

## The Concept of “Harem” in Fatima Al-Mernissi’s Perception & the Cultural Criticism

Maha M. Autoom<sup>[a],\*</sup>

<sup>[a]</sup>Associate Professor, Arabic Language and Literature, Language Center, Arabic Section, the University of Jordan, Amman, Jordan.

\*Corresponding author.

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### Abstract

This study analyzes the concept of Harem through the books and writings of Fatima Al-Mernissi<sup>1</sup> that make this concept central and fundamental. It is important for any researcher to deeply go through this concept in order to understand her feminist cultural discourse, especially as it is a multi-meaning concept that runs from the linguistic meaning to forms and multiple images Harem; unrealistic Harem, delusional Harem, and from the eastern to the western Harem, political and invisible Harem, and makes Scheherazade’s image an icon to alterations and transformations of this concept. Al-Mernissi is primarily concerned about providing an image of eastern Arabic Muslim woman, she discussed the dimensions of this image by understanding the different religious, political, social and cultural conditions that emerged, and at the same time paying attention to that this eastern Harem is linked very closely to the European and American Harem, which even if disagreed in form, but has the

<sup>1</sup> Fatima Al-Mernissi: 1940-2015: A Moroccan feminist writer and sociologist, her books have been translated into many world languages. Her writings are concerned about Islam and woman, analyzing the development of Islamic thought and modern developments. In parallel to her work in writing, she leads a struggle in the framework of the civil community for the sake of equality and women rights where she established the group called “women, families, and children”. On May 2003 she won the prize of Prince of Asturias for literature and Democracy jointly with Suzan Sontag. The most important of her writings: “What is Behind the Veil”, “Islam and Democracy”, “Shahrazad Travels to the West”, “Dreams of women Harem” (Tales of Harem Childhood), “Are You Fortified against Harem”. For more information, see Wikipedia site, The Free Encyclopedia on the Internet [ar.m.wikipedia.org](http://ar.m.wikipedia.org).

exact context. Al-Mernissi also dismantled the concept of Harem through serious and profound investigations in different sources that produced it, being basically a sociologist, and in order to understand the image of women and analyze it, she based on social studies in different scopes of knowledge.

**Key words:** Harem; Realistic harem; Political harem; Invisible harem; Delusional harem.

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### INTRODUCTION

The concept of Harem can be considered as Al-Mernissi’s central concept that she built her main project around it, which is not less important than Abdullah Al-Guthami’s (implicit pattern) term, though the two terms have some differences, but they agree in many ways:

First, they both refer to what is being done under shadows, and doesn’t appear on the cultural surface, in time they both form the essence of human culture and its main base,

and this is when two speech pattern systems contradict, one is apparent and the other is implicit, and the implicit is contradicting and abrogating the apparent which comes in one context, or in what is in the perception of one concept. (Al-Ghathami, 2000, p.77)

So, Al-Mernissi introduced the concept of the Harem from two sides, apparent and hidden, rising from the deep hidden concept to what appears on the cultural surface.

The second is that the authority has deliberately hidden or ignored it in order to preserve the falsity of cultural surface and uprooting it from its roots, and to separate it from its first components, where

this leads us to say that there is some sort of (symbolic tyranny), with completely metaphorical / collective nature (not individual as rhetorical metaphor), that it is the cultural allusion which forms the collective implicitly, and the (symbolic tyranny) acts as a motive in the cultural mind of the nation, which is the hidden component of its thinking patterns. (Ibid., p.80)

Through her readings, Al-Mernissi deduced the forms of power that control what appears, and what should be hidden in her delicate framework which is the women, and specifically arabic women. She deeply investigated in all directions to find out the reasons behind the current image of women, and the factors that lead to fall back and tumble down, so that

No biological or psychological or economic event alone can determine the form women should be in the society, but a cultural set of circumstances is able to produce the difference between male and eunuch, which is overwhelmed by the status of femininity in women. (De Bofwar, 2008, p.61)

The importance of cultural criticism is to be read beyond its aesthetic character, and tracking productive patterns of speech and identify the different trends, Al-Guthami says,

in our argue of cultural criticism project, that in literature discourse, specifically poetic, there is a valuable implicit patterns, causing the incorporation of a dominant cultural pattern that arab culture suffered from and still exist, this pattern remained un-criticized and unveiled because of its aesthetic character. (Al-Ghathami & Isteif, 2004, p.31)

And despite the fact that Al-Mernissi doesn't read patterns in literature and poetry, she tracks the image of women of different formats that produced its current form, including literature, and what it was, and what it became.

