

Opening the Gates: A Century of Arab Feminist Writing

by Margot Badran, and Miriam Cooke, ed.(*)

Reviewed by Dr. Evelyne Accad

This is the first collection of Arab Women's feminist writings including poems, tales, excerpts from novels, short stories, essays, journalistic articles and speeches, as well as interviews. The voices are those of Arab women who both did and did not call themselves feminists. Their discourse addresses universal issues such as education and work, rights concerning marriage, and suffrage, at the same time it confronts more Arab gender related problems. They come from countries that experienced European colonial rule and/or western imperialist hegemony. Because of that, their feminist voices often ran the risk of being discredited as anti-nationalist or anti-religious.

The selections are organized "within a deliberately fluid classificatory framework that opens a new way of thinking about women's writings." The division under the rubrics -- **Awareness, Rejection, and Activism** -- is an interesting one which shows a progression in feminist consciousness.

Many of the authors are not yet known. Many of the excerpts were translated from Arabic or French into English. The anthology presents women of the nineteenth and twentieth century from a geographical area that stretches from Morocco in the West to Iraq and the Arabian Peninsula in the East. The broad range of authors and voices offers a unique opportunity to

learn more about the complexity of Arab women writing styles and themes. "An analysis of Arab women's discourse allows us to see feminism where we had not previously thought to look." This remarkable collection of other stories, essays, poems, speeches, interviews, excerpts from novels, etc., gives us an understanding of the Arab world from the women's points of view, an aspect often occulted by the more dominant male discourse. •

(*) Margot Badran, and M. Cooke, ed., *Opening the Gates: A Century of Arab Feminist Writing*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990, 412 pages.



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