


Touro Institute  מכון טרו

In conjunction with the



Women in Islamic Societies



Kuwaiti Women Solidarity Protest
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Asma Afsaruddin is associate professor of Arabic and Islamic Studies in the Department of Classics and previously taught at Harvard University. Her fields of specialization are the religious and political thought of Islam, Qur'an and hadith studies, Islamic intellectual history, and gender. Among other publications, she is the author of *Excellence and Precedence: Medieval Islamic Discourse on Legitimate Leadership* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2002) and of the forthcoming *The First Muslims: A Short History* (Oxford: OneWorld Publications, 2007), and the editor of *Hermeneutics and Honor: Negotiation of Female "Public" Space in Islamic/ate Societies* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University, 1999). She has also written over fifty research articles, book chapters, and encyclopedia entries on various aspects of Islamic thought and has lectured widely in the US, Europe, and the Middle East. Afsaruddin serves on the editorial boards of the *Oxford Encyclopaedia of the Islamic World* and the *MESA Bulletin* (Cambridge University Press). Among her current research projects is a book-length manuscript about competing perspectives on and martyrdom in pre-modern and modern Islamic thought. Her research has won funding from the Harry Frank Guggenheim Foundation and the Carnegie Corporation of New York, among others.

Course Description

This course serves as a broad survey of women's and gender issues within the contexts of multiple societies in the Islamic world. The first half of the semester will concentrate on the historical position of women in Islamic societies, defined by the normative values of Islam and by cultural traditions and norms that were sometimes at odds with religious prescriptions. We will discuss how the interpretations of these values in diverse circumstances and who gets to do the interpreting have had important repercussions for women's societal roles. The second half of the course will privilege women's voices in articulating their gendered identities and roles in a number of pre-modern and modern Islamic societies in different historical circumstances as expressed in memoirs, fiction, magazine articles, and public speeches. As part of the historical contextualization of such works, we will focus on how modern phenomena like Western colonialism, nationalist

liberation movements, civil and other forms of war have fostered women's organized movements, and their socio-political empowerment in some cases and marginalization in others, with lasting implications for these developing societies.

Syllabus

Overview of Requirements

This class will emphasize, above all, critical reading and energetic discussion of the reading material assigned. Students are, therefore, always expected to have done their reading in advance and come to class fully prepared to discuss this material. There will be one mid-term in class and two short, written assignments (about 2 pages). Topics for these short papers are based on the reading assignments and lectures. Each student or student group will do one thirty- or forty-minute oral presentation in class based on one of the works below. There is no in-class final exam, but students will write a final paper (8-10 pages long).

Required Texts

1. Barlas, Asma. *"Believing Women" in Islam: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Qur'an*. Texas, 2002.
2. Shaarawi, Huda. *Harem Years*. Tr. Margot Badran. New York, 1987.
3. Saadawi, Nawal. *Memoirs of a Woman Doctor*. San Francisco, 1989.
4. Mernissi, Fatima. *Dreams of Trespass*. Reading, MA, 1995.
5. Abouzeid, Leila. *The Year of the Elephant*. Austin, 1989.
6. Al-Shaykh, Hanan. *The Story of Zahra*. Chicago, 1996.
7. Badr, Liyana. *A Balcony over the Fakihani*. Northhampton, 1998.

Assigned Readings and Films

- Ahmed, Leila. *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993. pp. 64-78 and 144-168.
- Badran, Margot, and Cooke, Miriam, eds. *Opening the Gates: An Anthology of Arab Feminist Writing*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990. pp. 338-362.

- Cole, Juan R. I. "Gender, Tradition, and History." In *Tradition, Identity, and Power*, Fatma Muge Gocek and Shiva Balaghi, eds. New York: Columbia University Press, 1995. pp. 23-29.
- Cooke, Miriam, "Arab Women, Arab Wars." In *Tradition, Identity, and Power*, Fatma Muge Gocek and Shiva Balaghi, eds. New York: Columbia University Press, 1995. pp. 144-166.
- Gocek, Fatma Muge, and Balaghi, Shiva. "Reconstructing Gender in the Middle East Through Voice and Experience." In *Tradition, Identity, and Power*, Fatma Muge Gocek and Shiva Balaghi, eds. New York: Columbia University Press, 1995. pp. 1-19.
- Hessini, Leila. "Wearing the Hijab in Contemporary Morocco: Choice and Identity." In *Tradition, Identity, and Power*, Fatma Muge Gocek and Shiva Balaghi, eds. New York: Columbia University Press, 1995. pp. 40-55.
- Mernissi, Fatima. *The Veil and the Male Elite*. Reading, MA: Perseus Books Groups, 1992. pp. 49-61.
- Muslims and America. Dr. Aziza al-Hibri and Nazir Khaja. Islamic Information Service. Videocassette. New York: Insight Media, 1997.
- Peirce, Leslie P. *The Imperial Harem: Women and Sovereignty in the Ottoman Empire*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993. pp. 3-12.
- Stowasser, Barbara Freyer. "The Hijab: How a Curtain Became an Institution and a Cultural Symbol." In *Humanism, Culture, and Language in the Near East*, Asma Afsaruddin and A.H. Mathias Zahniser, eds. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1997. pp. 87-104.
- Stowasser, Barbara Freyer. *Women in the Qur'an, Traditions, and Interpretation*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994. pp. 25-37.
- The Battle of Algiers. Dir. Gillo Pontecorvo, prod. Igor Film. Videocassette. New York: Guidance Associates, 1988.

Calendar

Week	Topic	Readings
1	Introduction: Gender, Identity, and Islamic Societies	"Reconstructing Gender in the Middle East Through Voice and Experience," by Gocek and Balaghi
2	Gender and Historical Context	"Gender, Tradition, and History," by Cole "The Transitional Age," by Ahmed Film: <i>The Battle of Algiers</i>
3	Religious Tradition and the Construction of Gender	"The Wife of the Prophet Adam in the Qur'an," by Stowasser "Tradition of Misogyny," by Mernissi
4	Hermeneutics, Culture and the Construction of Gender	" <i>Believing Women</i> " in Islam, by Barlas, pp. 31-89 (Introduction optional)
5	Hermeneutics, Culture and the Construction of Gender,	" <i>Believing Women</i> ," by Barlas, pp. 129-210

Continued

6	The Phenomenon of the Hijab (Veil)	"The Hijab: How a Curtain Became and Insitution and a Cultural Symbol," by Stowasser "Wearing the Hijab in Contemporary Morocco: Choice and Identity," by Hessini Film: <i>Muslims and America</i>
7	Discourse of the Hijab: Negotiating Cultures of War	"The Discourse of the Veil," by Ahmed "Myths and Realities of the Harem," by Pierce "Arab Women, Arab Wars," by Cooke
8	Reading Women's Memoirs and Life Stories: Feminist Consciousness in the Modern Middle East	Selections from <i>Opening the Gates</i> "Islamic Feminism," by Badran, from <i>Hermeneutics and Honor</i> (ed. Afsaruddin)
9	The Egyptian Women's Movement: Rise of Women's Activism	Begin reading <i>Harem Years</i> , by Shaarawi
10	Readings	<i>Harem Years</i> , by Shaarawi
11	Readings	<i>Memoirs of a Woman Doctor</i> , by Sadaawi
12	Readings	<i>Dreams of Trespass</i> , by Mernissi
13	Readings	<i>The Year of the Elephant</i> , by Abouzeid
14	Readings	<i>The Story of Zahra</i> , by Al-Shaykh
15	Readings	<i>A Balcony over the Fakihani</i> , by Badr

Lectures

Week	Topic	Lecture/Study Materials
1	Introduction: Gender, Identity, and Islamic Societies	Introductory Lecture Gocek and Bolaghi Study Guide
2	Gender and Historical Context	Second Lecture Cole and Ahmed Discussion Questions Mernissi Article Discussion Questions
3	Religious Tradition and the Construction of Gender	Stowasser Discussion Questions
4	Hermeneutics, Culture, and the Construction of Gender	Barlas Discussion Questions I
5	Hermeneutics, Culture, and the Construction of Gender, Contd.	Barlas Discussion Questions II
6	The Phenomenon of the Hijab (Veil)	Lecture on Veiling

		Hessini Discussion Questions
		Stowasser Study Guide
		Ahmed Study Guide and Discussion Questions
7	Discourse of the Hijab: Negotiating Cultures of War	Peirce Study Guide
		Cooke Discussion Questions
8	Reading Women's Memoirs and Life Stories: Feminist Consciousness in the Modern Middle East	Badran Study Guide I Badran Study Guide II
9	The Egyptian Women's Movement: Rise of Women's Activism	Shaarawi Study Guide
10	Oral Presentations/Sharaawi	Shaarawi Discussion Questions
11	Oral Presentations/Sadaawi	Saadawi Study Guide
12	Oral Presentations/Mernissi	Brief History of Morocco Mernissi Study Guide
13	Oral Presentations/Abouzeid	Abouzeid Discussion Questions
14	Oral Presentations/Al-Shaykh	Prelude to Zahra: A History of Lebanon Al-Shaykh Study Guide
15	Oral Presentations/Badr	Badr Study Guide

Introductory Lecture

Gender, Identity, and Society

Because my training is primarily as a philologist, I want to talk about the significance, both linguistic and sociological, of the terms "feminist" or "feminism" as opposed to "women's" or simply "feminine." I think in English the distinction is fairly obvious; "feminine" implies having to do with women in the broadest possible sense; "feminist" implies a specific ideology concerned with political and social rights for women. The coining of these terms is important in itself; it is an acknowledgement after all of a specific consciousness, of a specific analytical tool, and a specific discourse. The Arabic term that would be used to translate "feminist" into Arabic is *nisa'i*, the corresponding noun "feminism" is *nisa'iyya*. The same terms, however, also have to do with women in general, therefore meaning both feminine and femininity.

Historically, a term connoting feminism first appeared in the Arab world in 1909 when Malak Hifni Nasif under the pen-name, Bahithat al-Badiya, a name meaning "Seeker in the Desert," published a collection of articles and speeches in a book entitled *Al-Nisa'iyyat*. It was a perfectly innocuous title; *nisa'iyyat* after all simply means

something by or about women. However, the content of *Al-Nisa'iyat* revealed its feminist orientation: it called for improvement in women's lives by providing more educational and work opportunities, and the granting of freedoms guaranteed by Islam but which were allowed to lapse by a male establishment. This work was published by the printing press of a liberal nationalist political party, the Umma party. Thus had important social consequences -- it helped the feminist voice reach a broader public of both women and men. Two years later, Bahithat al-Badiya sent demands that she had spelled out in *Al-Nisa'iyat* to a nationalist congress. By 1923, the time of Huda al-Sha`rawi, Egyptian women belonging to the Egyptian Feminist Union began to use the term *nisa'i* in a feminist vein. To this day, therefore, this term retains its dual meaning; the larger historical and social context helps us determine its specific meaning and application.

However, we shouldn't fall into the trap of thinking that just because we don't label something as such, it does not or did not exist. If we scrutinize the literature of Arab women starting in the second half of the nineteenth century, we discover that Arab women were producing a discourse that can today be identified as feminist, before therefore there was an explicit term for feminism.

Margot Badran for example has specifically worked on the history of feminism in Egypt and has made, in my opinion, the very important distinction between "invisible" and "visible" feminisms. By maintaining this distinction, she says, we save feminism from being understood as an exclusively public and explicit phenomenon. Rather, feminism is used as an analytical framework within which to locate and explain the comprehensive feminist historical experience.

There are historical moments when patriarchal authorities suppress public feminist movements, as was the case in Egypt from the middle 1950s until the early 1970s. There are private moments when authorities within the family, usually husbands, enforce silence. Feminism may be removed from sight, but it is not necessarily extinguished.

This, I think, is a very important observation and perspective. Such a perspective allows us to valorize, to consider as equally relevant, voices of Arab women who both did or did not call themselves feminists. Even after the term came into use and feminism was explicitly understood, there were women writing who did not call themselves feminists and who would not see their work as embodying an outlook which others could and did recognize as feminist.

Another important distinction to be pointed out is that between the feminism of women and feminism of men. The starting point of each was different. Men's pro-feminist stands rose out of contact with European society in which women were generally visible. These men argued that Arab society was backward because women were backward and women were backward because of lack of education and because of social constraints, such as veiling and seclusion, practised in the middle and upper classes. They affirmed that these practices were not sanctioned by religion. One of the most important pro-feminist male

thinkers is the Egyptian lawyer Qasim Amin who wrote the very influential work *Liberation of the Woman* (Tahrir al-mar'a) in 1899.

"Women's feminism," on the other hand, was initially an upper class phenomenon, and it grew out of expanded learning and observation of their own lives during times of great change. Muslim women argued that Islam guaranteed women rights of which they had been deprived because of certain customs and traditions imposed in the name of religion. These women stressed that through the correct understanding and practice of Islam, women could regain basic rights, and their families and their societies would also benefit.

The two starting points, as we can see, were therefore quite different. This helps us realize that feminine discourse was and is anything but monolithic; that the word "feminism" has been and is used by different people to connote often different things.