Although Fatima Al-Mernissi is originally a sociologist, she focused on a large part of her writings on analytical and field studies of the status of women in the moroccan countryside, but these diverse studies have contributed in shaping the image of Arab and western women in self relationship in one side, and in their relationship with the other, she contributed to the diversity of this other and the multiple roles in impacting her and being impacted by others. These studies also contributed in introducing the cultural feminist speech by Al-Mernissi.

It is worth to mention that Al Mernissi is one of few women writers (who were interested in feminist criticism) who presented a moderate cultural speech approach which is different from other anti-man extremist writers from one side, and she wasn't fascinated by the image of western woman who is supposed to be liberated unlike the eastern woman from the other side. On the contrary, she exposed the duality of western women and men in many aspects and in several occasions in her writings.

In addition to that, and unlike many Arabic female writers, she presented a moderate islamic feminist speech approach, her criticism to the image of muslim woman was considered a criticism for her as a muslim too based

on misquotation of islam which is a retroactive, supporting this approach with profound studies of woman's image during the golden age of islam, comparing it with pre-islamic period and with the new modern age which is affected by multiple external and internal factors. Al-Mernissi didn't adopt a single feminist school, weather it was western or arabic but she depended on studying and analyzing the image of arabic women, and created the features of that image and the different effects which contributed in being retroactive in some aspects and having progress in other aspects.

Harem image concept can be understood in her different books within her social intellectual project, and this study will provide a total outcome of her production in analytical descriptive study for the image of Harem and its different concepts that arabic reader, through variety of biographies, social studies and intellectual historical books.

The feminist studies in general—although there are some differences in their trends and frameworks—are tightly connected with the cultural criticism, the works of Fatima Al-Mernissi and the readings of the image of arab and western women anciently and recently lies in the center of cultural studies and cultural criticism, that emerge clearly in the concept of Harem in which she dug in different aspects, and introduced it to the reader within an integrated critical project.

The cultural criticism is basically based on reading literary text and other texts with non-literary tools, avoiding the aesthetic treatment which critics use to deal with. "Cultural criticism is an activity that is concerned with cultural patterns which reflect several cultural, historical, moral and civil values even cultural, political and religious values" (Al-Khalil, 2014, p.17).

Al-Mernissi in this context deals with different historical, artistic and literary texts by examining the cultural patterns that produced them. Therefore, the concept of Harem is wide and diverse based on different texts that deals with.

Perhaps the most important issue done by Al-Mernissi in processing Harem concept is examining the fixed concepts and facts, reviewing them according to historical evidences that disappear or being eliminated by authorities in order to serve their interests which basically built on absolutism and dismissal of the other represented by women, so reviewing the woman's image historically, in present and in the literary text as well as in religion is what can be called by Abdullah Ibrahim, the disassembling of the traditional society "traditional society is the incubator that feeds the male paternal culture with many hypothesis and acknowledgments, and its frameworks most type of expelling and stenography to which women were exposed all along history" (Ibrahim, 2011, p.66).

According to Al-Mernissi, Harem concept can be read as an introduction to understand her moderate feminist speech approach which reads present and future in light

of history, and examining causes of expelling women in light of different data she analyzed, criticized and exposed aberration points in them.

Women have remained the captive of Hareem in its different images all along history, and will continue unless a comprehensive review is done in order to change relationship between men and women, and push the society forward into the right direction. Thou this is a feminist general idea, Al-Mernissi gave this concept a special attention by avoiding theorization as well as making the arabian woman a base for her feminist cultural project. The images and forms of Hareem that Al-Mernissi has studied and reviewed will be presented as per the below:

- Realistic and Delusional Hareem
- Eastern and Western Hareem
- Political and invisible Hareem
- Shahrazad leaves to the West

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## 1. REALISTIC AND DELUSIONAL HAREEM

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It seems that the concept of Hareem in most of Al-Mernissi's reviews in her different books and writings is connected to the lexical meaning, from its negative side which is linked to deprivation and Haram (unlawful or forbidden by God) (Al-Deen, 2005) and confirms this meaning by saying

The origin of Hareem goes back to Haram (unlawful or forbidden by God) the prevented, Haram in all cultures leads to punishment in a way that makes us disconnect from happiness, and is focalizing in dangerous zone where law and human desire confront. (Al-Mirnsi, 2000, p.12)

So law her means authority and human desire is the freedom that masculine authority is trying to deprive the woman from it, and is built on limits and separation:

