

From the “Unseen” to the “Scene”: Identity Politics in Selected Plays by Arab American Women Dramatists

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Although many have argued that Arab American theatre was born on September 11, the fact is Arab American playwrights have gained more acclaim and recognition since then. The heavy feminine presence of Arab American playwrights such as Leila Buck, Heather Raffo and Betty Shamieh, to name but a few, has introduced performances to the American stage that dispel the image of the villainous Arab. They have attempted to draw a more humanized portrait of the “mysterious other” to replace the stereotypical one of the miserly and greedy Arab in pursuit of carnal pleasures.

This study considers certain feminist aspects in three of Betty Shamieh’s plays. Shamieh, a Palestinian American performer and playwright, brings her experience as an Arab American to the American stage post 9/11. In her plays *The Black Eyed, Roar* and *Architecture* her characters, predominantly female, bring varying experiences of women (Arabs and Arab Americans) to the foreground. She offers a wide array of women from various historical and cultural backgrounds who discuss their hopes, dreams, disappointments and desires. By virtue of hybridity born out of existing between two cultures, Shamieh offers varying perspectives on both Arab and American cultures. She moves beyond the limitations of gender issues to include socio-political and cultural issues that makeup a large part of the women’s identities.

The questions that this paper shall attempt to answer are:

1. How do Shamieh’s plays mend the cultural and political ruptures?
2. How does a predominantly female cast negotiate its identity while maintaining its ethnicity?