We should be particularly mindful of this fact when we talk about "Arab feminism," or for that matter, any kind of feminism.

Scholars, it should be pointed out, have recently started using the term "feminisms" instead of "feminism" to indicate this diversity within feminism. This allows us to appreciate both the universality of feminism and its regional and local expressions. This has led to an increased awareness of feminist movements in diverse forms not only in the Third World, including the Middle East, but also has led to a more refined understanding of western feminisms. For example, Karen Offen's work on European feminism notes essential differences between Anglo-Saxon and French feminisms. She characterizes Anglo-Saxon feminism as being more individual while French feminism is more relational or family based. Black feminist theorists in this country like Barbara Christian and Barbara Smith demonstrate differences between black and white feminisms in America. This new scholarship challenges the notion of a monolithic feminism, whether western or eastern, but rather seeks to understand feminisms as products of particular times, places, classes, and races.

PERIODIZATION OF WOMEN'S ACTIVISM AND FEMINISM IN THE MIDDLE EAST

We may for convenience and future reference divide the major periods of women's activism and feminism in the Middle East into three. I am not suggesting that this is the only way to catalogue women's movements but it is a convenient way to demarcate three broad trends that may be observed.

1. First, **1860's to early 1920's**: We could describe this as a period of "invisible" feminism. We find expression of an increased awareness among women and questioning of gendered social roles, for example in books and articles produced by middle and upper class women. These works were distributed among women privately or published in women's journals such as *Fatat al-sharq* ("young woman of the east") or in men's periodicals such as *al-Jarida*. Women's activism of this nature was primarily centered in Egypt.

2. The second period from the **1920s to the end of the 1960s** witnessed the rise of women's public organized movements. There were active movements in Egypt between the 1920s and mid-1950s in Lebanon, Syria, and Iraq in the 1930s and 1940s and Sudan in the 1950s. In the 1950s and 1960s, states started to coopt independent feminist movements, repressing but not totally eliminating women's independent, public feminist voices. States for their own purposes articulated their own agendas for women's advance.

3. The third period from the **1970s to the present** witnessed a resurgence of feminist expression in some countries such as Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, and Iraq. However, during this same period many other Arab countries experienced their first wave of feminism. This period was fuelled to some extent by the United Nations Decade of Women (1975-1985). Outside stimulus encouraged Arab states to support limited public debate on the woman question. However, the rise of right-wing Islamic movements has seriously affected the scope of women's activism in some cases, as for example, we may currently see in Algeria and in Iran, and recently in Afghanistan. On the other hand, Islamic revivalism has also made possible the emergence of what may be termed Islamic feminism; practised by Islamist women and men who claim that Islam itself provides a platform for effecting changes in women's lives and securing them greater social participation. We see this occurring among Palestinian women, for example, and in Egypt, particularly in the urban areas.

In the article that you will be reading from the course packet by Fatma Muge Gocek and Shiva Balaghi, they talk about gendered social realities being constructed in terms of tradition, identity, and power. First of all, they define gender as “the social organization of sexual difference.” This is a definition they borrow from the historian Joan Scott. Gender is therefore a social construct; a result of power relations within a given society. It therefore needs to be deconstructed so we may understand the social and historical forces that give this concept meaning.

So to start with **Tradition**: We must first realize that tradition is not frozen and immutable, as some outsiders looking in might assume. Tradition can be a vibrant force, an instrument for change; but it can also be restricting. What makes a difference is the woman's agency and experience which allows her to manipulate tradition as a positive force which empowers her, as we will see in *Harem Years*, the memoirs of the Egyptian feminist, Huda al-Sharawi.

Identity: (p. 6) Identity is a complex thing. We are not only defined by our gender; we are also defined by our social class and ethnic identities. Our authors point out that “unlike the West, third-world gender identity includes strong nationalist and anti-colonial elements. We cannot talk about gender identity therefore in such societies without talking about specific historical and political contexts.

Power: Simone de Beauvoir once said that the personal was political: that the most intimate, most private social relations had a huge impact on how gender relations were defined vis-a-vis the larger society. The concept of power points to the significance of daily relations and life and family processes which create a structure of domination.

Feminist historians have questioned the traditional division of private and public spheres: can they really be so neatly demarcated? For women in particular, what they do in private can have enormous public consequences. This division is a modern, bourgeois one which privileges the public space, regarded as masculine space, as more important, particularly in an economic sense. We will talk more about this in a later class.

So, how do we get around some of these more conventional ways of regarding gender? First of all, we privilege women's voices, their experiences, so as to retrieve their agency in shaping their lives, in manipulating tradition. By studying the works composed by women themselves, we become aware of the complexities of their lives, the sophistication of their thought; we discover their originality.

Gocek and Bolaghi Study Guide

As you read Gocek and Bolaghi's "Reconstructing Gender," focus upon the following points.

- Concentration on the voice and experience of women : two conceptual parameters
- Three key themes: Tradition, Identity, and Power
- Definition of gender: "The social organization of sexual difference," Joan Scott
- Interpretive mechanism behind social organization is where sexual difference acquires a socially or culturally constructed meaning
 - While this meaning situates itself in societal processes, it diffuses into power relations
- pp. 2-3: Theory is great, but Dorothy Smith suggests we move beyond the level of textual discourse to the
 - 1) actual realities, the real life EXPERIENCES of women
 - 2) power relations: focus on the "relations of ruling," specifically in bureaucracies, administration, management, professional organizations, and the media.
- "Patriarchy": A term identifying both the personal and public relations of power
- To counter this patriarchy, Smith focuses on the everyday world as problematic: "The place from within which the consciousness of the knower begins."
- p. 3-4: Only by combining the personal with the societal can we understand how, and more importantly, why "The forces of their own life become superior to them" (p. 3)
 - Deconstruction
- Pg. 4: Last paragraph : How can we use the concept of experience without suffering from its limitations? Joan Scott suggests that we bring "historicity" to experience. Contextualization of experience spatially (to the Middle East) and epistemologically (to the dimensions of tradition, identity, and power).
- **TRADITION**: Societal processes in cultures and other than itself is static or at best derivative: Western view. Western feminists tend to see Third World Women as a monolithic group; our authors argue that (p.6), "the negative

- portrayal of tradition is eliminated within this experience, tradition in Middle Eastern gender relations emerges as a vibrant force that can be both constricting and liberating.
- **IDENTITY:** P. 7: As Stuart Hall says, "Identity requires us to look at... the politics of difference, the politics of self-reflexivity, a politics that is open to contingency but still able to act."
 - P. 7: Mohanty points out that it is dangerous to focus only on gender identity and ignore social class and ethnic identities."
 - Third World gender identity also includes strong nationalist and anticolonial elements.
 - One cannot only focus on discursive power; one must also "analyze the other component of power, the coercive," (p. 8, 1st paragraph).
 - **POWER:** the personal was the political (p.8).
 - Pierre Bourdieu: Symbolic power "located within language, religion, education, art, and ideology."

As a mode of analysis, symbolic power underlined relations and advocated a "relational mode of thinking," rather than a publicly defined institutional mode that disadvantaged women.
 - P. 10: importance of autobiography
 - P. 12: "Restoring women to history" archival research (last five lines)
 - P. 13: Diversity of women's experience
 - P. 13: Bottom line: "stories of village women; not about them." What is the significance of this?
 - P.15: What do the authors mean when they say, "The boundaries of power are perpetually negotiated"?

Second Lecture

SEX AND GENDER

What is sex? What is gender?

Sex: predicated on anatomical and biological differences. Makes one a boy or a girl, a man or a woman, and we simply take it for granted. It's who we are at the very basic, physiological level.

Gender: A: is a more complicated concept. Our gender identity is derived from a continuous and persistent sense of ourselves as male or female.

Until very recently, gender was not thought of as a tool of historical or sociological or political analysis. Let me read to you a rather amusing definition of "gender" taken from the 1988 edition of the *Dictionary of Modern English Usage*:

Gender. n. a grammatical term only. To talk of persons or creatures of the masculine or feminine gender, meaning of the male or female sex, is either a jocularity (permissible or not according to context) or a blunder

But as you know, dictionary meanings can easily change as history changes. The word "gender" has been appropriated especially by American feminist scholars who wanted to insist on the fundamentally social quality of distinctions based on sex. In other words, they were saying that biology does not determine who we are as individuals; it is society with its complex web of social and culturally determined roles that it assigns to males and females which gets to define gender. Gender is therefore a social and/or cultural construct. A construct, by its very definition, is something artificial, something created. Created by whom? Created by those who have the power, the ability, to create and enforce and maintain definitions and the roles generated by these definitions. Therefore, when we talk about gender in any given society, we are also talking about the power relations in that society and how those power relations constitute or define people and their relationships with one another.

Gender therefore does not only refer to women; think about when we use the term "gender issues," we tend to think about only women's issues, that is, in isolation from issues concerning men. It is safe to say that in practically all societies, women and men are defined in terms of one another, and no understanding of either could be achieved by entirely separating them. "Gender" therefore also refers to the social relations between the sexes.

These relations determine the behaviors, attitudes, values, beliefs, and so on that a particular cultural group considers appropriate for males and females on the basis of their biological sex. Therefore feminists and other social theorists often talk about deconstructing certain social and cultural concepts; to unpack it so to speak, to decode it so as to lay bare the relations of power which inform and define the gender division. In other words, what we term "femininity" or "masculinity" are not inherent characteristics in us but very subjective, maybe even fictional, constructs.

There are three theoretical positions based on the use of gender as an analytical category:

- 1) The first position, used mainly by feminists, uses gender to explain the origins of patriarchal society.
- 2) The second position uses Marxist theory to explain the economic subordination of women.
- 3) The third draws on different schools of psychoanalysis to explain the production and reproduction of the subject's gendered identity.

1. Patriarchal Society describes the gendered organization of a society in which men, as the economic providers of families, have socially dominant roles, while women, because of their reproductive functions and as economic dependents of men, have

socially inferior roles. In a patriarchal society, men and women are therefore basically unequal with men possessing all the economic power and the social power that goes with it.

Biological differences between men and women become institutionalized into a set of social and cultural roles specified for each sex and defined as the norm. Deviations from this norm are considered abnormal and threatening to the overall structure.

Most societies of the world have been or remain patriarchal; modern technological innovations, particularly in the twentieth century, made sweeping changes in the patriarchal societies of the West, allowing women to enter the work force and become economically independent.

2. Marxist Theory is very supportive of the feminist critique of the traditional patriarchal society. In essence, it repeats what the patriarchal position states; that the social subordination of women to men is based on their economic dependence on men. Whereas the patriarchal position maintains that this is the natural order of things, sanctioned by religious tradition and human nature, the Marxist position states that it is the love of economic power that drives one group of people to wield economic control over other groups of people; therefore, this basic economic inequality explains not only the inequalities between men and women but between, say, factory owners and factory workers. Class and gender inequalities are related in many ways.

It is not therefore the modes of reproduction but rather the modes of production that determine one's position in society; those who control the economic means of production are socially superior.

3. The Psychoanalytic School is concerned with the processes by which an individual's identity is created; it focuses on the early stages of child development for clues to the formation of gender identity. Included among these processes are actual experiences and the centrality of language in communicating, interpreting, and representing gender. By "language" is meant not so much actual words but systems of meaning. For some belonging to this school, the unconscious is a critical factor in the construction of the subject; it is the location, moreover, of sexual division.

So basically this school is saying that our gendered identities are formed under the influence of the environment that we grow up in, our actual life experiences, our relationships, in other words the social and cultural conditioning that we are exposed to.

IT IS POSSIBLE TO COMBINE ALL THESE PERSPECTIVES AND STATE THAT GENDER IS IN A LARGE MEASURE DEFINED ON THE BASIS OF THREE IMPORTANT CONCEPTS:

TRADITION, IDENTITY, POWER

The first article we will read from the reader will discuss these three concepts so we can come back to it on Monday.

HOW DO YOU THINK TAKING INTO CONSIDERATION THE CATEGORY GENDER WOULD OR COULD CHANGE THE NATURE OF HISTORICAL OR SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY OF HUMAN SOCIETY? DOES IT MATTER WHETHER WE USE GENDER AS A TOOL OF HISTORICAL, LITERARY, CULTURAL, POLITICAL, ETC. ETC. ANALYSIS? The French anthropologist Maurice Godelier has put it this way: It is not sexuality which haunts society, but society which haunts the body's sexuality. Sex-related differences between bodies are continually summoned as testimony to social relations and phenomena that have nothing to do with sexuality. Not only as testimony to, but also testimony for - in other words, as legitimation.

GENDER LEGITIMIZES AND CONSTRUCTS SOCIAL AND POLITICAL RELATIONSHIPS

Take a minute or two to think about how gender is invoked to legitimize many social conventions, perceptions, and institutions that we otherwise take for granted.

THINK ABOUT THE WHOLE NOTION OF PUBLIC VS. PRIVATE SPHERES. the fact that we even acknowledge the separation of these spheres is testimony to division along gender lines.

Private - feminine, ineffectual

Public - masculine, location of power

This division leads us to denigrate many traditionally feminine occupations because they were carried on inside the home rather than in the marketplace or in the public realm generally. Think about midwifery, for example, which allows for private birthing at home. Even though such practices empower women, midwives enjoy very little occupational prestige in most societies of the world.

