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Challenging State, Religious, and Gender Violence in Seven Contemporary Arab American Writers

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CHALLENGING STATE, RELIGIOUS, AND GENDER VIOLENCE IN SEVEN

CONTEMPORARY ARAB AMERICAN WRITERS

A Dissertation

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research

In Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

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Indiana University of Pennsylvania
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Title: Challenging State, Religious, and Gender Violence in Seven Contemporary Arab American Writers

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This dissertation examines the various positions and strategies that seven contemporary Arab American writers take to debate, diagnose, outline, challenge, and critique the phenomenon of violence that has existed in either their native Arab societies, Arab American communities, or in America. The literary texts that I analyze include Dallal Shaw's *Scattered Like Seeds*, Ibrahim Fawal's *On the Hills of God*, Mohja Kahf's *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf*, Soheir Khashoggi's *Mirage*, Diana Abu-Jaber's *Arabian Jazz*, Kathryn Abdul-Baki's collection of stories *Fields of Fig and Olive: Ameera and Other Stories of the Middle East*, and Fay Afaf Kanafani's autobiography, *Nadia, Captive of Hope: Memoir of an Arab Woman*. Such Arab American writers are actively engaged in dramatizing three forms of violence: "state violence," religion-based violence, and gender-based violence. These authors' texts—with their various cultural and geographical components which include Palestine, Lebanon, Syria, Arabian Gulf, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Arab American societies that include immigrants and descendants from these native countries—debate the ways through which these forms of violence operate within such societies and dramatize them to crystallize scripts that are emblematic of two basic elements. The first element is concerned with diagnosing the forms and causes of violence and its negative consequences, whereas the second element is concerned with challenging these causes in the hope of eliminating them.

The theoretical approaches for my investigation of these writers' dramatization and positions of the phenomenon of violence are mainly postcolonialism, Arab, Arab American feminist criticisms, as well as feminist theory in general. Postcolonialism and feminism are suitable tools with which I can explore how and why violence in its various forms in these literary works occurs, and highlight these writers' counter views of challenging it. Despite my major commitment to postcolonialism and feminism, I also incorporate in my analysis the critical views of Peter Ladicola, Anson Shupe, Hannah Arendt, Johan Galtung, and Sally Engle Merry on violence.