

argument and analysis. Some readers may be startled by the absence of a formal book plan and juxtaposing testimonies with lectures full of personal asides and opinions, but the overall content of this slim volume manages to maintain its luster throughout. Hopefully, Boyle will continue to write on this issue and broaden our vision as to what destiny holds for Palestinian statehood and Palestinian refugees.

Rabab Abdulhadi, Evelyn Alsultany, and Nadine Naber. Editors.
Arab and Arab American Feminisms: Gender, Violence, and Belonging
Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2011. 328 pages. Cloth \$45.00

Reviewed by Waleed Mahdi

Ever since the attacks of September 11, 2001, the world has witnessed an escalating polarizing rhetoric advancing, what I would refer to as, the US-Arab tension. The underpinnings of such a tension defy any attempt for contextualization that would render 9/11 as “the” historical turning point, but rather call for an in-depth scholarly consideration of the discursive formations that have shaped it, which long predate this particular incident. When charting the terrains of the US-Arab cultural encounters, the issue of otherness surfaces as a primary site of inquiry. Central to this are the questions of identity construction, particularly that of Arabs and Arab Americans, which have been mainly construed within the premises of the US imperialist realm that has perpetuated otherness as the only variable to measure one’s comprehension of the “Self.” In this regard, two overarching discourses surface for analysis, namely “orientalism” and “nationalism”; the former is often considered as the ideological framework that renders the economic necessities and political considerations imposed by the latter implicit in the popularized understanding, if not imagination, of Arabs and Arab Americans in the United States.

Drawing from the Foucauldian understanding of knowledge as “political,” the Gramscian notion of “hegemony” as a controlling mechanism, and the Hegelian conception of the “Self” and the “Other,” Edward Said showcases, in his seminal work *Orientalism*, how Europeans have exerted efforts to producing one-dimensional and highly politicized knowledge of the Orient that resorts to the Manichean paradigm of binary oppositions in order to establish a civilizational hierarchy and, consequently, legitimize the European imperialist project. This orientalist heritage, argue such scholars as Milini Schueller, Melani McAlister, and Douglas Little—in their works *U.S. Orientalisms*, *Epic Encounters*, and *American Orientalism* respectively—has been inherited by the United States and used to further crystallize its engagement with the Arab world.

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The other overarching discourse that continues to generate misconceived conceptions of the “Other” in the United States is “nationalism.” This nationalist narrative is sustained by an appeal to “American exceptionalism”; a discourse that celebrates the uniqueness of the American experience in world history and its geopolitical, socioeconomic, cultural, and moral distinction from the rest of the world. It is an embodiment of a rhetoric that locates the United States of America as the world’s beacon for liberty, democracy, freedom, and justice. This uncritically circulating myth has been reified by another equally important myth that restricts the definition of “American” to a set of values normativized through the lenses of white heteropatriarchy; hence, producing a sense of otherness marked through racialized, gendered, and sexualized bodies.

Arabs and Arab Americans have consequently undergone a process of alienation from the cultural landscape of the United States. In their edited work *Arab and Arab American Feminisms: Gender, Violence and Belonging*, Rabab Abdulhadi, Evelyn Alsultany, and Nadine Naber register this process through visiting multiple sites that showcase a wide range of voices that complicates the often superficial and stereotypical perception of Arabs and Arab Americans. In this volume, 32 entries are organized within five thematically structured issues that offer an encompassing portrait of the immediate concerns of Arabs in and outside the United States. One of the recurring issues throughout the work is that of “belonging.” In this regard, the agency is offered to the contributors who exhibit an array of perspectives that locate Arabness and Americanness in a continuum of constantly negotiated spaces. This offers a critical deviation from the deeply held polarity that has dominated the US public and popular spheres that would locate Arabs as the inherently opposite “Other,” and portray Arab Americans through the citizen-terrorist construct. In this work, readers are exposed to a multitude of third spaces, to borrow Homi Bhabha’s concept, where Arabs tend to voice their own embraced multiple racialized, gendered, and sexualized identities; thereby, complicating the readers’ understanding of the identity construction of Arabs and Arab Americans.

Although the work might be criticized for its selective reading of feminist writings, it still richly contributes to one’s understanding of the multiplicity of views pertaining to Arabs’ depiction of their sense of “being.” It intervenes by disrupting the already published feminist scholarship that often offers gendered categories of analysis without taking into consideration the intersectionality of gender, race, and sexuality in the Arab and Arab American experience, particularly in the post-9/11 context. Meanwhile, it invests in dispersing the homogenized portrayal of Arab and Arab American women as either submissive to Arabs’ masculine impulses or exotic for Americans’ sexual gratification through foregrounding the thoughts and experiences of Arab and Arab American women, queer, and transgender figures.

This is most effectively introduced through the powerful tool of personal narrative. With a diverse selection of poems, short stories, interviews, and essays, the contributors navigate away from the methodologies of discourse analysis and reporting narrative to stressing the power of the “personal” in contesting the dynamics of power—whether imperialist or nationalist—wrestling with the rhetoric of resistance, and engaging in self-representation. Furthermore, it offers the readers a more intimate inside look into the personal struggle of Arabs and Arab Americans in general, and brings into recognition the untold story of Arab (American) women, queer, and transgender in particular.

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Elias Khoury. *White Masks*. Translated from Arabic by Maia Tabet
Brooklyn, NY: Archipelago Books, 2010. 303 pages. Paper \$22.00

Reviewed by Yasmeen Hanoosh

First published in 1981 as *Al-Wujūh al-Baydhā'*, Elias Khoury's fourth novel only appeared in English in 2010. It is the third of Khoury's books to be published by Archipelago, following *Gate of the Sun* (2006) and *Yalo* (2009). Khoury, born in 1948 in Beirut, is the author of nine other novels (*Little Mountain*, *Journey of Little Gandhi*, *City Gates*, *Yalo*, *Gate of the Sun*, and *The Kingdom of Strangers* are also available in English translations) and numerous essays, books of criticism, and plays.

Like most of Khoury's other novels, *White Masks* is a story of storytelling in times of calamity. Published six years after the outset of the tumultuous Lebanese civil war (1975-90), *White Masks* was the first work of fiction to openly critique the behavior of the political factions during the war. It sets out to expose the criminal face of “heroism” and the poignancy of “martyrdom” through the disjointed tales of civilians and political figures, affluent and impoverished segments of society, victims and perpetrators of civil war crimes.

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