and Arab American feminist perspectives, many of us do not comfortably identify with the term "feminism." We use the term "feminism" as a shorthand for a commitment to gender justice, including an end to gender inequality, homophobia, and transphobia.[25] We further note that not all struggles for gender justice are the same: some tend to be hierarchical; some privilege struggles against sexism over struggles for feminist, queer, and transgender justice; others position gender justice in tension with and opposition to other forms of justice. As editors, we share a commitment to the necessity of resistance against hegemonic liberal U.S. feminisms that reinforce Orientalist and racist discourses on Arab and Muslim women. These feminist frameworks call for an end to what they define as inherent "cultural" or "religious" practices that they take out of historical and political contexts while ignoring historical and political realities. Several contributors engage feminists who view the category "Arab

feminism" as an oxymoron—as if Arabness or Muslimness were incompatible with feminism or as if Arabs were "inherently" or genetically incapable of understanding, advocating, or fighting for an end to gender and sexual oppression.

Several authors speak of the limitations they find in mainstream feminist agendas that confine Arab feminist concerns to issues liberal feminists view as the purview of Arab feminists, such as "the veil," "the harem," or "female circumcision," and rely on these issues as symbols of a backward and misogynist culture. Amira Jarmakani writes that Arab American feminists often find themselves trapped by the image of the veil, which dominant U.S. discourses presume to be the most urgent issue facing Muslim women—constantly having to respond to it and correct stereotypes about it. This constant forced engagement with the veil, she argues, displaces other struggles in which Arab American feminists are engaged. Jarmakani calls this process "the politics of invisibility" and suggests that it silences Arab American feminists "by the very categories that claim to give them voice."

In her essay, Amal Amireh criticizes Western feminist discourses for misrepresenting the experiences of Palestinian women by locating suicide bombers within cultural gender oppression rather than the violence of the Israeli military occupation. Amireh demonstrates how feminist writings, such as those works of Robin Morgan and the late Andrea Dworkin, extract the experiences of Palestinian women from the historical and political context of Israeli occupation and place them exclusively in a cultural context in which "Palestinian women are seen as victims of an abusive patriarchal Arab culture that drives them to destroy themselves and others. Thus, their violent political act is transformed into yet another example of the ways Arab culture inevitably kills its women."

While some contributors highlight the ways in which U.S. mainstream feminism has co-opted and defined feminist agendas in ways that exclude Arab and Arab American women, other contributors articulate their own feminist visions. Anan Ameri, for example, argues that there is no singular feminist agenda, since priorities are different for different women. Providing the example of women living in war zones, Ameri suggests that their priority might be securing food for their children and physical safety from rape, whereas for low income women in the United States, it might be affordable housing and health care. Ameri stresses that she ascribes to a feminism that is based on ending all forms of discrimination. Meanwhile, Joe Kadi places sustainable environment at the center of his feminism, incorporating yet another layer of social justice demands to this definition. As the keynote speaker at the 2004 San Francisco Dyke March, Happy/L. A. Hyder connects the dots among anti-Arab racism, the destruction of the Palestinian people and Iraqi civilization, and struggles for racial and sexual justice.

Arab and Arab American women's commitment to the eradication of multiple forms of oppression has meant addressing the theme of political resistance, activism, and organizing. Janaan Attia, a youth organizer and activist, illustrates the arduous process of coalition building. She explains the predicament of U.S. activism that often forces activists to choose one struggle over another. Colonialism, racism, and sexism, the struggle against which remains incomplete if homophobia is not viewed as an essential structure of inequality that affects our lives, privilege heteronormativity and binary understandings of gender, disenfranches queerness and transgender people. Imani Yatouma juxtaposes her experiences with childhood sexual abuse with family pressure to enter into a heterosexual marriage and have children. As she narrates her experience, Yatouma speaks of her struggles to embrace a queer identity as she recovers from multiple traumas.

Huda Jadallah calls for transgressing the simplistic binary that men and women have distinct experiences with discrimination. A common discourse in Arab and Arab American feminist writings reinforces a gender binary that associates masculinity with male bodies and femininity with female bodies. This framework neglects people whose bodies do not fit into this gender binary. In her discussion of anti-Arab racism, Jadallah makes clear that there are more than two genders. As a woman who might be perceived as a male, Jadallah does not experience being stereotyped into a submissive Arab woman, but she is rather seen as a violent Arab man. As a result, she calls for a more complex feminist analysis that accounts for the intersections of racism and gender nonconformity.