Think also about the politics of language:

For example, calling "Nature" "Mother Nature": mother and nurturing: immediately confirms sex role stereotypes about maternal instincts in the female and the need to procreate and raise children.

Cole and Ahmed Discussion Questions

Discussion Questions for Juan Cole's article

1) What kind of diversity in veiling practices does Cole point to in the pre-modern period? What is the significance of this diversity?

- 2) What are the characteristics of “state feminism?” How does the state try to coopt women’s movements? What are the consequences of this state-sponsored feminism?
- 3) What is the significance of Cole’s statement on p. 27: “Veiling is, therefore, the farthest thing from “traditional?”
- 4) What are the various forces which have shaped and continue to shape gendered identities and roles in the Middle East?

Leila Ahmed, “The Transitional Age”

35 Surely the men who submit and the women who submit, and the believing men and the believing women, and the obeying men and the obeying women, and the truthful men and the truthful women, and the patient men and the patient women, and the humble men and the humble women, and the almsgiving men and the almsgiving women, and the fasting men and the fasting women, and the men who guard their private parts and the women who guard, and the men who remember Allah much and the women who remember —Allah has prepared for them forgiveness and a mighty reward.

إِنَّ الْمُسْلِمِينَ وَالْمُسْلِمَاتِ وَالْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَالْمُؤْمِنَاتِ الْفَاتِحِينَ وَالصَّادِقَاتِ وَالصَّادِقِينَ وَالصَّابِرِينَ وَالصَّابِرَاتِ وَالْخَشِيعِينَ وَالْخَشِيعَاتِ وَالْمُتَصَدِّقِينَ وَالْمُتَصَدِّقَاتِ وَالصَّائِمِينَ وَالصَّائِمَاتِ وَالْحَافِظِينَ فُرُوجَهُمْ وَالْحَافِظَاتِ وَالذَّاكِرِينَ اللَّهَ كَثِيرًا وَالذَّاكِرَاتِ أَعَدَّ اللَّهُ لَهُمْ مَغْفِرَةً وَأَجْرًا عَظِيمًا ○

Sura 33, verse 35 of the Qur'an, as translated by Maulvi Muhammad Ali

Image courtesy of the [Online Library of Liberty](http://www.online-library-of-liberty.com)

1) Ahmed states on p. 66: “They hear (women and men) and read in its sacred text, justly and legitimately, a different message from that heard by the makers and enforcers of orthodox, androcentric Islam.” How does she make this case and why is this significant?

2) What are the various competing voices within Islam? How does this diversity affect how we relate to Islamic history and thought?

3) Why is it important to take into consideration power relations when particularly discussing gendered identities and roles?.

4) Why is it important to establish the importance of textual interpretation and control of access to it?

5) What does Ahmed mean when she says on p.67 that “The political, religious, and legal authorities in the Abbasid period ... heard only the androcentric voice of Islam.” What were the consequences of this androcentric view?

8) How does the history of women's lives in the pre-Islamic and early Islamic period challenge 'Abbasid notions of gendered identities?

9) What is the significance of the statement (p. 71): "Religion was the political idiom of the day - and the language in which issues of political power, social justice, and private morality were discussed."

Mernissi Article Discussion Questions

While reading Mernissi's "A Tradition of Misogyny," keep the following questions in mind.

1. When did Abu Bakra recall his *hadith* regarding women rulers? Why is that significant?
2. How does Mernissi establish Abu Bakra's lack of qualifications for transmitting *hadith*?
3. What was the status of this *hadith*? Did everyone accept this *hadith* as authentic?

Stowasser Discussion Questions

"The Wife of the Prophet Adam"

This article provides a compendium of a variety of different Muslim interpretations of the Adam/Eve story. We include this article to suggest some of the very different ways the original Qur'anic accounts have been interpreted. As you read the article, be aware that it is talking about different versions of the story with different implications for gendered identities and roles. First, there are the accounts of Adam and his wife in the Qur'an itself. Then, there are the interpretations of the Adam and Eve story, as depicted in traditional Muslim scholarly/religious commentaries, which diverge quite dramatically sometimes from the original Qur'anic versions and show the influence of the Biblical creation story.

SECTION 7

The Devil's misleading

116-121. The devil deceives. 122, 123. Allah is merciful. 124-128. The spiritually blind.

116 And when We said to the angels: Make obeisance to Adam,* they made obeisance, but Iblis (did it not)^b; he refused.

117 So We said: O Adam! this is an enemy to *you* and to *your* wife; therefore let him not drive you both forth from the garden^c so that *you should* be unhappy:

118 Surely it is (ordained) for *you* that *you shall* not be hungry therein nor bare of clothing;

119 And that *you shall* not be thirsty therein nor *shall you* feel the heat of the sun.¹⁶⁰⁸

120 But the devil made an evil suggestion to him; he said: O Adam! shall I guide *you* to the tree of immortality and a kingdom which decays not?

121 Then they both ate of it, so their evil inclinations became manifest to them,^a and they both began to cover themselves with leaves of the garden,^b and Adam disobeyed his Lord, so his life became evil (to him).¹⁶⁰⁹

وَاذَقْنَا لِلْمَلٰٓئِكَةِ اِسْجٰدًا وَّالْاٰدَمَ
فَسَجَدُوْا وَّلَا اِلٰهَ اِلَّا اِنۡلِيسَ اَبٰى
فَقُلْنَا يَا اٰدَمُ اِنَّ هٰذَا اَعۡدُوْكَ وَ
لِزَوۡجِكَ فَلَا يُخْرِجَنَّكُمَا مِنْ
الۡجَنَّةِ فَتَشۡقٰى

اِنَّ لَكَ اَلَا تَجُوْءُ فِيهَا وَلَا تَعۡرٰى
وَاِنَّكَ لَا تَظۡهَرُ فِيهَا وَلَا تَظۡهَرُ
فَوَسَّوَسَ الشَّيۡطٰنُ قَالِ يَا اٰدَمُ
هَلۡ اَدۡرٰكَ عَلٰى شَجَرَةٍ اٰخِلٰهٖ
مَلِكٌ لَا يَمۡبۡلٰى

فَاۡكَلَا مِنْهَا فَبَدَتۡ لَهُمَا سَوَآءُهُمَا
وَوَرَوٰا طٰٓئِفًا يَّخۡصِفۡنَ عَلَیۡهِمَا مِنْ وَّرَوٰتِ
الۡجَنَّةِ زُوۡعۡصٰى اٰدَمُ رَبَّهٗ فَعَوٰى

Sura 20, verses 117-121, as translated by Maulvi

Muhammad Ali

Image courtesy of the [Online Library of Liberty](http://www.online-library-of-liberty.com)

Some questions for discussion:

- 1) In five Qur'anic accounts of the creation of Adam and Eve, women appear in three. Summarize the sequence of events leading to the human "fall" in these accounts.
- 2) In these accounts, who specifically disobeys God and what are the consequences of it?
- 3) If according to one account, it was Adam who specifically disobeyed his Lord, how does the exegete al-Tabari, and after him others, come to blame Adam's wife for this incident?

- 4) “God then put His curse on the woman and the snake;” since the Qur’an does not mention this, where are the exegetes getting this notion from?
- 5) How did the Mu`tazili scholars engage these verses?
- 6) What do these interpretive strands convey to us about progressively developing pre-modern theological conceptions of women’s nature and status?
- 7) Why do you think certain Muslim exegetes actually showed a preference for certain details contained in the biblical creation account, even though the Qur’anic versions do not refer to them? For example, why did they import into their exegesis the Genesis account of woman being created from Adam’s rib?
- 8) How did Muhammad ‘Abduh’s exegesis attempt to challenge widely accepted interpretations of the Adam and Eve story? Was he successful?
- 9) What is the significance of the statement: “They used the story of Hawwa in new ways to reflect a variety of ideological, in some cases, also personal perspective” (p. 35).

Overall Questions to ponder:

A. How are the Qur'anic versions of the creation of humans, in the excerpts we have, different from the Biblical version? How are they similar? How do the differences in these texts change Genesis's story and its significance?

B. How much do you think the Biblical and Qur'anic stories of Adam and Eve have affected gender relations in individuals, cultures, and societies that take scripture seriously? How much do you think that the Biblical story of Adam and Eve still affects gender relations in the United States today?

Barlas Discussion Questions I

While reading the first half of Barlas' "*Believing Women*" in Islam, keep the following questions in mind.

- 1) What are some of the challenges inherent in reading the Qur’anic text (or any other sacred text)? Pp. 32-37
- 2) What is *Tafsir*? What are some of the problems identified by Barlas which result from relying primarily on *tafsir* to understand the Qur’anic text? Pp. 38-42
- 3) How are some of these problems compounded by the *hadith* literature? Pp. 42 - top of pg. 50

- 4) How do conservative theories mask the true meanings of the text by generalizing the particular? Pp. 50-58
- 5) How do critical readings of the Qur'an, which historicize the particular, yield a different understanding of the text and its function in different circumstances? Pp. 58-62
- 6) What became the relation of the Sunna to the Qur'an and how did that affect interpretations of the Qur'an? Pp. 64-76
- 7) How did the state affect the creation of knowledge? Pp. 81-89

Barlas Discussion Questions II

While reading the second half of Barlas' *Believing Women*, keep the following questions in mind.

- 1) How does Barlas interpret Qur'anic views on sexual sameness vs. difference? What does she find problematic about the two-sex model and the assumptions of gender and sex that are implicit in it? Pp. 130-48
- 2) What, according to Barlas, is the Qur'an's position on sexuality? How does it differ from Western patriarchal notions? Pp. 149-66
- 3) How are family and marriage conceptualized in the Qur'an with regard to parental rights, according to Barlas? PART I Pp. 167-82
- 4) How about with regard to daughters and fathers, wives and husbands? PART II Pp. 182-92
- 5) How does Barlas attempt to reconcile the Qur'anic principle of egalitarianism with divorce rights and assumed masculine privileges? Pp. 192-200
- 6) What does she find problematic about the conventional dichotomy (division) of public and private spheres? Pp. 200-202; also p. 172
- 7) What does she mean by "reading in front of the text?" Pp. 200-210

Lecture on Veiling

Lecture on Veiling Practices, Islamic Feminism, and Responses to Western Colonialism

There are four major discourses on this topic:

A. Feminist discourses: grounded in the framework of Islamic modernism inspired by Muhammad Abduh.

IJTIHAD: independent inquiry into the sources of religion. First, started by upper-class, educated men. The debate broadens as women and the lower middle class enter into it.

Feminist writing becomes more mainstream as they reach a wider audience through the press.

Interestingly, early feminists actually opposed the unveiling of the face that male feminists advocated. For women, veiling was a practical matter; for men a matter of ideological and symbolic value.

B. Liberal Nationalist discourses: primarily spearheaded by upper-class men who supported feminism.

Men from more modest middle-class origins were antagonistic towards women's emancipation which they saw as emanating from foreign Western influence.

Political independence top priority; women's rights secondary. Initially, male feminism was more radical than women's; later, women's feminism became more radicalized.

C. Islamist discourses: A conservative popular Islamic movement grew up in the late 1920s (1928) with the formation of an Islamist party called the Muslim Brothers.

The large majority of supporters were drawn from the middle and lower middle class. They had a strong nationalist platform: opposed British military presence and economic imperialism (p. 209). As Badran points out, during the 1919 revolution, feminists and nationalists across class differences could come together. However, after the revolution, these class differences came to matter quite a bit. The Egyptian Feminist (EFU) union came to be regarded as pro-Western because they used primarily French; Westernized men not regarded with as much suspicion. Raised questions of cultural authenticity.

THEREFORE, we have Islamist women like Zainab al-Ghazali who marked her secession from the EFU and founded the Muslim Women's Society and saying that EFU was secular, ergo Western, and that Islamist women were consciously basing their feminism on the Shar`ia.

Islamist men also went on the offensive, equating colonialism with the pernicious effects of feminism.

D. Statist discourses: The state had a dim view of feminism in general, whether Islamist- or EFU-sponsored, because of the political criticism inherent in these discourses.

Non-radical, non-threatening feminism was allowed to flourish that did not ask for drastic social reform, when feminism coincided with the state agenda. Therefore, Zainab al-Ghazali and Nawal al-Sa`dawi considered threatening and was imprisoned but Bint al-Shati was lionized by the state because of her non-militant stance. State supported, however, educational and employment policies for women. In 1956, women given the right to vote in Egypt. Women's literacy rate increased; women university graduates increased, growth of a class of professional women.



Stowasser Study Guide

Note the following points made in Stowasser's "Hijab."

