



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

Taylor, Lisa K.; and Zine, Jasmin, eds.
Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2014

Book Review

Tags: anti-racism | social justice | transnational feminism

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Date Reviewed: February 12, 2015

Speaking about her identity as a Muslim woman, spoken-word poet Sofia Baig said, “At a certain point, you have to raise your voice and fight to take it back” (275). In that spirit, this volume unites reflection and action for transformational pedagogy. By teaching readers to recognize negative stereotypes about Muslim women and exposing complicity with imperialism in some uncritical forms of multiculturalism, these essays make a significant contribution to social justice education. Collectively these authors model the transnational feminist praxis they propose. The volume offers a treasury of references to Muslim women artists as well as caution about the ways that some authentic voices have been commodified and co-opted. Interviews with artists expand and enrich the scholarly examination of pedagogical questions regarding authority, agency, representation, and identity.

Contributors present an impressive array of arguments that problematize pervasive errors in “liberal” or “Western” feminism because it has contributed to simplistic and oppressive images of Muslim women in ways that feed the justification for violence, war, and imperialism. For example, Megan MacDonald effectively demonstrates how glib ideals of the “universality of global sisterhood” can be co-opted to justify “the occupation’s military industrial agenda” if Muslim women are reduced to oppressed victims in need of rescue (39). Similarly, Catherine Burwell warns about exploitive trends in marketing and uncritical reading of fiction featured by North American women’s book clubs that sometimes perpetuate those negative images. Over and over, these writers examine the dangers of depoliticizing and disconnecting women’s voices from historical context. At the same time, these scholars call for art and critical education in both public and academic settings that broadens and deepens antiracist, anticolonial, transnational feminist cultural production. For instance, the creation of the

“Hijabi Monologues,” by Sahar Ishtiaque Ullah actively counters the “conflation of Middle East and Arab and Muslim” (286). Readers get a glimpse of what Mehre Gomez Fonseca calls “pedagogical means to unlearn Arabphobia and Islamaphobia” (198).

These artists, scholars, and educators warn readers against unethical use of some literature written by Muslim women that is quite well known. At the same time, they introduce readers to new artists whose work may be less familiar. Full transcripts of interviews with Muslim women artists include: conversations with novelist Mohja Kahf, documentary filmmaker and writer Zarqa Nawaz, curator and writer Rasha Salti, editor and publisher Tayyibah Taylor, spoken-word poet Sofia Baig, theater director and writer Sahar Ullah, and visual artist Jamelie Hassan.

Social justice educators committed to antiracism, anticolonialism, and transnational feminism will appreciate this corrective to mistakes that many of us have unwittingly made. Readers find suggestions for anticolonial praxis such as “ethical practices for reading across difference” examining privilege and power, and opening up “space of dialogue, debate, and dissent” (195). The book will be of particular interest to those who teach religious studies, feminist studies, and multicultural literature.

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