The Center for Gulf Studies (CGS) at AUK hosted a lecture by Dr. Haneen Al-Ghabra, Assistant Professor in the Department of Mass Communication in Kuwait University. The talk entitled, Muslim Women and White Femininity: Reenactment and Resistance, discussed the main findings of her book of the same title, where she focused on the portrayal of Muslim women in western media and their embodiment of white feminism.

In her talk, Dr. Al-Ghabra shed light on the hegemonic representation of feminism in an attempt to introduce a transition towards the more inclusive intersectional feminist ethics, which would allow for an account of the multiple layers of the diverse ethnic, social, and religious identities of women of color. In studying this, she demonstrated the utility of archetypal criticism, a form of criticism that analyzes recurring archetypes, as a tool to deconstruct dominant discourses in the media. She suggested that there were archetypes of Muslim women circulated by western media outlets for further political and economic agendas, emphasizing, “It is important to know that Muslim women are always at the forefront of western media whenever the West wants to come into the region, politically, economically, and strategically.”

In particular, the speaker examined three predominant archetypes carried through by Muslim women within western media discourse and imagery. The first archetype she listed is ‘The Oppressed’ which frames Muslim women as beings lacking access to basic rights. She offers the case of Malala Yousafzai, a Pakistani activist for female education, of being framed by the western media as someone who belongs in this category. Dr. Al-Ghabra’s second archetype was ‘The Advocate’ which she explains as a type that completely disengages with their own society, culture, and identity. The final archetype she introduced was ‘The Humanitarian’ such as philanthropist Queen Rania of Jordan. In this category, she notes the difference between the ways in which humanitarian efforts may be reported by western media.

In noting the significance of this lecture, Dr. Shareefa Al-Adwani, Director of CGS, said, “Dr. Al-Ghabra’s presentation allows us to reflect on our privileges and our oppressions, and how the two are both exogenous and internalized by all people. In this way, her research challenges us to interrogate institutions, ideas, and our identities as denizens of the Gulf.”

Dr. Haneen Al-Ghabra is an Assistant Professor at the Department of Mass Communications at Kuwait University. She recently was the recipient for the Outstanding Article Award, at the National Communication Association’s (NCA) Feminist Division in the United States (November, 2018). She is the author of Muslim Women and White Femininity: Reenactment and Resistance (November 2018) and specializes in Rhetoric and Cultural Studies with a focus on Intersectionality. Dr. Haneen’s methodological research is conducted through rhetorical criticism, ethnography, and autoethnography. She has been featured on more than six top panels and has won top awards four times. Dr. Haneen also has eight years of work experience both in the government and private sector in Kuwait in public relations and campaign planning.