

What to Read Next?

FIFTEEN IRAQI POETS

Edited by Dunya Mikhail
(New Directions, 2013)

This short compilation of pieces by modern Iraqi poets offers a taste of contemporary work. But as Mikhail writes in her introduction to the anthology, although the authors may be products of the 20th century, readers may also hear the influence of ancient Sumerian culture, particularly myths and symbols, in their poems.

DAY OF HONEY: A MEMOIR OF FOOD, LOVE, AND WAR

By Annia Ciezadlo
(Free Press, 2011)

Using skills honed as a foreign correspondent, Ciezadlo sets out to discover, prepare, and dine on Iraqi cuisine while living in Baghdad between 2003-2009. Her research takes her from cafes on Abu Nuwas Street, where she savors *masquf*, to the city's markets, or souqs, to the kitchens of new friends. Ciezadlo comes to understand (and taste) the influence of Iraq's history, and its position at the intersection of many empires, on its food culture.

SHOOT AN IRAQI: ART, LIFE AND RESISTANCE UNDER THE GUN

By Wafaa Bilal and Kari Lydersen
(City Lights Publishers, 2008)

The political artist Wafaa Bilal reflects on his month-long installation, *Domestic Tension*, in which he allowed viewers to shoot him with paintballs, as well as his upbringing in Iraq, his internment in refugee camps, and his eventual arrival in the United States.

2014

ARAB AMERICAN BOOK AWARD

The Arab American Book Award is a literary program created to honor books written by and about Arab Americans. The program, managed by the Russell J. Ebeid Library & Resource Center at the Arab American National Museum, generates greater awareness of Arab American scholarship and writing through an annual award competition and educational outreach. Learn more about past and present winners at arabamericanmuseum.org/bookaward.

The goal of the Reading & Discussion Guide project is to increase the audience for Arab American literature and stimulate discussion about the winning books' themes and topics.

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10TH ANNIVERSARY

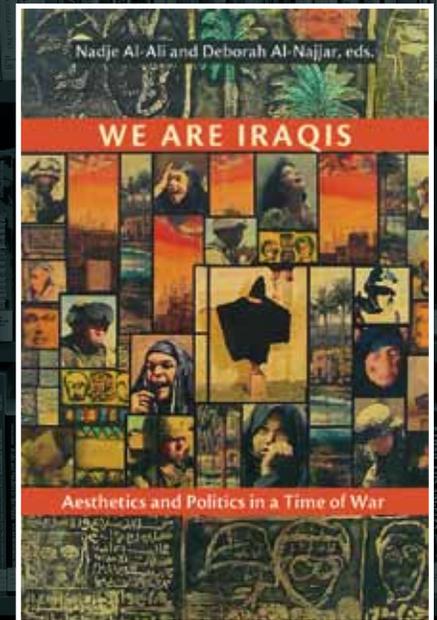
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2014

ARAB AMERICAN BOOK AWARD

Evelyn Shakir
Non-Fiction Award Winner



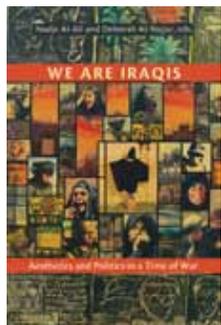
READING & DISCUSSION GUIDE



2014

ARAB AMERICAN BOOK AWARD

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We Are Iraqis *Aesthetics and Politics in a Time of War*

Edited by Nadje Al-Ali
and Deborah Al-Najjar
Syracuse University Press

SUMMARY

Most Americans know very little about the everyday lives of Iraqis, despite ongoing media coverage of the occupation of Iraq and its aftermath. In this anthology, editors Nadje Al-Ali and Deborah Al-Najjar showcase written and visual contributions by Iraqi and Iraqi American artists, writers, poets, filmmakers, photographers, and activists. The short pieces that make up the anthology offer readers diverse perspectives, in various mediums, on a shared traumatic history.

The contributors face issues common to many immigrants in ethnic communities – identity in diaspora, the lasting impact of war, cultures in transition – compounded by America’s invasion of their country of origin. The co-editors frame the pieces in this anthology as acts of nonviolent resistance: writers continuing to write and artists continuing to make art, maintaining their culture despite chaotic surroundings and the effects of invasion. *We Are Iraqis* is a highly relevant addition to this under-published subfield within Arab and Arab American studies.



Co-editor Deborah Al-Najjar, photo by Furqan Rauf

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What experiences did you have with contemporary Iraqi art before reading this book?
2. In his essay, Wafaa Bilal describes how his artistic mission is to encourage others to “examine their own attitudes, prejudices, lives, and behaviors and hence hopefully reach new levels of understanding themselves and others.” Do you remember a time that a work of art, from this book or elsewhere, has had that effect on you?
3. What differences in style, outlook, or practice do you see between the contributors? What about similarities?
4. Whom, if any, of the artists and authors do you identify with? Why?
5. Are there voices or perspectives missing from this collection?

About The Editors

Nadje Al-Ali is Professor of Gender Studies at the School of Oriental and African Studies at the University of London. Her publications include *Iraqi Women: Untold Stories from 1948 to the Present* and *What Kind of Liberation? Women and the Occupation of Iraq* (coauthored with Nicola Pratt). She is a founding member of Act Together: Women’s Action for Iraq and a member of the Feminist Review Collective.

Deborah Al-Najjar is a PhD candidate in the Department of American Studies and Ethnicity at the University of Southern California. Her fiction has been published in the *Kenyon Review*, the *Michigan Quarterly Review*, and the *Indiana Review*. Her dissertation examines cinematic, literary, and performance histories of Iraq.

By the Numbers

IRAQI AMERICAN COMMUNITY

- 14: Number of Chaldean (Iraqi Christian) churches in metro Detroit
- 656: Number of Iraqi immigrants that arrived in 1966
- 4,300: Average yearly number of Iraqi immigrants and refugees in decade after the 1991 Gulf War
- 20,000: Approximate number of Iraqi refugees and immigrants that arrived in 2012