

**Muslim Women, Transnational Feminism,  
and the Ethics of Pedagogy: Contested  
Imaginaries in Post-9/11 Cultural Practice**

*Lisa K. Taylor and Jasmin Zine, eds.  
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The asphyxiation of subaltern voices and the disregard of Arab and Muslim women's subjectivities in the cultural sphere of the post-9/11 era is the main problematic addressed by this collection. With the editorship of Lisa K. Taylor and Jasmin Zine, and based on the legacy of post-colonial writers like Gayatri Spivak and Paulo Friere, this collection foregrounds how Orientalism operates on the ground and discusses how we can come up with new discursive tools and spaces for articulations of difference and diversity and for "reading back"

to resist the Empire. Critical public pedagogy is both the main objective and the main analytical tool in unmaking the epistemic frameworks of western imperialism, Orientalism, and patriarchy. The articles take up different stories to expose how racist, patriarchal, imperialist, and neo-Orientalist legacies cooperate with western feminism in the public and cultural realms and determine the forms of representation and modalities of agency that Muslim and Arab women can claim. Presenting examples from South Asia to North America to the Middle East through various cultural media (e.g., literature, the visual arts, film, and performance art), this volume contributes to studies in critical pedagogy, transnational feminism, and cultural and Islamic studies. It addresses an audience that ranges from academics and students to artists and public pedagogues.

The first section, “Transnational Anticolonial Feminist Reading Practice,” explores how particular representations of Muslim and Arab women are produced in historically and geographically specific contexts, yet with distinctive relevance and connection to one another. Megan Macdonald’s “SUR/VEIL, The Veil as Blank(et) Signifier,” takes the veil as a guide through Orientalist and colonial legacies and articulates the centrality of Muslim women’s bodies to the Empire’s epistemic framework. Macdonald draws connections between the French colonial postcards with “exotic” images of Algerian women for the consumption of the western male gaze with contemporary French headscarf controversies. By discussing how patriarchal Orientalist discourses are politically coopted in western feminism and traveled from colonial Algeria to France and the post-1980 revolution, she demonstrates the necessity of a transnational anticolonial feminist pedagogy.

Shahnaz Khan’s “*Khamosh Pani*, Reading Partition Muslim Masculinities and Femininities in an Age of Terror” takes us to South Asia and examines the patriarchal discourses that construct women’s bodies at the intersections of nationality and religion. An example of independent Hindi cinema, Sabiha Sumar’s *Khamosh Pani* (Silent Water), relates the story of a Sikh woman who converts to Islam to avoid gendered violence by Muslim groups during Partition (1947) and who eventually faces exclusion in her Muslim community in the wake of Islamist radicalization (1979) in Pakistan. In her analysis, Khan critiques the construction of communal identities and boundaries through women’s bodies and draws connections with contemporary representations of Muslim men and women in the context of the “war on terror.” She situates the film in the “complex terrain of production and reception” of the cinematic narrative, and reveals the imperialist and Orientalist epistemic framework that continually underwrites gendered violence from Partition to the security discourse of the post-9/11 era.

Mine Eren's article "Breaking the Stigma? The Antiheroine in Fatih Akin's *Head On*" examines Akin's award-winning film (2004) in terms of cultural representations of the Turkish diaspora in Germany and gendered identity. She looks at the cinematographic narrative of an unconventional young Turkish woman and the voyeuristic portrayal of her sexuality and "promiscuity" that, Eren argues, make sense within the frame of the "culturalization of racism" in public discussions on women, violence, and Islam. She argues that the narrative is intelligible only within the patriarchal and imperialist episteme, as it establishes a western male gaze into Turkish culture where the Muslim woman appears as "oppressed and in need of liberation." Eren situates the film in the German cinematic tradition, which suffers from the absence of migrant women's voices, and discusses the complex intermeshing of European xenophobia and the struggles of belonging with the politics of perception in the post-9/11 cultural scene.

This section's last article, Dana M. Olwan's "Pedagogies of Solidarity in Suheir Hammad's 'First Writing Since,'" turns to spoken word-art and poetry as a form of challenge to the Orientalist and imperialist legacies that obliterate women's voices and subjectivities. Her article is based on a critique of exclusionary cultural politics in the aftermath of 9/11, a time when American pain is constructed as exceptional and homogenous. She posits Suheir Hammad's poem, "First Writing Since," as a response and a form of pedagogy of relational solidarity that emphasizes "compassion and mutual understanding while insisting on diversity and difference" as pivotal values (p. 111). As Olwan observes, Hammad not only contextualizes the origins of violence committed instead of excusing it, but she also draw connections between whiteness, power, and violence. Her poetry challenges the dominant national narratives of 9/11 with a commitment to critical pedagogy, gender equity, anti-racist politics, and a form of transnational solidarity beyond the pitfalls of "global sisterhood" and imperialist feminisms.

The second section, "The Politics of Production and Reception," focuses on the politics of reception in literature and artwork by or about Muslim and Arab women. Catherine Burwell's "'A Too-Quick Enthusiasm for the Other': North American Women's Book Clubs and the Politics of Reading" explores book clubs as inherently political spaces where power, privilege, and social distinction are reproduced. Burwell examines how texts on and by Third World women are read and discussed in certain frames of thinking endorsed by reviewers, publishers, and marketers within the logic of imperialism, militarism, and war. She discusses *Reading Lolita in Tehran*, a recurring topic in this collection, to demonstrate how commodifying and appropriating culture

occurs in literature at the cost of stereotyping “third” world women by de-politicizing and de-historicizing their experiences. By doing so, Burwell reveals how artifacts become consumable in alignment with larger cultural and institutional discourses (Giroux 2004) and within a “horizon of expectations” (Jauss 1982) that enable identification with texts and activate discourses on global sisterhood.