Beyond the "Internal-Communal" and "External-Political" Binary Divide

Some contributors focus on tensions that emerge within and between Arab American communities. Several authors (Jarrar, Yatouma, Berry, Hatem) reflect on the sense of being caught between pressures by their communities and dominant U.S. assumptions on the role of women in Muslim or Arab communities. Mohja Kahf, for example, writes about the challenges of being a Muslim woman writer in the West, where success is predicated on producing narratives that place the victimization of women at the center, focusing narratives on the experiences of either the victim or the escapee. She also discusses the pressure she faces from some Muslims to refrain from what they perceive as airing dirty laundry in public.

Mervat F. Hatem tackles the ways in which gender permeates the racialization of Islam and how racialization by the dominant society shapes polarizations within Arab American communities. In this context, *al-Muhajjabat* (those who wear the *hijab*), according to Hatem, claim their legitimate rights and interests

by participating in this debate. However, some Muslim, Christian, and Jewish members of the community have tended to look down on this group, defining its members as "socially backward," thus feeding into Orientalist stereotyping, and refusing to deal with *al-Muhajjabat* as equals when debating women's rights.

Moulouk Berry illustrates how fixed and rigid perceptions of Islam emerge not only from external U.S. sources but also within and between Arab and Arab American communities. She relates her experience of teaching a course on the Quran to predominantly Arab American Muslim students. Assigning her students to read a woman's challenges to different Islamic texts and understand the contexts in which they were codified, Berry finds some of her students threatened, as they assume that knowledge of the sacred text rests with Muslim male clerics but not with women, and thus perceiving Berry's feminist stance as an attack on established traditional and patriarchal interpretations of the text.

Susan Muaddi Darraj argues that the popular feminist slogans "The personal is political" and "The political is personal" are inapplicable to Arab American women in the same way as they are to other women in the United States. She argues that Arab American women fight two separate battles—one at home against sexism that is personal and one in society against racism that is political. Nadine Naber expands on this notion by exploring the ways in which the Arab American communities where she lives and works mark certain issues as "cultural" and "private" and therefore distinct from "political" and "public" issues. Sexism and homophobia become "cultural," while U.S. racism and imperialism become "political." Naber calls for a new movement that resists the choice between racism and imperialism, on the one hand, and sexism and homophobia, on the other.

Inspiration

We draw our inspiration from the many Arab and Arab American feminist activists in North America who have come before us: from the Arab immigrant women's magazine *Al Hoda* in the early 1900s and the Syrian Ladies' Aid Society of Boston, founded in 1917, to the Union of Palestinian Women's Associations in North America (1980s); Feminist Arab American Network (1983); Palestine Aid Society/Al-Najda (1983); Arab Women's Solidarity Association, AWSA, North America (1999); Radical Arab Women's Activist Network, RAWAN (2003); and Arab Movement of Women Arising for Justice, AMWAJ (2004).

This collection of essays would not have been possible were it not for the cumulative contributions of Arab and Arab American feminist scholars and activists who have set the stage for our work. The contributions by activists whose stories remain unwritten have had a particularly profound effect on us. We are

humbled by Camilia Odeh, Rawia Bishara, Ahla Shounich, Somaia Barghouti, Hala Maksoud, Mona Khalidi, Nabiha Ghandour, Abla Shamieh, Maha Khoury, Fadia Salfiti, Fatima Zeidane, Maha Jarad, Suheir Abbasi, Nabila Mango, Mary Harb, Helen Samhan, and many others.

For us, Arab and Arab American feminisms are ongoing processes that build on the cumulative struggles of those persons who have preceded us. We therefore offer no conclusions. We hope that this volume will debunk the notion of the "monolithic Arab woman"; will make clear how the geographic boundaries between Arab homelands and diasporas are fluid and overlapping; will articulately, theoretically, and experientially reflect our ideas, desires, emotions, and strategies for survival; and will affirm that Arab and Arab American feminist discourses and practices have existed, on multiple fronts, simultaneously, within our families and communities, in struggles against racism and colonialism, in debates over spirituality and the divine, within progressive and feminist and queer spaces, in academia, and among each other.