So Hareem is a spatial concept, and its limits divide the space into two parts: Inner hidden feminist space, which is forbidden to all men except the Master and external feminist space that are opened for all men except the woman. (Ibid., p.9)

The word Hareem means

“Haram” (Islamic word means forbidden), or the sacred place that submits to certain and extreme rules in order to access it, Hareem also is the private space prohibited for the public. Like the term Odalisque, Hareem includes their place and the woman who lives in, and owned by one man (the Protector or the Master). (Ibid., p.7)

She also says “The separation between sexes is greater in Hareem than monadic marriage, since woman does not leave it” (Al-Mernisi, 1987, p.126). Separation, limits and authority imposed by man on women inside the Hareem are the main bases of this type of Hareem which enforced upon woman for a long time. Hareem also is attached to prison and restrictions of women who are not allowed to leave it “Hareem was a prison for the Jasmine

(Al Yasmeen), a place where women buried alive” (Al-Mernisi, 2002, p.6)

Jasmine “Al Yasmeen” was Fatima’s grandmother whom she loved and learnt a lot from her, even she lived all her life in Hareem, but she taught Fatima how to challenge current and quelling circumstances, to start free in the space of life and experiences.

Based on the above, Al-Mernissi introduces different negative meanings for Hareem, but this reading does not stop at the borders of theorizing, in her book: (Women on wings of dream) provides an interesting and enjoyable narration about her real childhood she lived in Fez Hareem (Al-Mernisi, 1998), which although it appeared closer to the biography that tells the facts and lists of events, but it is a deep social image for the image of the moroccan Hareem who did not disintegrate till the beginning of the twentieth century. On the other hand, it is a realistic image of the realistic Hareem which is full of life and dreams and pains experienced by women in the light of this prison, as she calls it.

In spite of its severity, Hareem was a breeding ground for dreams and fed the will in order to obtain the right opportunity for the salvation of its chains. An uneducated woman like the grandmother Jasmine had her own formulations for some of the stories of *One Thousand and One Night*. And this formulation of the end of a woman story who wears a garment of feather is a dream formulation that expresses the will of this woman who lived her entire life in Hareem, but insists on the fact that women do not accept injustice and authority imposed by the man, and the rush to break the restrictions to get her hope for freedom (have a look at the story and the formulation of its end for the grandmother Jasmine) (Al-Mernisi, 2002).

Hareem is the place of dreams on the opposite side of the injustice and separation, borders and punishment, cruelty and conflict, though it is crashing, falling apart and fades. It is also a place of childhood, and its misfortune, and a source of love and family warmth.

Perhaps the importance of this book lies in concealing this realistic picture of the Hareem with the allusions of the west about arab islamic Hareem in her other books, the islamic Hareem breakup in the beginning of the eighteenth century, but it has continued in the west in the form of fashion in slabs of Europe, and in the paintings and drawings created by their portrait artists inspiring the Hareem image from their illusions about the image of the surrendering, subduing, and submissive muslim women, as it appears in the paintings of Matisse and Unger, and Picasso. Al-Mernissi says:

The westerns do not store in their minds only forms of Hareem formed on the basis of the images woven by their artists, they are paintings and films mainly, while I store in my mind realistic palaces, with high walls, built of real solid stones, by very strong men like caliphs and sultans and traders. My Hareem refers to historical reality, but their Hareem derives its strength from the

images created by painters who were enjoying the creation of women prisoners, creating a bond that is not visible between fun and slavery. (Ibid., p.6)

This means that the women of the Harem are weak and submissive, which is contrary to the historical and contemporary facts,

it seems that western Harem are for fun, where men succeed in achieving an impossible miracle in the east: Is to enjoy crowds of imaginary women in the Harem they dream of, without fear of their reactions, unlike the realistic Harem in the east where men apprehend from the women's cunning. (Ibid., p.25)

So realistic Harem is a place where strong women fight to prove their existence, while the western Harem is a place of beautiful weak women. "The Harem envisioned by westerns is completely free of this vision that includes calling for the women's strength all the time" (Ibid.). But westerns continued to draw the Ottoman Harem mistresses at a time where the modern Turkish state was founded, Harem disintegration, women get their freedom of employment, education and politics.

