
Teaching American Women's Contemporary Drama in the Arab World

Phyllisa Deroze*¹

¹United Arab Emirates University – United Arab Emirates

Abstract

In this paper, I will discuss student perception of American women's drama in a drama class taught in the Middle East. By unpacking the challenges of transplanting American feminist drama into an Arab setting where issues of censorship arise and the expression of feminism is uniquely different, this discussion will demonstrate the collisions and the diversions of undergoing such a project. Ntozake Shange's *for colored girls who have considered suicide when the rainbow is enough* will be discussed first followed by Pearl Cleage's *Flying West* and finally *Poof!* by Lynn Nottage. The first is one the first explicitly feminist plays written by an African American playwright and for colored girls... proceeded to have a record-setting run on Broadway in the 1970s. *Flying West*, like *for colored girls...* is set in America and focuses on gender violence faced by American women. These two plays provide students an authentic "American" perception of feminist drama enabling them to make connections to their own culture. *Poof!*, however, does not have a particular setting or time and the characters are not bound culturally to America. This freedom to cross cultural boundaries afford students to better relate to the script and compare it to their own cultural experiences. Finally, I will discuss the multiple levels of censorship encountered when teaching such texts and how I negotiate what textual material remains, what topics of discussion are consciously avoided, and the overall impression of contemporary women's drama is viewed by students in my classes in the Gulf.

*Speaker