Trish Salah picks up parallel themes of authorship and audience relationship in Joss Whedon’s popular TV series *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. In “Of Activist Fandoms, Auteur, Pedagogy, and Imperial Feminism: From *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* to *I am Du’a Khalil*,” Salah establishes an unlikely connection between the brutal public stoning to death of Du’a Khalil, a Yazidi Iraqi woman, in 2007 and the fans of an American TV series in order to demonstrate the neo-Orientalist and imperialist underpinnings of “global sisterhood” and transnational feminist discourses. In particular, she examines Whedon’s call out to *Buffy* fans to be responsible and take action in response to occurrences like Du’a Khalil’s, thereby embodying the feminist and liberal ideals that *Buffy*, the strong white American female heroine, upholds. Salah also makes a connection between the democratization of *Buffy*’s superpowers as a vampire slayer toward the end of the series and Whedon’s call-to-arms of the fandom within a context of Orientalist and imperialist feminist discourses. With this, Salah presents a powerful case for the convergence of feminist cooptation of imperialist and neo-Orientalist discourses in the post-9/11 cultural and political spheres.

The third section, “Transformative Pedagogies,” opens with Jasmin Zine’s “Cartographies of Difference and Pedagogies of Peril: Muslim Girls, and Women in Western Young Adult Fiction,” in which she talks about how certain texts become pedagogical and support a particular agenda. Examining the young adult novel series of *Shabanu* by Suzanne Fisher Staples, Zine demonstrates how neo-Orientalist discourses construct “pedagogies of peril,” that render Muslim and brown women intelligible to the western reader through the archetypes and racist logic of western imperialism. Zine presents an anti-Orientalist, antiracist feminist critique of western feminist writers who make authoritative truth claims about an “imagined Orient” and the women who live there. With a concern for the material affects of such representations on the lives of young Muslim women and girls, Zine discusses possibilities for “decolonizing” such texts. She extrapolates such transformative pedagogies as reading contrapuntally (with an awareness of the dominant discourses of metropolitan histories), reading with the critical reflexivity of one’s own subject location, and reading ethically with awareness of consuming and appropriating meanings.

Mehre Gomez Fonseca's "Shaking Up" Vision: The Video Diary as Personal and Pedagogical Intervention in Mona Hatoum's Measures of Distance," engages with the place of visual art and media in anti-racist feminist pedagogy. She problematizes the stigmatized visibility of the Muslim subjects of diaspora and asks "how can students and teachers located in feminist classrooms, Muslim and non-Muslim alike, safely imagine Muslim bodies and identities" outside of imperialist constructions? Fonseca pedagogically interprets Hatoum's autobiographical video installation, "Measures of Distance" (1988), a collection of the latter's interactions with her mother in occupied Palestine. She discusses the pedagogical potential of such artwork in demonstrating the complexities of articulating social identities across national and epistemic borders. In addition, she explores the innovative potential of such artwork as anti-racist feminist pedagogy "where the bodies of Arab and/or Muslim women can be regarded as sites of agency" (p. 207) in remembering and reimagining anti-colonial struggles.

In the section's last article, "From Empathy to Estrangement, from Enlightenment to Implication: A Pedagogical Framework for (Re)Reading Literary Desire against the 'Slow Acculturation of Imperialism,'" Lisa K. Taylor explores the possibilities of constructing counter-readerships and counter-publics to pedagogically intervene in re-inscriptions of the Empire's gendered Orientalisms and the violence that they license. Her article presents a hands-on approach to critical pedagogy in the classroom through her experience of teaching Marjan Satrapi's graphic novel *Persepolis*. She discusses how testimonial and autobiographical texts from the Orient are used selectively and instrumentally to essentialize cultural difference in the service of a neo-imperialist agenda. Taking literature education as a crucial arena for contested imaginaries and critical public pedagogy, Taylor proposes a "recursive pedagogy" to critically historicize and create an embodied ethics of reading.

The last section, "Reflections on Cultural Production," is the collection's most unique contribution. Interviews with various Canada- and United States-based female Muslim and Arab artists present unique examples to the anti-racist and feminist pedagogical principles that have guided the articles. These interviews provide the reader with a detailed account of the artists' lives and contextualize their experiences and artistic motivations. Featured are author and poet Mohja Kahf; independent writer/broadcaster Zarqa Nawaz; Toronto International Film Festival international programmer Rasha Salti; the editor and publisher of *Azizah* Tayyibah Taylor; spoken-word poet Sofia Baig; the creative director, head writer, and cofounder of *Hijabi Monologues* Sahar Ullah; and visual artist Jamelie Hassan. These interviews complement the ped-

agogic enterprise set forth in the collection by providing the much-needed space for the voice and self-articulations of Muslim/Arab women by Muslim/Arab women. Muslim and Arab artists' accounts come together as a multivalent response and a form of public pedagogy to dissolve the Empire's hegemonic discourses and offer new discursive tools and frames of reference with which to articulate counter-publics and initiate social change.

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