The westerns did not pay attention to the miniatures and the oriental art in the eastern history books, where:

We first find that women of the Harem are far from sensuality, emptiness and nudity as visualized by the west in the works of Matisse, Anger, and Picasso, on the contrary, they are hyperactive, dressed in their clothes so as not to say that they are coated by, wearing long dresses, often riding fast horses and armed with arches and arrows, in those miniatures depicting women is impossible to adjust or control. (Ibid., p.31)

The west wanted to imprison women in the eastern Harem, which provides it with the power, authority and sovereignty, and did not notice the violation of these fictional portrait of the reality of the east on one side, and the reality of the west, which called for the freedom of women and equality between men and women at a time when the artists paint these paintings that violates the western spirit, and the historical truth, and the eastern reality on the other side "the rich bourgeois were competing to buy these paintings at exorbitant prices, and fighting in the Senates council for the human rights and the citizen" (Al-Mirnsi, 2000, p.44) which reveals the duality of the west. In addition to the historical and factual errors.

Based on the above, Al-Mernissi presents a picture of the Harem, as she lived and experienced and coexisted it in Fez, and considers it a negative attitude, because she views it as a prison, and a place of borders and separation between both sexes, and between women and the world, but at the same time provide other aspects ignored by the westerns, who weren't objective when they confined the image of Harem in limits of what their artists, writers and intellectuals thought, making a woman Harem image only in beauty, nudity, pleasure and leisure, tyranny and wealth. Which contradicts the historical objective and truth, and gives an idea of the western opinion about the east which doesn't go beyond one of these paintings to

a tyrant man who enjoys many women whom they don't have any job but competing for him and his love, which is exactly the image that the colonizer wanted to imprison those who occupied in their framework, so that west will remain masculinity and power versus east, which represents femininity and weakness. The bottom line is, we should always distinguish between the two levels of truth: The truth made by women (Turkish women who learn and become lawyers and pilots in 1930, and the illusion which is part of the reality of the man (Mistress which is part of Matisse, a French citizen who was alive in 1930).

I believe that this distinction is fundamental because it allows us to understand the interactions and the psychological projections between two things one is like the other in ambiguity: "The fear from the opposite sex and the fear from other culture" (Ibid., p.53), and says in another place:

Perhaps this unique desire among Europeans to obtain a mistress graphics for silence and surrendered female slaves is one way to rationalize their desire to control, and the embodiment of contradictions in order to overcome, expel and control them, which brings us to the basic idea, which is that the anti-emancipation of women is not the prerogative of the Arabs, as envisioned by the western press, and is inevitable for Muslims. (Ibid., p.66)

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## 2. EASTERN AND WESTERN HAREEM

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In order to shed the light on this kind of Harem, Al-Mernissi seeks to review the Arab eastern history, and comes to detail the image of Harem of two personalities who consider them as templates designed to read the Harem in their time: Harun Al-Rashid (fourth Khalifa of the Arab Abbasid dynasty), which ruled in the eighth century. And Mohammad II (seventh sultan of the Ottoman dynasty), his title: Conqueror, ruled in the fifteenth century.

It is not because the two Muslim rulers may extend their authority on Byzantium, Europe's Christian symbol, but because both of them, in his own way, was a unique personality. Once Byzantium fell, they started to subdue their men, and captivated Christian women in their palaces, and brought to the palace degree of life luxury, maximum grandeur unmatched. (Ibid., pp.70-71)

This Harem is based on three basic elements: power, wealth and pleasure. And features many beautiful, educated and singers, and here we find the bestowal and donations and a lot of money spent for fun, which is restricted to women and eunuchs who guarded Harem and only let the master or the sultan alone or caliph, so that the "Harem does not provide pleasure, but only for one person, it is the sultan. Sultan alone is the decision-maker, and the commander, and all his people, particularly women, are just tools" (Ibid., p.71). A woman will be happy if he loved her, and if he went to the other woman,



which is what always happens, she succumbs to the new tragic situation, which is supposed to play without any resistance.

Harun Al-Rashid was an attractive person for women and inflaming the imagination of Arab men, because he was handsome, intelligent and soulful poet and lover from one side, and invader and committed leader from the other side, as “leading the convoy of pilgrims to mecca in one year, then leading a holy war against Byzantium in the following year” (Ibid., p.67). Without depriving himself of fancy and bring slaves of every color and sex to his palace until the number of slaves reached two thousand.

In contrast, Mohamed II (the Ottoman Sultan), who earned the title Conqueror, has inflamed the imagination of the europeans because he conquered Constantine, and was able to control it and named it Istanbul, was able to open the country, controlled the wealth, and gave it the islamic character, and enchanted its beautiful women.