- p. 87: 1) Spatial meaning of hijab: limitation of space
2) Visual: perception of how an object is veiled
- p. 88: Hijab: can be a marker of status
- p.88: Metaphorical and concrete meanings
- p. 89: 33:53: For the wives of the Prophet
- pp. 89-90: Metaphorical and mystical sense
- pp. 90-91: Veiling for the Prophet's wives related to specific historical and political activities
- p. 92: Why his wives became progressively excluded
- p.92: Privilege (safety for the wives)
- p. 93: 33:32 - Muhammad's wives are not like other women

- p.93: *Jilbab*
- p. 94: Extended to all Muslim women
- p. 97: *Tabarruj* - antithesis of veil
- p. 97: Command, "stay in your homes" to the Prophet's wives becomes extended to women in general
- pp. 97-98: As opposed to women's participation in war
- p.98: Women's secluded space, concealing clothes, and unfitness for public activity.
- pp. 98-99: Western imperialism - Westerners attacked veiling as a symptom of the Muslim's backwardness - political implication
 - Qasim Amin called for emancipation of women - seen as a lackey of Western imperialists
- p. 101- Hijab: no longer seclusion - but refers specifically to female garments
- In contemporary Islamicizing discourses, women are always expected to uphold tradition and culture
- Al-Sha`rawi - talk about him at some length
- p. 102- How does the hijab become a "portable veil?"
- p. 103- The role of department stores in disseminating pious and modest hijab-based fashions
 - Pugh- fundamentalist vs. pious styles
- p. 103: Muhammad Ahmad Khalaf Allah: example of a modernist, reformist outlook on the veil



Department store displays in Iran (left) and Egypt (right) reflect both traditional and modern 'hijab-based fashions.'

Images courtesy of flickr users [hoder](#) and [vagabondblogger](#).

Ahmed Study Guide

Discussion Questions for Ahmed's "Discourses of the Veil"

- 1) How and why did the new discourse on the veil come to include issues of class and culture, colonizers and the colonized?
- 2) What is the significance of Ahmed's statement on p. 149 that this new discourse framed as a contest over culture (European vs. Egyptian) came to center on women and the veil?
- 3) What does she mean by colonial feminism? (P. 151) What were the aims of this peculiar brand of feminism?
- 4) What is Ahmed's main critique of Qasim Amin's work "The Liberation of Woman?" How, according to Ahmed, did the book fail to deliver on its promise?
- 5) GENERAL QUESTION TO THINK ABOUT: Why are women in general regarded as the upholders of CULTURE? What implications does that have for their societal roles?

Additionally, keep the following points in mind as you read.

- Qasim Amin's "The Liberation of the Woman," published in 1899.

By 1890's, the state had already established schools for girls, so why the controversy?

- because of the symbolic reform he advocated - the abolition of the veil.
- beginning of feminism in Arab culture
- first battle of the veil to agitate the Arab press

- p. 145 Encompassed issues of class and culture; colonizers and the colonized
- p. 145 ISSUES OF WOMEN AND CULTURE FIRST APPEARED AS INEXTRICABLY FUSED IN ARABIC DISCOURSE
- p. 145 Egypt supplied raw materials for the British.
- p. 146 Benefited certain classes within Egypt—European residents within Egypt, the Egyptian upper classes, and the new middle class of civil servants and intellectual elite.
- p. 146 Traditional knowledge became devalued; the ulama' were affected
- p. 147 Accentuation of class divisions; glass ceiling for lower middle class occupations
- p. 147 Fear that education could lead to dangerous nationalist sentiments
- p. 147 Issues of culture and attitudes toward Western ways intertwined with issues of class and access to economic resources, position, and status.
- pp. 147-148: Laws unjustly skewed in favor of the British colonizers
- p. 148- Class and economic divisions plus political and ideological divisions
- p. 148 - Spectrum of views—minority Arabs sometimes sided with the British—religious and secular nationalism

- p. 149: WOMEN AS UPHOLDERS OF CULTURE—CONTEST OVER CULTURE CENTERED ON WOMEN AND THE VEIL
- p. 149: Western narrative of women in Islam
- p. 150: Female Western travelers sometimes had a more sympathetic view
- **p. 150: Why are women central in this discourse of culture?**
- p. 150-51: THE OTHER CULTURE as defined according to Victorian standards
- p. 151: Colonialism appropriated the language of feminism and redirected it towards other men's cultures COLONIAL FEMINISM
- p. 152: Cromer's views on Islam, women and the veil.
- p. 153: Views on women's education
- p. 154-57: How were colonial binaries set up (for example, Muslims backward, lazy etc.; Egyptian women—ignorant and debased compared to the exact opposite in the West)
- **p. 160: Why was it assumed that an assault on the veil by Amin reflected internalization of colonialist rhetoric?**
- **p. 161-162: What is the significance of Ahmed pointing out that the colonial rhetoric on women's emancipation merely called for a substitution of Islamic style male dominance for that of Western style male dominance?**
- **p. 162: As Ahmed notes, more than thirty books and articles appeared in response to Amin's provocative book? Why do you think the book was considered so provocative in its day?**

Peirce Study Guide

As you read Peirce's "Myths and Realities of the Harem," focus upon the following points.

- P. 3: What is the meaning of "Orgiastic sex became a metaphor for power corrupted?"
- p. 3 Discuss: Family politics, not sex, was the fundamental dynamic of the harem.
- Meanings of harem:
 - 1) to be forbidden and
 - 2) to be sacred, or taboo, inviolable
- Hareem: a sanctuary or a sacred place.
- p. 5 Harem: a word of respect connoting religious purity and honor
For example: al-Haram al-Sharif- Temple mount; Haram; Makka and Madina
- p. 5: The inner precinct of the royal place was called the **imperial harem** because the sultan lived there.
- P. 5: Women related to the male head of a household, not always in a sexual role.
- p. 6: Second myth: Precluded the exercise by women of any influence beyond the walls of the harem
- **p. 6: Private v. Public dichotomy**
- p. 7: Islamic manifestation
-Assimilation of Western notions

- **What did 'private' mean in the Ottoman context?**
- Role of female elders, women of status
- p. 7: Ownership and exploitation of property
- p. 8 Public and private notions not congruent with gender
- p. 8: The degree of seclusion from the common gaze served as an index of the status of the men as well as the woman of means.
Ottoman males of rank also did not venture out too often into the public arena, and not without a retinue
- p.8: privileged vs. Common, sacred vs. Profane undercuts gender distinctions.
—*Kass* and *amm*: privileged vs. vulgar
- P.12: One's status was marked by the extent to which one could penetrate the interior of another's household, most of all, that of the sultan.

Cooke Discussion Questions

Discussion questions for "Arab Women, Arab Wars"

- 1) What is the main premise of Miriam Cooke's paper?
- 2) How, according to Cooke, does the novel, etc. emerging out of the war experience challenge "the Homeric myth?" What implications does it have for women writing war stories?
- 3) How have unconventional, post-colonial wars challenged "the mystic boundaries" of war myth-making monopolized by men?
- 4) What is the significance of the statement, "These war stories, although men's domain, may also be interpreted as being about peace, women's domain" (p. 152). How have the post-1948 wars in the Arab world, for example, the Algerian war of independence, granted legitimacy to women authors entering a traditional "male preserve"?
- 5) How did Palestinian women's writings contribute to a further expansion of this trend?
- 6) How do messy civil wars dissolve boundaries between "home" and "front" so as to create, what Cooke calls, a "hyperspace"?
- 7) How do we see this manifested during the Lebanese civil war?
- 8) How are women "inscribing their experience in war into the war story" and with what results?

Badran Study Guide I

As you read Badran's "Opening the Gates," focus upon the following points.

- p. 338: Emphasis upon rights granted women by the *Shari`a*
 - Women believe that Islam represents justice towards humans, regardless of gender, and confers specific rights on the woman
- p. 339: Early feminist discourses emphasized that political and civil rights should be granted to women; not to do so is a betrayal of the highest Islamic ideals and patriotism/loyalty to the nation.
 - A plea for legitimation
 - Emphasis upon Arab women's intellectual heritage and accomplishments
- pp. 345-46: Inji Aflatun: The enemies of women are the enemies of progress and democracy.
 - Her emphasis is on equal citizenship for woman.
 - p. 348: The enemies of woman are the fiercest enemies of democracy.
 - She also fought against elitism.(pp. 349-50).
- p. 354: *Fitna* referred to the first civil war between `Ali and the supporters of A'isha.
- p. 355: Difference between the two muftis.
- Another thing that becomes clear in these vignettes is the **activist role of women** in national liberation and as patriotic figures.
- p. 360: 1923—The Unveiling
- p. 360: 1925—The first secondary school for girls was opened
 - By the 1950s university education became generally available to women

Badran Study Guide II

As you read Badran's "Islamic Feminisms," focus upon the following points.

- p. 159: Feminism—First appeared among the upper and middle classes
- **p. 160: The author says that men want to uphold “patriarchal modernity” and women want “egalitarian modernity;” what does this mean?**
- p. 160: engagements with modernity—creating a discourse based on ISLAMIC MODERNISM AND SECULAR NATIONALISM
- p. 161: ISLAM VS. MODERNITY—East vs. West
 - Fundamentalists and hostile Westerners like to maintain this distinction
- p. 161: Patriarchal form of Islamism can live with nationalism, but not with feminism.
- **p. 161: According to the author, what are the differences between “Muslim feminists” and “Islamist women”?**
- **p. 162: In the 1930's and 1940's, what are some examples of the cordial relations between feminists and Islamist women?**
- pp. 162-63: meaning of term “feminism” in the Middle Eastern context
- p. 164: Rereading the Quran and other texts
- **p. 164: Radical feminism is equated with Islamic feminism. Why?**

- Islam—as religion and culture
- pp. 164-65: “Middle space” - between secular feminism and masculinist Islamism.
- p. 165: results of Islamic feminism:
 1. Revisioning of Islam
 2. New modernity
 3. Transformation of feminism
- **Why is the name that we give to 'feminism' important?**
- **Why is religious feminism important in the Middle East and other traditional Muslim countries?**
- p. 166: No center-stage religious feminism yet
- p. 166: Islamic feminism—an uneasy notion
- p. 168: IJTIHAD: how to be Muslim and modern
- p. 171: Muslim women have tried to combine modernity and secular nationalism
- **p. 172: Why couldn't women divorce privately like men?**
- p. 174: Kemalist feminism: man was still head of the family
- p. 174: woman's bodies: sites of opposition
- p. 175: Islamic modernity vs. secular modernity
- p. 176: NEWLY VEILED WOMEN BUT IN PUBLIC, ACTIVIST ROLES
 - Gendered modernist movement
- p. 177: GENDER POLITICS, GENDERING OF MODERNITY
- p. 177: Turkish women took up the hijab in the public sphere
- **p. 178: Discourse of the hijab: modern or not?**
 - FEMINIST HIJAB (almost militant)
- p. 179: Relationship with male-led nationalist movements vs. feminist movements
- p. 184: Radical feminism = Islamic feminism, revisited

Shaarawi Study Guide

As you read Shaarawi's *Harem Years*, focus upon the following points.

- Max Weber's definition of class in *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization* (Glencoe, Illinois: The Free Press, 1947), 424.
 - A "class" is any group of persons occupying the same class status.
 - The term 'class status' will be applied to the typical probability of a given state of:
 - a. provision with goods,
 - b. external conditions of life, and
 - c. subjective satisfaction or frustration will be possessed by an individual or a group.

A. Class and Education:

- p. 73: Able to initiate divorce by Atiyya Hanim Saqqaf, make stipulations in the marriage contract for Huda
- p. 19 -20: Charitable activities help bridge private and public
- p. 74: Reverence for the descendants of the Prophet Muhammad
- Sharifa—baraka and class

B. Education and Social Authority

- p. 40: Grammar
 - p. 41: Turkish grammar
- p. 41: Another reason to love her father: he loved literature and surrounded himself with poets and learned men.
- p. 42: But Sayyida Khadija knew grammar - itinerant poet; shared her love of poetry
- p. 62: Failure at learning Arabic grammar again; but mastery of French
- p. 89: In Istanbul, met a girl, the sister of Hilmi Pasha, impressed by the fact that she had mastered Arabic grammar
- p. 59: Learning shields from failed relationships
"I began to carry a book around with me --"
- p. 78: Education: "Mme Rushdi not only guarded my reputation, but also nourished my mind and spirit."
- p. 81: Mme Rushdi attended Shari`a courts; "I was aghast to see the blatant tyranny of men over women."
- pp. 33-34: Umm Kabira—learns to read the Koran
- pp. 68-69: class-based respect: shopping expedition to Chalon

COMING OF AGE:

- p. 80: Mme Rushdi and the Saturday salon

HONOR:

- p. 21: Notion of honor (also grounded in Islam)

ROLE OF LANGUAGE:

- Language of the Feminist Union: French (at once a marker of the educated upper class)
- p. 134: However, as the movement matured, the women's funds supported two monthly journals (in French and Arabic).

C. Influence of Islam:

- p. 66: hadith and its role
- Empowerment of women through critiquing the sources: Muhammad °Abduh, Qasim Amin
- p. 13: Shaykh al-Tahtawi reminded people that Islam extolled education for men and women alike. Education for girls became the slogan of the day.
- p. 14: Discourses about how social custom but not Islam held women back occurred in upper-class harems.

