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Arab Women: Between Defiance and Restraint

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The lives of Arab women today are complex, diverse and far more multi-faceted than those of the one-dimensional creatures of veiled passivity who inhabit the imaginations of so many Western "experts." In most Arab countries, women face constricting laws and social customs that hold them back from full participation in their societies. Some, as a result, lead lives of passive submission. But others rage against those institutional obstacles, organize other women to challenge male domination of their public and private lives, and seize every opening, large or small, to move the rights of women at least that one next step.

Arab women labor in dangerous factories and unmechanized fields, they keep families intact and care for their children without access to modern technology; sometimes even without electricity or clean water. But they also fill medical and engineering schools in universities throughout the Arab world; they are creating some of the greatest art and literature of their rich cultures; they serve bravely in overwhelmingly male parliaments; and they organize and fight-with or without men's consent-for incremental democratic gains, and sometimes for their own rights as women.

This collection brings together a distinguished cast of Arab women writers and other experts and analyzes the lives, the diverse roles and the means of overcoming the challenges that confront women in today's Arab societies. Essays examine feminism, women's education and daily lives, women's views of Islam and women Islamists, and women's roles in war and literature. It also includes interviews with women political leaders such as Palestine's Hanan Mikhail Ashrawi and Jordan's Leila Sharaf.

Contributors include: Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad, Samira Harfoush-Strickland, Bouthaina Sha'aban, Abla Amawi, Taghreed Alqudsi-Ghabra, Sheila Carapico, Hadia Higab, Judith Tucker, Ramla Khalidi, Fatima Mernissi, Fadwa El Guindi, Sarah Graham-Brown, Richard H. Curtiss, Nagat el-Sanabary, Hala Maksoud, Julinda Abu Nassr, Suha Sabbagh, Rita Giacaman, Jane Smith, Samer M. Reno, Mounira Charrad, Mervat F. Hatem, Suad Joseph, Joe Stork, Susan Slyomovics, Eileen Kuttab and Jean Makdisi.

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