However, the women of the islamic Hareem specifically used tricks to continue within the life of the Caliph or Sultan, especially foreign women by giving birth to children, and access them to power, so we find successors from romanian mothers, such as the Caliph Mamoun, the son of Harun al-Rashid, Al Wathik, AL Monastir, and Musta'in, and Al-Muhtadi (Al-Andalusi, 1981). It is worth mentioning here that

this ability of the captive women on sedition inside the palaces known only to the islamic Hareem, because this phenomenon was impossible in the Hareem of the Greeks and Romans as an example, for the simple reason that the Son of Mistress remains a slave all his life, and therefore, we see that Islam was somewhat ahead in the fields of human rights, because it is contrary to the Greeks and the Romans, he freed them, and gave them the right of succession. (Al-Mirmisi, 2000, p.80)

Al-Mernissi has introduced the eastern image of Hareem along with explanations and clarifications and details, to be able to question the image of the Hareem set up by the west, which is unrelated to the eastern Hareem history, because women of eastern Hareem were not just a matter of fun, were not always weak, they were educated, literate and singer and with multiple talents in order to be favored by the heart of the Sultan or caliph, and she used wisdom and intelligence to reach power through their children.

In the time that the west criticizes arabs and muslims to create Hareem, and the american media promoted an image of arabs and muslims as racist against women by creating Hareem, considering that this concept is the invention of an arab-Islamic invention. Al-Mernissi proves that the west is the first racist pioneers, and provides analysis of the origin of Hareem in the west starting from Greece and their successors the romans who had a Hareem in which women do not have any right, they are slaves for the fun of the master, and their children are slaves who do not get their freedom, even if the master married the

slave. And therefore they do not get any political or social rights, unlike the Muslim eastern Hareem, where the sons of slaves enjoy their legitimate rights, and they get their education, but also have access to leadership.

Therefore, Islamic civilization was enriched by scholars, writers and linguists from non-Arab mothers, a lot of them also came to power. Therefore, Arabs have taken the idea of the Hareem from Greeks and Romans, after developing it and granted women their rights which westerns didn't grant to their Hareem. Even this old west Hareem, which was founded seven centuries before Islam is the one that created the eunuchs, and confined them in Hareem as well as for women, so as to protect this Hareem and guard it from other males outside. While Muslim caliphs took this concept from their neighbors, who were representing the power and their goal was meant to imitate and beat them, especially after the Islamic conquests in the abbasid, and ottoman sultans after them.

In the present time Frenchwomen are complaining about what seems to the world of freedom and modernity, in fact it is the enslavement of women and return to the dark ages differently, a French friend of Al-Mernissi called Christina said about the freedom of working women in France:

Yes, they have access to jobs, but there are conditions, there are the wages first, at the moment women request a wage that fits their experience, men lose their sense of security, and men who hire women in high positions manage their affairs by surrounding her with younger women in order to destabilize her, so that you see, a company is located in the Champs-Elysees, which may include Hareem, it's a place where the president surrounds himself with dozens of women that their wages depend on his opinion, so oppression will be equivalent to that of the east, but with more hidden nature. The male domination occurs in a consummate way and self-censorship. (Al-Mernisi, 2002, pp.199-200)

Which is confirmed by Germaine Greer, who said:

Considering women's work secondary is universal feature, they must be in the house to ease the burden on her husband, and build his self-confidence as a breadwinner, and this one side of women's work being secondary outside house which was not evaluated. It is assumed that wives earn less than their husbands, and woe to the men whose wives are more successful than them. (Ghreir, 2014, p.184)

On the other hand, Al-Mernissi revealed the western and american way in the exclusion of women, by using her as a tool is fashion and advertising, and imposing harsh standards on beauty which defines her status and role in society and in life:

Western man unlike eastern man—who limits the repression in the public domain—controls the time and light. he decides by the virtues cameras' lights that print the ideal beauty on millions of used pictures in public letters, that a woman should look like in the fourteenth, and if she looked like she is in forties or fifties, then they fade into the darkness. (Al-Mernisi, 2002, p.227)

Betty Fredan, who is an american woman, in describing herself and other american women says:

This had never been a pure depriving and imaginary work, it meant that myself and every other woman I knew, were living in a lie, and all doctors who treated us and experts who taught us committed the same lie, our houses, schools, churches, and politics, and professions were built around that lie. (Fredon, 2014, p.17)

In fact, racism against women is correct, either in the east or in the west, the west began to criticize itself and inquiring about the reality of the woman, even some practices indicated by Al-Mernissi remained, as

The trends of masculinity prevails in the whole world, but the western world developed knowledge, principles and mechanisms which protects it to a distinct, of these knowledge is the search in "Gender" or the social type, which is a research that opposes the Biosocial, it also considers the differences between women and men cultural and historical not a natural eternal. (Salameh, 2006, p.156)

Thus we can say that the western has opened the door for the Harem, and the eastern muslim imprisoned women in it.