D. Nationalism/national betrayal/exile

- p. 25: grandfather had betrayed his country
- Exile: a theme
- p. 26: Refused to accept my mother
- p. 29: Accusation of national betrayal directed at her father
- p. 94: Early signs of nationalism: would not take part in an enterprise headed by an Englishwoman
- p. 111: Nationalism brought Huda and her husband closer
- p. 130: Separation from Wafd—abandonment of nationalism, but not of feminism

Shaarawi Discussion Questions

For our next discussion, think about the following issues and themes and how they are developed in the book:

1) Class and Power and their effect on gendered identities, private and public:

- How is class and social status determined in Huda's society and time?
- What are the variables that affect class and power?
- What is the role of education in determining people's social roles and expectations?
- What effect does education have on gender roles? How does language and its use play into it?
- Does the concept of honor have any bearing on this discussion?

2) Role of Islam:

- What part does adherence to Islamic principles contribute to the women's movement in general and the rise of a feminist consciousness?
- How does it contribute to the legitimization of the feminist agenda?
- What was the feminist agenda?
- What is the potential for this feminist movement to forge links with women of all classes and, therefore, claim to be a truly representative women's movement?

3) Finally, we are not done with nationalism yet!

- What is the relationship between feminism and nationalism?
- How does nationalism affect the women's movement and people's perceptions of it? What is Huda's own views of nationalism and its impact upon feminism? Refer also to the article by Badran *Competing Agenda: Feminists, Islam and the State in Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Egypt*.

SUMMATION: What is the historical value of this work in assessing the rise and importance of the feminist movement in Egypt? Is there any advantage to having this historical report of a movement cast in the form of a memoir?

Saadawi Study Guide

As you read Saadawi's *Memoirs*, focus upon the following points.

- p. 7: Woman in her twenties when she wrote the novel
- p. 7: Revolutionary feminist novel which revealed the double exploitation of women; general social oppression and private oppression through marriage
- p.9: Conflict between herself and her femininity
- p. 10: Everything about her was shameful
 - "A state of enmity already existed between me and my nature."
- p. 11: "I began to search constantly for weak spots in males to console me for the powerlessness imposed on me by the fact of being female."
- p. 13: Onset of menstruation (10 yrs. old)
- pp. 11-12: Her body the source of shame; tyrannical femininity
- p. 13: Doorman who noticed her sexuality
- p. 14: Marriage: that loathsome word ...!
- p. 15: The hateful, constricted world of women with its permanent reek of garlic and onions
- p. 15: Grandmother's eyes on her breasts; meeting with potential suitor
- p. 15: Father had acknowledged her intelligence; her father says "she's first in her group at primary school this year"
- FIRST SIGN OF REBELLION: refusal to wear her cream dress and accentuate her attractiveness, her virginity
- pp. 15-16: Body the locus of shame and cause of rebellion: breasts, long hair
- p. 17: Chains on my arms and legs and round my neck every day
- p. 17: Gets rid of a "woman's crowning glory"
- p. 18: My challenging of authority had turned me into an immovable force
"FOR THE FIRST TIME IN MY LIFE; I UNDERSTOOD THE MEANING OF VICTORY; FEAR LED ONLY TO DEFEAT, AND VICTORY DEMANDED COURAGE"
- p. 19: ROLE OF LEARNING AGAIN: Favorite room which contained books, loved school except home economics
- p. 19: Longing for companionship

- pp. 20-21: Rude reminders of her sexuality and how she is now viewed by male former childhood friends
- p. 22: "I hated my femininity, resented my nature, and knew nothing about my body."
- p. 23: "MEDICINE WAS A TERRIFYING THING. IT INSPIRED RESPECT, EVEN VENERATION, IN MY MOTHER AND BROTHER AND FATHER. ...I'd prove to nature that I could overcome the disadvantages of the frail body she'd clothed me in, with its shameful parts both inside and out."
- p. 24: "I had charted my way in life, the way of the mind. I had carried out the death sentence on my body so that I no longer felt it existed."
- p. 24: Asserts her power over the male naked corpse
- p. 25: "In the course of it men lost their dread power and illusory greatness in my eyes."
 - man as a god toppled before her eyes
- PP. 25-26: WHAT DOES A MAN'S BODY SIGNIFY IN THE WOMAN'S, SOCIETY'S EYES?
- p. 26: De-mystification of the male body "How ugly man was, both inside and out"
- pp. 26-27: A new perspective on the value of feminine beauty
- pp. 29-30ff.: The creation of a doctor; learning the secrets of the body: subverts **CULTURAL CONSTRUCTS** about the body
- p. 32: Science revealed the secrets of human existence to me and made nonsense of the huge differences which my mother had tried to construct between me and my brother.
- pp. 33-34: Struggle with her (feminine?) compassion
 - p. 34: The god of science is mighty and merciless.
- p. 36: I was alone with a man in the middle of the night
- p. 38: **SELF-REALIZATION: THE FOCUS OF THE STRUGGLE INSIDE ME WIDENED OUT FROM MASCULINITY AND FEMININITY TO EMBRACE HUMANKIND AS A WHOLE**
- P. 39: Science cannot defeat death **SCIENCE TOPPLED FROM ITS THRONE AND FELL AT MY FEET NAKED AND POWERLESS**
- p.41: Comfortable with her body; "I stretched and yawned in delicious indolence"
- p.42: Rejection of culture; acceptance of nature
"NATURE WAS A BEAUTIFUL AND MIGHTY GOD; CULTURE CHEAP SHODDY GARMENTS"
- p.42: "I felt that emotion was sharper-witted than reason"
- p. 43: Vivid description of lush nature, acceptance of life; validation of womanhood in its life-supporting activities of procreation and nurturing
- p. 44: Description of rebirth; acceptance of the self
- p. 45: I was seeing the patient as a whole person
- p. 46: pleasure of pain, pleasure of my humanity
Free rein to emotions; to dislodge the dark veil that was insulating my heart
- p. 47: Rediscovery of love: **LOVE OF LIFE**
- pp. 48-49ff: Awakenings of sexual longings
- p. 55: The man says, "A beautiful woman cannot be clever"

- p. 61: Marriage contract
- p. 63: Husband's need to control (an engineer)
- p. 64: PSYCHOLOGICAL INDEPENDENCE
- p. 67: Defiance; dares to leave her husband
- p. 70 ff: Search for the perfect man
- p. 75: The battle between a man and a woman
- p. 77: "It was my will which guided my behavior"
- p. 78: Arrogance turns a man into a stupid, feeble-minded creature
- p. 79: Fate of a woman living alone
- p. 81: "All society's tragedy came into my surgery; deception and deceit"
- p. 71: "All or nothing was my abiding principle"
- p. 88: Meeting with a second husband (an artist; songwriter)

Brief History of Morocco

A Brief History of Morocco in the Modern Period with reference to the rise of nationalism and feminism

1909-13	War of resistance against Spanish colonialism
March 30, 1912	Treaty of Fez establishing the French protectorate
<p>FRANCE CONTROLS MOROCCO.</p> <p>The Sultan Signs the Treaty Establishing a Protectorate.</p> <p>Special Cable to THE NEW YORK TIMES.</p> <p>PARIS, Sunday, March 31.—A wireless message from the <i>Matin's</i> special correspondent in Fez says that the treaty establishing a French protectorate over Morocco was signed by the Sultan at 1:30 P. M., Saturday. The firing of 101 guns on Sunday will announce the event.</p> <p>"France Controls Morocco," Special Cable to <i>The New York Times</i>. March 31, 1912.</p>	
1912-36	Guerilla warfare against the French in the Middle Atlas
1920-26	The Rif War, against Spanish and then French colonialism
Nov. 18,	Mohamed Ben Yousouf named Sultan, at the age of seventeen

1927	
1930	Moroccan independence movement
1934	French general Guillaume completes “pacification” of the south of Morocco
1937	French repression of nationalist movement, putting its leaders in prison or sending them into exile
1936-39	Palestinian uprising; Spanish civil war
1939-45	World War II
1940-44	Vichy France, after French army defeated by the Germans
1942	Year of the American war/Year of the ration coupon. Americans landed in North Africa (Operation Torch). It was also a year of famine, in which ration coupons were issued for essential supplies
Jan. 22, 1943	US President Franklin D. Roosevelt assures Moroccan king Mohamed V of his support for Moroccan independence
1943	Princess Lalla Aicha gets her primary school certificate
Jan. 11, 1944	Independence Manifesto. Nationalists in Fez make first demand for outright independence from France, and form the Istiqlal (Independence) Party.
1947	Demonstrations in Casablanca against the French bloodily suppressed. Preparation of the armed resistance begins in Casablanca
Apr 11, 1947	Mohamed V gives a speech in Tangier breaking with the French. Princess Lalla Aicha gives a speech calling for the emancipation of women.
1949	Opening of a women’s branch of the Qaraouine University.
1950	French arrest or exile Istiqlal party members
Aug. 20, 1953	French exile King Mohamed V.
Nov. 1, 1954	Armed liberation war begins in Algeria
Aug 20, 1955	Uprisings in Oued Zem, crushed brutally by General Duval and his troops
Oct. 2, 1955	First attacks by Moroccan liberation army on three French garrisons on the Moroccan-Algerian border
Nov. 6, 1955	Mohamed V signs La Celle-St. Cloud agreement with French foreign minister Antoine Pinay to put Mohamed V back on the throne and leading to Moroccan independence
Nov. 16, 1955	Return of King Mohamed V
March 2,	Moroccan Independence

1956	
1957-59	Muodouana family law code issued, in stages
1993	Reform of the moudouana. The first two women elected to the Moroccan parliament.

Mernissi Study Guide

As you read Mernissi's *Dreams of Trespass*, focus upon the following points.

- Compare the mothers in the three books read so far.
- p. 19: Dreams and Stories
 - Trespass, *hudud*
- p. 21: French harem
- pp. 22-23: Old city—Medina; French city—*La ville nouvelle*
- p. 23: The *Ville nouvelle* was like their harem; just like the women, they could not walk freely in the Medina
- It's all about **violating frontiers**:
 - p. 7: Listening to Radio Cairo, another place, another movement
 - p. 17: Hanan violated frontiers
 - p. 25: Yasmina had Hanan in contact with nature
- p. 25: "The farm was part of Allah's original earth, which had no frontiers, just vast, open fields without borders or boundaries, and of that I should not be afraid."
- p. 9: Mother is rebellious, encourages Fatima to be rebellious
- p. 100: My daughter will never wear a veil
- p. 13 ff.: Meaning of Schehrezade—p. 13 ff.
- Mother a crypto-feminist, part of a wave of invisible feminism.
- p. 16: Comment on Schehrezade: a woman's lifetime work "to tell stories to please a king."
- Must become skillful with words: weaker people have to live by their wits
- p. 16: Where will the troubled women go? Father: in justification of harem
- p. 17: Women excelled in storytelling: Aunt Habiba, also had hanan.
- p. 25: Lalla for women; sidi for men (p. 25)
- p. 26: Yasmina, "Are we Muslims or not? If we are, everyone is equal."
- p. 31: This woman does not respect hierarchies. Read: **DOES NOT RESPECT FRONTIERS**
- **p. 32: HOW DID WOMEN SUBVERT FRONTIERS? ROLE OF STORIES: SHAJARAT AL-DURR**
- p. 33: Naming of farm animals after bad men by Yasmina: the peacock after King Farouk
- pp. 34-35: NOTION OF FREEDOM AND SLAVERY: NATIONALISTS DISCUSSED POLYGAMY, SLAVERY, AND THE HAREM
 - P. 36: Your grandfather was a nice man: but he bought slaves

- p. 36: NAMING THE DUCK LALLA THOR WAS YASMINA'S WAY OF PARTICIPATING IN THE CREATION OF THE BEAUTIFUL, NEW MOROCCO
- p.39: WHAT IS A HAREM: AN OPEN FARM OR A FORTRESS IN FEZ
- p. 40: Two Camps
- p. 43 ff: HOW CAPTURING WOMEN BECOMES NECESSARY TO SULTAN.
- pp. 45-46: CONTRADICTIONARY OPINIONS
- p. 49 ff.: Co-wife, Tamou
- **p.55: NATURE IS WOMAN'S BEST FRIEND**
- **p. 60-61: Meaning of harem—FORBIDDEN AND SACRED**
- **p.62: QAIDA is about CONTROLLING SPACE**
- **p.64: Prescient prediction about Mernissi's future**
- **p.67: Pastilla**
- p.75: No eating at fixed hours at Yasmina's place
- p. 77: No individualism in the harem
- Father loved his wife
- p.78: The idea of the harem is part of the bigger discourse about nationalism and traditions
- p.78: "WE LIVE IN DIFFICULT TIMES ... OUR CULTURE IS THREATENED. ALL WE HAVE LEFT IS THESE TRADITIONS."
- P.81: Women entitled to 100 % happiness (according to Fatima's mother)
- p.85: The semiotics of women's dress
- p. 119: if women dress like men, it is more than chaos, it is fana, the end of the world
- p.91: Tradition and modernity existed **harmoniously for men**; the young men all wore Western attire
- p.94: SOCIAL COMMENTARY: The veil for the women equated with yellow clothes for the Jews during World War II
She sees the larger picture; constantly going back and forth between larger historical events and the private occurrences.
- p. 106: Asmahan
- p. 113: Storytelling and movies
- pp. 196, 205: Magic/Shour
- pp. 127-8: Powerful female figures - role models
 - pp. 130-1: HUDA SHA`RAWI
 - pp. 133-34, 137 ff.: PRINCESS BUDUR
 - p. 180: PRINCESS AISHA, P. 180
- p. 121: Qacem Amin, *The Liberation of the Woman* (1885)
- p. 166: Forbidden terrace; girls and boys looked at one another, etc.
- pp. 184-85: No separation of races in Morocco, like there is in America
- p/ 187: A woman who ches gum is, in fact, making a revolutionary gesture
- pp. 196-7: A world changing: Modern education for the girls
- pp. 200-1: Powerful statement on the value of education
- p. 203 ff., p. 205: "Dreams let you fly"
- pp. 214-5: Circumvention of time

- p. 207: Taqlid, Bid'a
- P. 242: The construction of difference

Abouzeid Discussion Questions

Discussion questions for *Year of the Elephant* by Leila Abouzeid

1. What do you think is the significance of the title: Year of the Elephant?
2. What kind of relationship is imagined by our protagonist between Rahma and magic?
3. What role does popular religion (represented by shaykhs to a great extent) play in women's lives?
4. What kind of a tension is set up in the novel between authenticity and foreign mores?
5. Discuss these following themes in the context of the novel:
 - a. Property and women's rights
 - b. author's ambivalence towards her mother
 - c. Consequences of childlessness
 - d. Independence and nationalism - effects on women in particular
 - e. eloquence and illiteracy

Prelude to Zahra: A History of Lebanon

BRIEF HISTORY OF LEBANON (as a prelude to the discussion of the *Story of Zahra*)

A MINOR DIVIDED SECRET TREATIES

France and England Agreed
on Zones of Assistance to
the Liberated Peoples.

