
Jarmakani (women's studies, Georgia State Univ.) problematizes various constructions of Arab-Muslim femininity in Western societies, especially in the US in the last century. By deconstructing visual presentations of Arab-Muslim women, she shows how US popular media has portrayed these women either as helpless victims of Arab male domination or as erotic, sexualized, magical belly dancers in harems. The persistent fascination with the veil, harems, and belly dancers reflects US cultural and national interests in fulfilling the country's masculine fantasies and justifying its imperialist historical narrative of progress and liberal democracy. Jarmakani focuses on three sets of images in three periods and interrogates their function in the shifting power relations between the US and the Middle East. The representation of Arab womanhood in the 1893 Chicago world's fair fine arts display served expansionist US interests and fostered stereotypes in tobacco advertisements in the early 20th century—the latter at the service of US mass consumerism and proto-imperialism. Contemporary images of Arab-Muslim women, especially in veil, have become functional to capitalist globalization and US hegemony. Functioning as cultural myths and reflecting Western heteromasculine fantasies, these images decontextualize Arab-Muslim women from their actual historical and cultural settings, and rationalize Western hegemonic presence in the Middle East. Summing Up: Recommended. Upper-division undergraduates and above.

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