### 3. POLITICAL AND INVISIBLE HAREEM

In her book *The Political Harem* Al-Mernissi introduced a problematic and controversial issues in the arab islamic thought, which pushed many people to stand against her, and also lead to prevent circulating her book in morocco for a long period of time, where Al-Mernissi bravely introduced sensitive issues , perhaps the most sensitive issues in the arab and islamic community, and this study is not meant discuss what she introduced, or agree or disagree with her, but to show and analyze her thoughts and speech. The most important issues raised by this book are:

(a) The image of the ideal woman in the era of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) which developed from its image in the pre-Islamic era, to some extent.

(b) The gradual difference of this image after the death of the Prophet Mohammad (peace be upon him) and since the time of the Caliphs, then in the political strife, that led some to fabricate conversations, to cancel the role of women and their effectiveness, and exclude them from the political scene to let the man take the power.

(c) Discussing many verses and hadith in order to find the truth, which is clear in the texts, but is inconsistent with the narrations, which refers to the deliberate intervention of the narrators and historians (males) to exclude women. "The position of religion as a descending revelation, and as the religion of nature gives women their right, but culture as human masculine industry underestimates women, and transfers them to a stolen cultural entity" (Al-Ghathami, 1997, p.17).

Al-Mernissi talked much about the personality of the Prophet Mohammad which is sympathetic with women, and put them with the man along, which is what he personally believed and applied practically in his life,

"throughout his prophecy, Mohammed whether in Mecca or Medina, has given a central concern for women in his public life" (Al-Mernissi, 1993, p.127). Starting from his marriage to Khadija who chose him as a husband while she was older than him by about fifteen years, and was the first to believe in him, and the first to believe his prophecy, and stood on his side when everyone abandoned him. Then Aisha (one of the prophet Mohammad wives) whom the prophet granted her a political and social position in addition to her sentimental position till he said: "Take half of your religion from Aisha" (Ibid., p.98). and regardless of the accuracy of this Hadeeth, it indicates that Aisha was an important religious reference for the companions and all muslims, given such a position. She also was mentioned in many sources of Muslim and Bukhari Hadeeths. and the same applies to Umm Salamah (one of the prophet Mohammad wives) who accompanied the Prophet in his conquests, and had consulted her in many issues, so that "Umm Salamah was a pretty and charming woman, with a convincing argument, a prompt logic, a super power to deduct correct opinions" (Ibid., p.141).

But the prophet's position was faced with rejection and denying even in his life, especially by Omar bin Al-Khattab, who pointed out to the Prophet Muhammad that in his sentimental behavior and sympathy with women, he will provoke the hearts of men who are still clinging to the pre-islamic values, which was a source of fear for Omar bin Al-Khattab, and tried hard to change or reduce it.

Hence, the status of women in general which was protected by the prophet himself, and changed its old pre-islamic image not only in the religious text (the Quran and the Sunnah), but also in personal true actions which came from his tolerant principles but did not last long after his death.

Al-Mernissi introduces a hand full of Hadeeth and narrations which she felt they were put by people associated with power, and serves their ideology which is based on the rejection and exclusion of women. Al-Mernissi also comes on detailing many of the complex religious issues, attempting to deduce the cause of legislations or prevention, which is based all the time on standing against women, limiting her role in various fields of life, and clearing the ground for males to practice their power. Especially in veil issues, and polygamy and the exclusion of women from the political scene, she believes that the main reason for this is the fear of women, and competing man in politics, where she says: "We will see the emergence of this great fear of women that the Prophet wanted to remove" (Ibid., p.96).

Al-Mernissi seemed to be moderate in her discussions, even she seemed selective in choosing Hadeeths, and evidences, but this selectivity was connected to the specific issues raised by her, and at the same time connected to proving her idea, which is in the overall

discourse proves the role of women in politics and in public life, and her rights that were guaranteed by the Prophet and the message of moderate Islam, and she was deprived of it by the historians and politicians and who were in the service of their cause, to exclude women—at the end—and for the males to get the authority.