ASIA ONCE INCLUDED

Was to Get Constantinople, but
Not Now—Treaties Otherwise
Considered Still Alive.

By CHARLES A. SELDEN,

Editor, 1919, by The New York Times Company.
Special Cable to THE NEW YORK TIMES.

PARIS, Jan. 2.—What Foreign Minister Pichon referred to in his recent speech in the Chamber of Deputies as "the recent contracts" between England and France, by which French mandates were established in Asia Minor, are a group of secret treaties made by England and France at London in 1916 and another group, made by England, France, and Russia at Petrograd in 1917, just before the Russian Revolution.

According to the London treaties, France has control of all of Syria and Lebanon and part of Armenia, and England and all of Mesopotamia. Arabia is to be an independent kingdom. The time is to have an international

- Until the end of World War I, Lebanon was part of Syria constituting what was known as Greater Syria. After World War I, France was given a mandate over Lebanon by the League of Nations. France then divided Syria in 1920 into two parts, what we know to be Syria and Lebanon today.
- After 20 years of French mandate, Lebanon's independence was proclaimed on Nov. 26, 1941 but full independence came in stages.
- Evacuation of French troops was completed in 1946.
- According to the National Pact, different religious communities are represented in the government by having a Maronite Christian president, a Sunni Muslim prime minister, and a Shi'ite National Assembly speaker.
- The arrangement worked for about two decades but then civil war broke out in 1958 against the government led by a Maronite president. There is a history of clan warfare among various religious factions which go back centuries. These factions include the Maronites, the Greek orthodox, the Greek catholics, the Armenian orthodox, and the Nestorians among other Christian groups. The Muslim factions include the Sunnis, the Shi'ite, and the Druze.
- In 1975, a new and bloodier Lebanese civil war broke out. In the fighting between various factions, 40,000 Lebanese were estimated to have been killed and 100,000 wounded between March 1975 and Nov. 1976. At that point, the Syrian army intervened on behalf of the Christian government and brought large-scale fighting to a halt.
- On June 6, 1982, Israel invaded Lebanon, claiming that it was in response to Palestinian attacks on Israel from Lebanese territory. They also created a militia from renegade Christian forces within Lebanon. Under an US initiative, the PLO was dispersed to other Arab countries and Israel partially withdrew.
- In the same year, president-elect Bashir Jemayel from the Christian Phalangist party was assassinated; Israeli troops moved into west Beirut. The renegade Christian militiamen organized by the Israelis massacred hundreds of Palestinians in two refugee camps, known as Sabra and Shatila, but Israel denied responsibility. On September 20, Amin Jemayel, brother of Bashir was elected president.

Al-Shaykh Study Guide

Study Guide to *The Story of Zahra* by Hanan al-Shaykh.

I argue that throughout this work, Zahra's experience serves as a representation of that of Lebanon.

- **Civil war** connotes a family war. Her dysfunctional family and the tragic lives of the individual members is a microcosm of a Lebanon that is constantly hopeful but perennially deceived and betrayed.
- **The Scars of Peace** are like her pock-marked face. Even though she knows it aggravates her problem, she keeps picking at her face, creating a metaphor for the scarred landscape of Lebanon. Her pain seems to be almost self-inflicted. She should know better but can't help herself, displaying a masochistic desire to become the victim. Note pages 24 and 126.
- Her **constant flirtation with danger** and reaching out to people, even though she knows instinctively it won't work, reflects Lebanon's grasping at straws to save herself.
 - The French, who ended up dismembering and polarizing the country.
 - The Palestinians, who were given refuge at first out of sympathy for their plight, heightened the internal conflict within Lebanon, particularly Beirut.
 - The Syrians and the Arab deterrent force come in to halt the civil war after 1975
 - The Israelis then come in and began their invasions of Lebanon, which end with their long occupation of southern Lebanon.

Each time, Lebanon had hoped that some resolution to the conflict would happen and was met, instead, with further suffering.

- This metaphor would explain her **loveless sexual encounters**, her flight to **Africa**, her contracting again a **loveless marriage**, her **abandonment**, and finally her **death at the hand of someone she trusted**. All these people could be any one or several of the ethnic groups in Lebanon.
 - P. 110: "Why is it that I am always finding myself in a hurtful situation? A sense of helpless fatalism!"
- The **sniper** is the internal enemy, the one who finally killed Lebanon.
 - P. 147: "I had made myself into an easy target for assassination."
 - P. 148: 2nd last paragraph: who was Lebanese?
- She gives intimate details of their sexual encounters—exchange of body fluids, p. 150: his sperm dripping down her thighs; her cries are like hot lava and sand p. 152. When she goes to Dr. Shawky's clinic, she sees her mother and her lover in the dark. This signifies **closeness to the sniper but also something illicit**. The sniper is someone she knows very well, or so she thinks.
 - P. 161: "You sniper, you weigh on me like a vast but weightless mountain."

- p. 164: lost innocence reflected in the anguished question: “Where is our childhood?”
- p. 212: Final hopes are dashed; the enemy is not outside, but within.
- P. 144: The reference to a "**demon inside**" suggests Lebanon's failure to master its internal demons. It was because of this that the country died.
 - p. 162: Questions that may never be answered: “never told me why he became a sniper”

Badr Study Guide

“A Balcony Over the Fakihani”

- It is primarily a historical and political novel: creating a competing narrative to the Zionist master narrative.
- Themes of Exodus, concentration camps if you like, life on the march, genocide, a sense of chronic martyrdom, martyr’s cemetery, exile and diaspora: all these themes reflect the Zionists’ telling of their predicament in order to legitimize their claims to Palestine.
- Memory of a homeland: competes with the Zionist memory of a “promised land for them.”
- Mocking narrative tone throughout the novel but also one of hope. This internal tension often indicated through the artful choice of people’s names which suggest optimism. For example, *Yusra*—ease, wealth; *Su’ad*—happy, lucky; *Umar*—derived from life; *Salwa*—solace
- Significance of names: names are after all the basis of identity. *Nom de guerres*
- The Palestinian movement is not a religious movement but a nationalist movement, in which Palestinians are shown to possess national and ethnic solidarity. Both Muslims and Christians appear as protagonists on the same side.
 - Thus on p. 6, take note of George Matta; Monastery of the Good Shepherd
- When a recent member of the PLO was gunned down by the Israelis during the current outbreak of hostilities, the major church in Bethlehem rang its bell to commemorate his memory.
- George Habash, a Christian, has been the leader of one of the most militant Palestinian commando groups: the PFLP (the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine).
- P. 65: Beit Sahour—a predominantly Christian village
 - Inversion of the normal symbolizes the Palestinian tragedy: white hair on the child’s head (Ruba); parents watching their children die

Discussion question: How is water invoked as a political motif?

Think about: Palestinians left with brackish water, the sea, and their tears – how is this broadly evocative of the general Palestinian experience?

Assigned Readings and Films

- Ahmed, Leila. *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993. pp. 64-78 and 144-168.
- Badran, Margot, and Cooke, Miriam, eds. *Opening the Gates: An Anthology of Arab Feminist Writing*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990. pp. 338-362.
- Cole, Juan R. I. "Gender, Tradition, and History." In *Tradition, Identity, and Power*, Fatma Muge Gocek and Shiva Balaghi, eds. New York: Columbia University Press, 1995. pp. 23-29.
- Cooke, Miriam, "Arab Women, Arab Wars." In *Tradition, Identity, and Power*, Fatma Muge Gocek and Shiva Balaghi, eds. New York: Columbia University Press, 1995. pp. 144-166.
- Gocek, Fatma Muge, and Balaghi, Shiva. "Reconstructing Gender in the Middle East Through Voice and Experience." In *Tradition, Identity, and Power*, Fatma Muge Gocek and Shiva Balaghi, eds. New York: Columbia University Press, 1995. pp. 1-19.
- Hessini, Leila. "Wearing the Hijab in Contemporary Morocco: Choice and Identity." In *Tradition, Identity, and Power*, Fatma Muge Gocek and Shiva Balaghi, eds. New York: Columbia University Press, 1995. pp. 40-55.
- Mernissi, Fatima. *The Veil and the Male Elite*. Reading, MA: Perseus Books Groups, 1992. pp. 49-61.
- Muslims and America. Dr. Aziza al-Hibri and Nazir Khaja. Islamic Information Service. Videocassette. New York: Insight Media, 1997.
- Peirce, Leslie P. *The Imperial Harem: Women and Sovereignty in the Ottoman Empire*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993. pp. 3-12.
- Stowasser, Barbara Freyer. "The Hijab: How a Curtain Became an Institution and a Cultural Symbol." In *Humanism, Culture, and Language in the Near East*, Asma Afsaruddin and A.H. Mathias Zahniser, eds. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1997. pp. 87-104.
- Stowasser, Barbara Freyer. *Women in the Qur'an, Traditions, and Interpretation*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994. pp. 25-37.
- The Battle of Algiers. Dir. Gillo Pontecorvo, prod. Igor Film. Videocassette. New York: Guidance Associates, 1988.

About the Authors

Below are links which will provide biographical information about the authors of some of the novels assigned in this course. An understanding of these women's backgrounds is essential to a full appreciation of their works. Further information on these and other figures covered in this course may be found by searching your library's catalog or the internet.

Note: Each link will open in a new window.

- [Huda Shaarawi](#)
- [Dr. Nawal al-Saadawi](#)
- [Hanan al-Shaykh](#)
- [Fatima Mernissi](#)

Huda Shaarawi



Huda Shaarawi (1879-1947), a feminist nationalist activist, is considered by several Western scholars to be a central figure in early twentieth century Egyptian feminism. Born into a very wealthy family, Shaarawi spent her early years in the harem, an experience described in her memoirs, Harem Years.

Philanthropic Work

Shaarawi was involved in philanthropic projects throughout her life. In 1908, she created the first philanthropic society run by Egyptian women, offering social services for poor women and children. She argued that women-run social service projects were important for two reasons. First, by engaging in such projects, women would widen their horizons, acquire practical knowledge and direct their focus outward. Second, such projects would challenge the view that all women are creatures of pleasure and beings in need of protection.

To Shaarawi, problems of the poor were to be resolved through charitable activities of the rich, particularly through donations to education programs. Holding a somewhat romanticized view of poor women's lives, she viewed them as passive recipients of social services, not to be consulted about priorities or goals. The rich, in turn, were the "guardians and protectors of the nation."

Egyptian Feminist Union

Shaarawi was a feminist activist throughout her life. In 1914, she founded the Intellectual Association of Egyptian Women. In 1923, she founded the Egyptian Feminist Union (EFU), in which she was to remain active throughout her life. The EFU consisted of upper and middle class Egyptian women, and at its height had about 250 members.

The EFU focused on various issues, particularly women's suffrage, increased education for women, and changes in the Personal Status laws. While the EFU accomplished few of its goals, it is widely credited with setting the stage for later feminist victories.

Involvement in Nationalist Struggle

Shaarawi was very involved in the Egyptian nationalist struggle, and was a central player in organizing a march of upper and middle class women against the British in 1919. In 1920, she became the president of the Wafdist Women's Central Committee.

Much to the dismay of Shaarawi and other women activists, following independence, the new government denied women suffrage. When, shortly afterwards, the government barred women from the opening of the Egyptian Parliament, Shaarawi led a delegation of women to picket the opening. Revealing the interrelatedness of their feminist and nationalist beliefs, the protesters issued a list of 32 feminist, social and nationalist demands. Eventually, in 1924, Shaarawi split from the Wafdist Central Committee, and began to devote her time to the EFU.

