



Arab-American Women's Writing and Performance: Orientalism, Race and the Idea of the Arabian Nights (International Library of Cultural Studies)

Somaya Sami Sabry

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The public image of Arabs in America has been radically affected by the 'war on terror'. But stereotypes of Arabs, manifested for instance in Orientalist representations of Sheherazade and the Arabian Nights in Hollywood and American popular culture, have prevailed for much longer. Here Somaya Sabry traces the powerful effects of racial discourse and nineteenth- and twentieth-century American Orientalism on the Arab-American experience, setting the stage for a discussion of contemporary Arab-American women's responses. She shows how Arab-American women writers and performers confront and subvert racial stereotypes in this charged context, which is further complicated today by hostility towards Arabs in post-9/11 America.

How do Arab-American women writers and performers interrogate central tropes in the current polarized and historical moment? Sabry suggests that the figure of Sheherazade and the idea of the Arabian Nights, with their themes of transformation and change, offer a common cultural space for the exploration and reinterpretation of these stereotypes across the work of contemporary writers and performers—from Diana Abu-Jaber's *Crescent* to Mohja Kahf's *E-Mails from Scheherazad*, from Laila Farah's *Living in the Hyphen-Nation* to Maysoon Zayid's stand-up comedy. Through close readings and critical analyses Sabry reveals how each of these writers and performers engage in varying ways with Sheherazadian narrative and orality, and thus forge a location for cultural translation and negotiation—interrogating stereotypes of oppressed Muslim/Arab women at the same time that they navigate belonging and identity in a hostile/ambivalent environment.

Combining literary, cultural and political analysis, and shedding new light on Arab-American women's negotiations of identity, this book will be indispensable for all those interested in the Arab-American world, American ethnic studies and race, as well as diaspora studies, women's studies, literature, cultural studies and performance studies.

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