From this point came the title of her book *The Political Harem* to assure her idea that who deprived the woman from her right is not religion, but politics and authority that used the religious text, and interpreted it in accordance with its interests, therefore she deeply went through the image women in the pre-islamic period, and being injustice to her rights in patrimony, to a degree of underestimating her humanity and considering her only for pleasure, and comparing this image with another image when islam came and particularly in the reign of prophet Mohammad (peace be upon him), specifically when they granted their rights, and the status they deserve, which were taken away after his death, and returned back to what they were in the pre-islamic period, Al-Mernissi says:

There is a contradiction in that issue, islam, unlike many others assume, does not introduce an inferiority saying originated in women, but it assures the possibility of equality between both sexes. The inequality that is prevailing now does not lean on ideological or biological theory that confirms the inferiority of the women, but it is a result of qualitative institutional work designed to suppress her capacities, and specifically to seclude her, and legally subdue her inside the structure of the family, and these institutions did not generate a methodological ideology to convince with the idea of women inferiority. (Al-Mernisi, 1997, pp.79-80)

Though some people think that the religious text has participated in the formation of the political islamic disclosure, where Raja' Bin Salamah says commenting on the book of the Political Harem by Al-Mernissi:

She tries diligently to explain the deep rooted paternal structures by occurrence of incidents in the Messenger's reign, and by conditional circumstances the Messenger was exposed to, and individuals who hate women and lay Hadeeths against them, the situation is that the two institutions that specify the position of the woman, and separate between the public and the private; are the institution of the veil and superiority, both of them are worded in the Holy Qur'an itself. (Salameh, 2006, p.197)

Perhaps this is not a contradiction among the two researchers; they both agree on racism against the woman, but the religious wording and different interpretation that makes the occurrence of difference and discrepancy between them.

Therefore, Al-Mernissi in the introduction of her book *Forgotten Sultanas* submits this caution saying:

To avoid any misunderstanding and confusion, it is normal that every time I talk about islam without any description in this book, then I mean the political islam, islam as a practice of power, and deeds of men propelled with their interests, and so much filled up with fancies, which is different from the real islam- the mission, the mission sent from God, the ideal islam inscribed in the Holy Qur'an (the Book of God). And when I

talk about the last, I surely express it with Islam, the mission, or spiritual Islam. (Al-Mernisi, 2002, p.18)

And from here comes the significance of the *Forgotten Sultanas* in which Al-Mernissi put a great effort in researching and investigating in the arab and islamic and foreign sources to conclude the fact, and to introduce personalities of women the arab and islamic history has ignored, and did not concentrate on their roles that not less significant than males, they were real Sultanas and decision-makers, and played a role in the life of individuals and communities. These women were distributed in places and came in different times, this means that women remained present all times in spite of exclusion, but the masculine authority, which remained existing to prevent them from reaching to power, had practiced another role against her which was denying her presence, or recognizing it at least.

#### 4. SHAHRAZAD TRAVELS TO THE WEST

In her overall work, Al-Mernissi tried to show the famous character of Scheherazade, who represents the women who is able to stand up against the authority, and even make it to her side, Scheherazade has fascinated her king by staying long nights of storytelling till he was changed and became nice, loving, kind, and pleasant (Al-Mernisi, 2002, p.24), she challenged the killings and the power with her words and narrations which guaranteed to herself and her kind a life and peace. Till

Shahryar confessed that the man has to use the word instead of force to resolve disputes. And in her struggle for survival and freedom, Shahrazad had never controlled soldiers but words, from this, narratives and story telling's can be considered as a present civilized myth. The tales of *One Thousand and One Nights* shows the victory over violence. (Ibid., p.74)

Shahrazad's narratives have been a model of Harem women in Fez, where Shahrazad was representing the dreams of imprisoned women in Harem, entertainment of narration from one side, and the model of liberated women that Shahrazad represented for all Harem women, which pushed the grandmother, Al-Yassamin to go with Shahrazad, and transformed the story of the woman who was covered with feather, with what fits her aspirations and ambitions to liberation from the masculine restriction.

However, Scheherazade was defamed, her image didn't go far from the image of the defamed western women, which shocked Al-Mernissi when she went to attend a show for Scheherazade in Berlin, to find that Scheherazade in the West is just a beautiful and attractive woman, who was dancing throughout the whole show, Al-Mernissi was amazed and disappointed as they ignored her main role which is speak and stop killing, which remained till she came. And it is a continuation of the western Harem, which wants to imprison women for fun,



and imprison the east in submissive and surrendered role, which is a symbolic representation of women in exchange for Western culture / male.