Ties with international women's movement

Part of Shaarawi's motivation for founding the EFU was her desire to send a delegation of Egyptian women to the 9th Congress of the International Women's Suffrage Alliance in Rome, in May 1923. In a speech at this conference, Shaarawi advanced her conception of Egyptian feminism. She argued, first, that women in ancient Egypt had equal status to men, and only under foreign domination had women lost those rights. Second, she argued that Islam also granted women equal rights to men, but that the Koran had been misinterpreted by those in power.



Shaarawi and the EFU maintained their ties with the International Women's Suffrage Alliance for several years. However, in the 1930s, increasingly influenced by the nationalist movement in Palestine, Shaarawi and her colleagues began to define nationalism in pan-Arab, rather than Egyptian, terms. In addition, they became increasingly suspicious of Western feminists, and began to cast their feminist struggle in pan-Arab terms as well. Eventually, they broke their ties to the Suffrage Alliance. In 1945, Shaarawi and the EFU played a major role in founding the All Arab Feminist Union.

Shaarawi and the Veil

Upon her return from the Rome conference in 1923, Shaarawi performed an act that has come to stand as a central symbol of her life: she removed her veil in public at a Cairo train station. While clearly a bold act, its significance may be somewhat exaggerated, since Shaarawi herself argued for a gradualist approach to removal of the veil. In fact,

removal of the veil was never on the EFU's agenda. In addition, the veil was only an issue for the wealthiest women in Egyptian society, since only they wore it. Thus, ironically, what Shaarawi is best known for -- removing her veil -- is an issue to which she herself chose to devote little time.

Sources:

Badran, Margot. Feminists, Islam and Nation: Gender and the Making of Modern Egypt. Princeton, NJ: Princeton U. Press (1995).

Baron, Beth Ann. "Unveiling in Early Twentieth Century Egypt: Practical and Symbolic Considerations." Middle Eastern Studies. 24(3): 370-86.

Hatem, Mervat. "Egyptian Upper- and Middle-Class Women's Early Nationalist Discourses on National Liberation and Peace in Palestine (1922-1944)." Women and Politics. 9(3): 49-69 (1989).

Kader, Soha Abdel. Egyptian Women in a Changing Society, 1899-1987. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publisher, Inc. (1987).

Shaarawi, Huda. Harem Years: The Memoirs of an Egyptian Feminist. Translated and introduced by Margot Badran. New York: The Feminist Press (1987).

Author: Melissa Spatz, Fall 1996

**Nawal El Saadawi
Curriculum Vitae and List of Books (2005)**



Professional Experience:

Visiting Professor

Duke University, 1993- 1996

University of Washington, Seattle, 1995

University of Illinois at Chicago, 1998, Florida Atlantic University 1999

Montclair State University 2001-2002

University of Southern Maine January to December 2003

University Autonoma at Barcelona Spain 2004

Smith College Northampton MASS. USA Autumn 2004

Claremont Graduate School , California USA Spring 2005

Head of Women's Program in the UN – ECA, Addis Ababa, 1978-1979;

UN -ECA, Beirut, 1978 -1980

Author in the Supreme Council for Arts and Social Sciences, Cairo, 1974 - 1978

Director General of the Health Education Department, Ministry of Health, Cairo, 1966- 1972

Medical Doctor, University Hospital and Ministry of Health, 1955–1965

Activities:

Founder and President, Arab Women's Solidarity Association (AWSA), 1982- Present Founder, Noon Magazine, 1989-1991 and Health Magazine 1968-1973

Co-Founder, Arab Association for Human Rights, 1983-1987

Founder Vice-President, African Association for Women on Research Development, Dakar, Senegal, 1977 -1987

President and Organizer, International Conference on the Challenges Facing Arab Women, Cairo, September, 1986, and other international conferences of AWSA, 1988, 1990, 1992, and 1997, 1999, 2002 and 2005 in Cairo.

Founder, Health Education Association and Chief Editor, Health Magazine, Cairo, Egypt, 1968-1974 Founder, Egyptian Women Writer's Association, 1971

Secretary General of Medical Association, Cairo, Egypt. 1968-1972

Editor of Medical Association Magazine, 1968-1972

AWARDS

Honorary Doctorate, University of York, United Kingdom, 1994

Honorary Doctorate, University of Illinois at Chicago, 1996

Honorary Doctorate, University of St. Andrews-Scotland, 1997

First Degree Decoration of the Republic of Libya, 1989

Literary Award of Gubran, (Arab Association of Australia Award), 1988

Literary Award by the Franco-Arab Friendship Association, Paris, France, 1982

Literary Award by the Supreme Council for Arts and Social Sciences, Cairo, Egypt, 1974

XV Premi International Catalonia Award, 2003
Honorary Doctorate Degree, University of Tromso, Norway, 2003
International Writer of the Year for 2003, nominated by the International Biographical Centre, Cambridge, England
Great Minds of the 21st Century Award, American Biographical Institute, North Carolina , USA, 2003
North South Prize 2004, the Council of Europe (Lisbon, 25 October 2004)
Inana International Prize , Bruxelles Belgium 2005

PUBLICATIONS:

All originals in Arabic. Most have been translated into 30 languages, including English, French, German. Spanish, Catalan, Portuguese, Swedish, Norwegian, Danish, Italian, Dutch, Finnish, Indonesian, Japanese, Iranian, Turkish, Urdu, Thai, and others.

FICTION:

NOVELS (in Arabic)
Memoirs of a Woman Doctor (Cairo, 1958)
The Absent One (Cairo, 1969)
Two Women in One (Cairo, 1971)
Woman at Point Zero (Beirut, 1973)
The Death of the Only Man on Earth (Beirut, 1975)
The Children's Circling Song (Beirut, 1976)
The Fall of the Imam (Cairo, 1987)
Ganat and the Devil (Beirut, 1991)
Love in the Kingdom of Oil (Cairo, 1993)
THE NOVEL (Cairo, 2004)

SHORT STORY COLLECTIONS (in Arabic)

I Learnt Love (Cairo, 1957)
A Moment of Truth (Cairo, 1959)
Little Tenderness (Cairo, 1960)
The Thread and the Wall (Cairo, 1972)
Ain El Hayat (Beirut, 1976)
She was the Weaker (Beirut, 1977)
Death of an Ex-minister (Beirut, 1978)
Adab Am Kellat Adab collection (Cairo, 2000)

PLAYS (in Arabic)

Twelve Women in a Cell (Cairo, 1984)
Isis (Cairo, 1985)
God Resigns in The Summit Meeting (1996)

NON-FICTION

MEMOIRS (in Arabic)
Memoirs in a Women's Prison (Cairo, 1983)
My Travels Around the World (Cairo, 1986)
Memoirs of a Child Called Soad (Cairo, 1990) (1944)
My Life, Part I, Autobiography (Cairo, 1996)
My Life, Part II, Autobiography (Cairo, 1998)
My Life, Part III (2001)

BOOKS (in Arabic)

Women and Sex (Cairo, 1969)
Woman is the Origin (Cairo, 1971)
Men and Sex (Cairo, 1973)
The Naked Face of Arab Women (Cairo, 1974)
Women and Neurosis (Cairo, 1975)
On Women (Cairo, 1986)
A New Battle in Arab Women Liberation (Cairo, 1992)
Essays: El Ma`ara Wa lguorba (Cairo, 1997)
Essays: Taw`am el Sulta Wa l guins (Cairo, 2001)
Essays: Kadaya el Ma`ara wa l Fikr (Cairo, 2002)
Essays: Kasr El Hedoud (Cairo, 2004)
Fiction and Non-Fiction (Cairo, 2004)

BOOKS TRANSLATED INTO ENGLISH

The Hidden Face of Eve [study] (London: Zed Books, 1980)
Woman at Point Zero [novel] (London: Zed Books, 1982)
God Dies by the Nile [novel] (London: Zed Books, 1984)
Circling Song [novel] (London: Zed Books, 1986)
The Fall of the Imam [novel] (London: Methuen, 1987)and Saqi Books
2001
Searching [novel] (London: Zed Books, 1988)
Death of an Ex-minister [short stories] (London: Methuen, 1987)
She Has No Place in Paradise [short stories] (London: Methuen, 1987)
My Travels Around the World [non-fiction] (London: Methuen, 1985)
Memoirs from the Women's Prison [non-fiction] (London: Women's Press,
1985; University of California Press, 1995)
Two Women in One [novel] (London: Al-Saqi Books, 1992)
Memoirs of a Woman Doctor [novel] (London: Al-Saqi Books, 1992; City
Lights, USA, 1993)
The Well of Life [two novellas] (London: Methuen, 1992)
The Innocence of the Devil [novel] (London: Methuen, 1994; University
of California Press, 1995)
Nawal El Saadawi Reader [non-fiction essays] (London: Zed Books,
1997)
Part I – Autobiography (Zed Books, London, 1999) “A Daughter of Isis”.

Part II Walking through Fire (Zed Books, London, 2002)
Love in the Kingdom of Oil [novel], (Saqi books, London, 2001)

A SHORT BIOGRAPHY

Nawal El Saadawi is a novelist, a psychiatrist, and a writer who is well known both in the Arab countries and in many other parts of the world. Her novels and her books on the situation of women have had a deep effect on successive generations of young women over the last 4 decades.

As a result of her literary and scientific writings she has had to face numerous difficulties and even dangers in her life. In 1972 she lost her job in the Egyptian government. The magazine, Health, which she had founded and edited for more than three years, was closed down. In 1981 President Sadat put her in prison. She was released one month after his assassination. From 1988 to 1993 her name figured on death lists issued by some fanatical terrorist organizations. She lived in exile for five years. In 2001 she won her case in Cairo court against forceful divorce from her husband (according to Hisba law). In 2004 Al Azhar in Cairo banned her novel, The Fall of the Imam. Her new Novel entitled Al Riwaya (in Arabic) published in Cairo by Dar Al Hilal October 2004 was banned by Al Azhar and Church in Egypt .

On June 15, 1991, the government issued a decree that closed down the Arab Women's Solidarity Association, over which she presides, and handed over its funds to the association called Women in Islam. Six months before this decree, the government closed down the magazine Noon, published by the Arab Women's Solidarity Association. She was editor-in-chief of this magazine.

Nawal El Saadawi has been awarded several national and international literary prizes, and has lectured in many universities and organized and participated in many international and national conferences, the latest one was the 7 th International conference of the Arab Women`s Solidarity Association (AWSA) under the title Creativity , Dissidence and Women held in Cairo 21 to 23 May 2005 . Her works have been translated into many languages all over the world, and some of them are taught in a number of universities and colleges in different countries.

On 8 December 2004 she presented herself as a candidate for the presidential elections in Egypt . You can visit her web site : www.nawalsaadawi.net to see her electoral program in English and Arabic as well as other information regarding her different political and literary activities .

Hanan Al-Shaykh

b. 1945



Biography / Criticism

Hanan Al-Shaykh was born in 1945 in Beirut, Lebanon. She grew up in a conservative part of town called Ras al-naba where she went to a traditional Muslim primary school for girls. Al-Shaykh began writing at a young age and by sixteen had essays published in the newspaper she would eventually work for, al-Nahar. She attended the American College for Girls in Cairo, Egypt from 1963 to 1966. After her graduation she worked in television in Beirut and as a journalist for a women's magazine, Al-Hasna, before landing a job at al-Nahar in 1968. She worked at the newspaper until 1975.

It was during this time in Cairo that she wrote her first novel, *Intihar Rajul Mayyit*, later published in 1970. Like most of her novels, it examined relationships between the sexes, power struggles and patriarchal control. *Faras Al-shaitan*, published in 1971, contained more autobiographical elements, including her relationship with her religious father and her marriage. In 1976 she moved to Saudi Arabia because of the Lebanese Civil War, which undoubtedly influenced her next novel *Hikayat Zahrah* (*The Story of Zahra*). She published it with money out of her own pocket in 1970, as no Lebanese publisher would touch it. The novel follows the harrowing story of a young girl named Zahra, who tries to escape oppression and war but upon leaving finds only more of the same. Banned in most

Arab countries, the book garnered international acclaim for Al-Shaykh and was hailed as "original, moving, and powerfully written" by the Boston Sunday Globe.

In 1982 Al-Shaykh moved to London, and in 1989 published *Misk al-ghazaal* (Women of Sand and Myrrh). Also banned from many Middle Eastern countries, it follows the story of four women (two from an unnamed Arab country, one Lebanese, and one American) coping with life in a patriarchal society. It was named one of the 50 Best Books of 1992 by Publishers Weekly. That same year she published *Barid Bayrut* (Beirut Blues), a novel consisting of ten "letters" written by a Muslim woman named Asmahan during the Lebanese Civil War. The letters are addressed to specific people both dead and living, as well as to certain places and events, such as "war." Both *Women* and *Beirut* received great praise in the U.S. The latter is described as a "blues song" in reviews from *Ms.* magazine and *The Washington Post*. The *San Francisco Chronicle* described *Beirut Blues* as having "a Kafka-esque feel." The *Chronicle* describes Al-Shaykh's writing as "attempting to convey the kind of existential angst that is synonymous with war, and to an impressive degree it succeeds." It also maintains that Al-Shaykh's writing exemplifies the "pursuit of the pleasures of the quotidian on one hand, and their struggle against the vagaries of war on the other."

