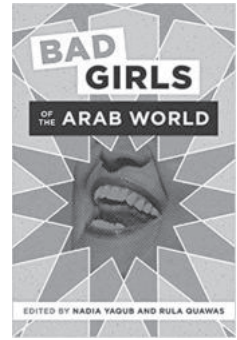


◆書評◆

Edited by Nadia Yaqub and Rula Quawas

*Bad Girls of The Arab World*

(University of Texas Press, 2017, ISBN: 978-1-4773-1335-7, USD27.95)



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*Bad Girls of the Arab World* pushes our understandings of women and gender in Arab-majority countries by challenging simplistic ideas of oppression, agency and resistance. The edited volume complicates notions about change and transgression, and succeeds in both providing interesting historical and ethnographic material while also offering personal and artistic reflections. The twelve contributions by or about women who either defy gender norms or are perceived to do so, are framed by an eloquent and insightful introduction written by Nadia Yaqub, and two artistic interventions in the form of Afterwords by Laila al-Atrash and Miral al-Tahawy.

Inspired by the seminal collection *Bad Girls of Japan* (2005), this volume highlights the various ways gendered boundaries and norms are historically contingent and socially produced but are also potentially shifting and subject to change in the context of both individual transgression and wider social and historical transformations. The editors put together a range

of examples of women being branded as “bad”, either intentionally or against their will, showing that the control and scrutiny of women’s behavior, their mobility, their bodies and their sexuality, is central to reinforcing and reproducing patriarchal authoritarianism in the context of wider social, economic and political crises and anxieties in the region. Examples and contexts are wide-ranging and include the experience of a university professor teaching feminism to students in a classroom in Amman, a performance artist responding to frequent suicide bombings in Beirut, an Arab American immigrant who worked as a CIA agent and became the target of an Islamophobic campaign, Palestinian women accused of being bad mothers for their supposed willingness to sacrifice their children in the context of Israeli military violence, and Sudanese female musicians who live in the diaspora and continue to play a role in Sudanese national politics.

This important book gains particular significance as Rula Qawas, one of the

editors, passed away unexpectedly before the book was published. All of us, whether students or fellow academics, who knew her, were touched by her commitment to gender studies, to the education of her students and to women's rights more broadly. What struck me most about Rula were her wit and humour, coupled with a political and intellectual astuteness, all crouched in modesty and respect for others. Her commitment to gender studies, feminism and the well-being of her students got her into trouble on more than one occasion. She was courageous to stand up to injustice, inequalities and attempts to side-line or suppress women's voices. The mere fact that she claimed the term "feminist" and provided her students with the knowledge and tools to challenge existing gender norms made her stand out and transgressive in the eyes of many people, inside and outside the university.

Just like Rula Qawas experienced on several occasions during her life time, many of the "bad girls" presented and discussed in this edited volume are branded as such due to their transgression, courage and daring to defy norms. They are not necessarily intending to appropriate

the term "bad", in fact some loathe it and would much prefer to be accepted and respected by society. It is not only strict gender norms and gendered roles that cause transgression, whether intended or not, but socio-economic factors like class, ethnicity, religious affiliation (or lack thereof) as well as political conviction that might also influence whether a certain behavior is viewed as transgressive or not. The focus on transgression, allows for a more nuanced approach to the way women resist, subvert or negotiate the structures and processes that might restrain their freedom, thereby shifting our focus to the fraud concept of agency.

I thoroughly enjoyed reading both the more analytical as well as the reflective and artistic contributions to this volume, and recommend the book to be on reading lists for students learning about women and gender in the Middle East. My only suggestion for future publications would be to start challenging the idea of the Arab world, given the fact that many of the "bad girls" are named as such because they are not ethnically Arab or don't identify as such.

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