In 1994, Al-Shaykh published a collection of short stories called *Aknus al-shams an al-sutuh* (I Sweep the Sun off Rooftops). The novel was translated into English in 1998 by Catherine Cobham. Only in London followed in 2000 with generally positive response, being called an "exquisite perspective of estrangement and recognition" by the *Guardian Review*. Only in London details the lives of four people trying to find a balance between multiple cultures while living in England.

Al-Shaykh has also written two plays, *Dark Afternoon Tea* in 1995 and *Paper Husband* in 1997. Though she speaks English fluently, Al-Shaykh continues to write solely in Arabic. She still resides in London.

In considering the positive reception Al-Shaykh's books have received in Great Britain and the U.S., it is important to consider literary and postcolonial theorists' responses to their popularity. Reviews of translated writing of "others" (such as Egyptian feminist Nawal el Saadawi or Al-Shaykh) by readers in the West can result in an Orientalist or unexamined affirmation of their works. Amal Amireh claims that "the West's interest in Arab women is part of its interest in and hostility to Islam" -- a hostility that "was central to the colonialist project." This is problematic for Amireh and others who argue that "the West welcomes her feminist critique of Arab culture because it confirms the existing stereotypes of Arabs and Muslim [men] as backward, misogynist, and violently oppressive." Thus, although Amireh claims it would be foolish "to assume that Arab women writers are just pawns" or that their books may mislead and misrepresent, more must be done to translate critical response to such texts.

Al-Shaykh's complex and vivid texts have provoked strong responses wherever they have been published. Her work demands that we think carefully about the relationships between culture, gender, race, nation, and empire.

Selected Bibliography

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- *Intihar Rajul Mayyit*, (1970)
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- *Story of Zahra* (1980, translated 1986)
- *Women of Sand and Myrrh* (1988, translated 1989)
- *Beirut Blues* (1992, translated 1996)
- *I Sweep the Sun Off Rooftops* (1994, translated 1998)
- *Dark Afternoon Tea*, (1995 play)
- *Paper Husband*, (1997 play)
- *Only In London* (2000, translated 2002)

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- Schlote, Christiane. "An Interview with Hanan Al-Shaykh."; *Literary London* 1.2 (2003). [link](#)
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- Trosky, Susan M., ed. *Contemporary Authors: A Bio-Bibliographical Guide to Current Writers in Fiction, General Nonfiction, Poetry, Journalism, Drama, Motion Pictures, Television*, Volume 135. Detroit: Gale, 1992.

Works in Languages other than English

- Spanish
 - *Esto es Londres*. (Innaha Lundun, ya azizi; *Only in London*) Trans. Mara Luisa Prieto and Abdel Rahim El Safi. Barcelona: Ediciones del Bronce, 2002.
 - *Mujeres de Arena y Mirra*. (Misk al-ghazaal; *Women of Sand and Myrrh*.) Trans. Pau Tod and Llus Tod. Barcelona: Ediciones del Bronce, 2002; Del Bronce, 1996.

Related Links

[Books and Writers](#)

his site gives a lengthy description of the author's life and her works. It describes the relationship with her mother, and the inspiration for her novels.

[The Sweet Briar Seminars](#)

This site gives a brief description about the author, as well as links to reviews of her work from other sources.

[Between Two Worlds: An interview with Hanan al-Shaykh](#)

This is a great site that hosts an interview between Paula Sunderman and the author. The author goes into detail about her life as a Lebanese woman, and the ups and downs of her writing.

[Hanan al-Shaykh on Life, Dreams and Pain of Afghan Women](#)

In this article, Hanan describes her views and feeling after the 9/11 attacks. She describes the Taliban and how the event has inspired new works.

[Lebanese Women's Association](#)

This site gives a lengthy description about the author's work, and also quotes sections of her novels.

This page was researched and submitted by [Grant Tharaldson](#), [Julie Kane](#), [Laurel Winter](#), and [Jill Shirley](#) on 5/6/04 and edited and updated by [Lauren Curtright](#) on 8/18/04.

Fatema Mernissi

A Contemporary Scheherazade's Tales of a Borderless World

By [Maggie Huff-Rousselle](#)

Shortened version of an article for the [Cairo Times](#), May 2003

(...) Like a modern day Scheherazade, it is perhaps Fatima Mernissi's destiny to turn our world into a fairytale, many fairytales, told with varied twists and turns, over and over and over again. She is the modern day Scheherazade of the Arab world, and Scheherazade reigns as the mythical queen of Arabic literature, not because of her physical beauty (which is taken for granted), but because she combined creativity with the shrewdest intelligence.

Beginning with her first book, **Beyond the Veil: Male/Female Dynamics in Modern Muslim Society**, a seminal and still classic analysis based on her doctoral thesis in sociology at Brandeis, Mernissi established herself as an intellectual with solid credentials. She had taught herself how to think clearly and creatively, and how to communicate her thinking in ways that would be both engaging and persuasive. Many, perhaps most, academics develop skill in collecting and presenting relatively conventional data in relatively conventional ways. Perhaps they are capable of no more. Perhaps they fear the exposure - the risks - of not following accepted intellectual orthodoxy.

Intellectually, Mernissi goes swaggering off in unorthodox directions, barely acknowledging that she has strayed from a conventional path that she probably considers

unworthy of consideration. "Beyond the Veil" is still controversial, but, for many, it established her as an Islamic scholar because of her use and interpretations of the Koran. For others, this and her subsequent books established her as a "refreshing" voice, an "imaginative Moroccan scholar and author [who] enters new territory" and "finds an innovative answer to the shared myths of the Arab world." (...)

Her subject matter is diverse, and she is much more than a Koranic scholar. "Beyond the Veil" was followed by other books with a gender focus, such as **Doing Daily Battle: Interviews with Moroccan women**; **The Veil and the Male Elite: A Feminist Interpretation of Women's Rights in Islam**; and **The Forgotten Queens of Islam**. Her most recent book, **Scheherazade Goes West**, a tongue-in-cheek attempt to explain the Western female as trapped in an invisible socio-cultural harem, develops that feminine/feminist perspective from a different angle.

While that perspective is an important characteristic in much of her work, it is not central. **Islam and Democracy: Fear of the Modern World** is probably the best known among those texts that represent her political analysis. Written and published after the first Gulf War, it was re-published with a new introduction after September 11. Mernissi herself sees **The Political Harem** as her most important book. More recently, her passion has been with grassroots civil society. **Les Aït-Débrouille** (The Resourceful Tribe), a lesser-known publication available only in French, was initially produced for the World Bank. This book explains "social capital" (a concept related to solidarity and trust within societies) through the story of a group of rural non-governmental organizations in the High Atlas.

Although known for her scholarly analysis and essays, Mernissi would describe the best-seller among her collected books as a work of fiction. Publishers promote **Dreams of Trespass: Tales of a Harem Girlhood**, as a memoir, but the book, now in 24 languages, is a necklace of fairytale vignettes strung out like semi-precious gemstones that bring the reader - through the provocative sensibility of a girl-child - into the private and very domestic harem of an old Moroccan family post-World War II. It begins with a true fact and moves on: "I was born in a harem in 1940 in Fez, a ninth-century Moroccan city some five thousand kilometers west of Mecca, and one thousand kilometers south of Madrid, one of the dangerous capitals of the Christians." The fairytales for adults in "Dreams of Trespass" are like the classic and universal fairytales: they provide insight into the human condition and a moral framework based on our common humanity, not on a specific religion or culture.

Although most of her texts are non-fiction essays, Mernissi often uses the techniques of a fiction writer. In **Les Aït-Débrouille**, for example, she invented Aunt Aïcha, a composite of real characters living in the High Atlas, to help her tell the story of the NGOs working there. There is even a photograph of Aunt Aïcha in the introduction to the book. For **Scheherazade Goes West** Mernissi invented two Western males, also composites of men she knows, to help explain the male perspective. Readers, she felt, would distrust a female narrative voice discussing male perspectives on females in the West, but they would not question a male voice explaining the same perspectives to the female narrator.

Mernissi is acutely conscious of her intended audience. Although she spent only a half-dozen years living abroad (in France, England and the US) and returned permanently to Morocco 30 years ago, she always writes in English or French. Early drafts, not yet scrutinized by a copy editor, will have a riot of mechanical spelling and grammatical errors, but specific words have been selected with the delicacy of the finest gemstone expert choosing jewels for a monarch's crown. There is a logical and seductive flow of ideas, with transitions as smooth as silk. **Les Aït-Débrouille**, intended for a Moroccan audience, was written in what Mernissi describes as Arabic-French: she used French words but incorporated the rhythm and structure of Arabic. Whether she is writing in French or English for Western audiences, she often uses an italicized Arabic word, followed by a well-honed definition which provides insight into Arab-Islamic culture. She mixes science, through scholarly analysis, with literary art.

Some artists work with fabric, some with paints and canvas or clay. Some chip away, finding the visions they imagine within a rock. Like her mythical ancestor, Scheherazade, Mernissi is an artist of the intellect. She works, not with tangible materials, but with ideas. She creates new theories and concepts by reinterpreting the past or the present and imagining the future, or spinning more conventional thinking together in odd and unexpected patterns that elude conventional thinking. One of the many Arabic concepts she uses as a theme is *jadal*, the art of dialogue and debate.

In practicing *jadal* herself, Mernissi has one theme that dominates: boundaries, frontiers, the things that divide us from the "other." The *hijab* (veil or curtain) is central in **Beyond the Veil**, and the *hudud* (sacred frontier) is a theme in this first seminal work and most of her other books. The introductory paragraph to **Dreams of Trespass** moves on to explain that she was "born in the midst of chaos, since neither Christians nor women accepted the [sacred frontiers]." In both introductions to "Islam and Democracy", she jousts with the words *hijab*, sometimes used to describe the recently fallen iron curtain, and *hudud*, used to describe many very different kinds of frontiers and boundaries. "Who among us," she asks, "is about to imagine a city of peace without boundaries, without separations, without *hudud*, without walls, without *hijabs*?"

The boundaries that Mernissi visits, over and over again, are the frontiers that divide us in a kind of modern-day tribalism. The commonalities that affiliate us - gender, race, religion, language and nationality - fashion a sense of solidarity that makes us feel safe and protected behind the invisible boundaries and frontiers we build around that solidarity. But these frontiers are ultimately destructive of what should be a far greater and more diverse solidarity: that of the human race. In Arabic, one says: *kuluna fil howa sowa*, we are all together in the same air. The English equivalent is: we are all in the same boat. This is a common moral in the fairytales that Mernissi tells us.

Scheherazade outwitted authority and conventional power - the status quo. Mernissi has done no less. Attempting to capture her in a few paragraphs is as foolhardy as attempting to pin down any specimen of a rare species. As a writer, she makes her audience perceive, understand and even "believe" in things that were always there (or so Mernissi

would have it), but - because of conventional thinking - were not obvious before she made them come true for us.

Using ideas and language, she spins and weaves or strings necklaces for adults, fashioning nuanced and textured designs from interrelated and unconventional concepts, constructed both with careful analysis and interpretations that may startle. One can accept and believe in the ideas she spins and weaves or strings together, or not. Much depends on one's sense of optimism, because Mernissi's worldview is analytical, imaginative and staunchly optimistic. Stubbornly optimistic.

A few weeks after the little tribe of the Caravane Civique [*April 2003 at Zagora*] had scattered from the Moroccan desert, Mernissi was selected, from among 20 nominees, by the judges for the Prince of Asturias Award for Letters. "It gives me hope and vibrancy," said Mernissi when she learned of the award. "It gives me hope for the Arab world, for civil society." She will share the prize this year with Susan Sontag. As with the Nobel Prize, judges select, not on literary merit alone, but because of what the writer has to say. Both women were praised for "having developed a literary work in several genres that, with a profoundness of thought and aesthetic qualities, tackles essential issues of our time."

Those living in "our time" can learn much from Mernissi's quirky and insightful feminine-feminist worldview, from her effusive optimism, and from her seductive shadi (sweet voice). If this modern-day Scheherazade's stories were heard by today's rulers, they might be enchanted, and, like the cruel ruler in Scheherazade's mythical world, transformed into believers in jadal (dialogue and debate) rather than the force and violence used to build and defend the invisible and terrifying frontiers that divide us. Fairytales can come true - when one believes in them.

Related links:

[Beyond the Veil](#)

Male/female Dynamics in Modern Muslim Society

[Doing Daily Battle](#)

Interviews with Moroccan Women

[The Veil and the Male Elite](#)

A Feminist Interpretation of Women's Rights in Islam

[The Forgotten Queens of Islam](#)

[Scherazade Goes West](#)

Different Cultures, Different harems

[Islam and Democracy](#)

Fear of the Modern World

[Dreams of Trespass](#)

Tales of a Harem Girlhood

[Les Ait-Débrouille](#)

ONG rurales du Haut-Atlas