East was always described as feminine, its wealth as fertility, its major symbols are lustful women, the Harem, the tyrant ruler, etc. ...., but it was attractive in a strange manner. In addition to that, eastern women are like maids in the Victorian era, they were legally forced to remain silent as much as they were forced to give birth. (Saed, 1991, p.53)

As well as for Scheherazade in that show who was silent and submissive and attractive and didn't do anything but dancing.

This is also what happened in the book, which she saw in one of Berlin's libraries as well, and found on its cover a picture of a fluffy semi-naked woman who represented Scheherazade (Al-Mernisi, 2002, pp.77-79). Scheherazade, who dazzled the west, where Anthony Calland (Antoine Galland, 1646-1715) translated *One Thousand and One Nights* into French for the first time, and his translation was very popular, and released in twelve volumes (Al-Mernisi, 2002, p.79). This Scheherazade was assassinated in the West, in different ways, and was imprisoned in the eastern Harem itself. Al-Mernissi says: "Unlike the woman whom I saw showing her body on a glaring blue cover, the East Scheherazade is smart, and makes the strongest enticements out of this feature" (Ibid., p.58).

On the other hand, Al-Mernissi tracks misrepresentations and other literary distortions of Scheherazade in the west, you find out that the American writer Edgar Allan Poe (Edgar Allan Poe 1808 to 1849), in his book: *A Thousand and Two Nights of Scheherazade* killed Scheherazade (Ibid., p.81) and he felt relieved that he killed her, he says: "I felt with a great relief when the rope was tightening around her neck" (Ibid.,p.91). She sees that the reason behind the killing of Scheherazade is the tightness of the western man mind against the women's intelligence, and his desire to keep her in the image of being silent, beautiful and stupid, she says:

Here I realized why Allan Poe killed Scheherazade, a woman showing her intelligence is a crime, a women should give up her intelligence and obscure her mind if she wants the temptation of a man in the opinion of Kant. (Ibid., p.108)

Al-Mernissi refers to Kant's book *Notes on the beauty and Highness* and deduced from it how the racism of Kant against women, and his inferiority of them (Ibid., p.108). Women in the eastern Harem needed to be intelligent in order to be distinguished and prove herself, while in the western Harem they must only be beautiful. She says, "Isn't it strange that the dictators in the east medieval like Harun Ar-Rasheed were looking for intellectual mistresses, and while the Western philosophers like Kant was dreaming of foolish women in Europe during the Age of Enlightenment?" (Ibid., p.112) In contrast, the French writer, *Teophile Cootie* killed Scheherazade as well as

in the story of *A Thousand a Night and Two Nights*, "but the reason for killing this time was very humiliating: Scheherazade has lost the inspiration! Allan Poe killed her because she knew too much, while Cootie did so because she did not know enough" (Ibid., p.113). In both cases, her knowledge seemed to be a reason to be killed, whether this knowledge is excessive or deficient, it is a source of threat for a western man, who does not want this role for a woman, which makes her able to challenge him and share the power he wanted only for himself as he was the smart and the one who has the knowledge, while she was the ignorant and submissive, so he is the owner of the power and she is the colonized and obedient.

Shahrazad and her tales in one Thousand Nights and a Night have been a source of admiration and aspiration to the westerns on all levels since Gallan's translated it to French language, and have been favored with many studies, and readings, but Al-Mernissi does not speak about this great presence of Shahrazad and her tales, but she digs in this type of presence in the western thinking, that sees in Shahrazad from its side, and ignores what it also wants, it wants to imprison the woman in this Shahrazadian image, not that it sees and lives with in the shadow of liberation, democracy and equality and fears it from one side, and from other side it wants to fix the picture of the east and imprison it too in the framework that makes it easy to dominate it, because it is afraid of it too, and wants to preserve the image of power / west/ male/corresponding to the image of weakness /east/ female. And this situation shows even other side that the positive reading represents and acknowledges the east as a source of threat. The writer of the book *The Strangest Magic*, Marina Woner, says:

I wanted to show another face to the culture of the area, that became, from the point of view of politics, an enemy that forms a threat to the western politics, that attempts with this fair study of the book *One Thousand Nights and a Night* to obtain victory to the arab culture through it, and lightens the excessiveness of extremism and racialism against the Arab. (Marina, 2016, p.482)

However, we should acknowledge the presence of Scheherazade in a positive way as well, and what Al-Mernissi referred to, western women have imitated women from east in their costumes and fashion since the eighteen century, some of them was attributed to Scheherazade, it is an expression of western women for admiration and fascination with the character of Scheherazade, which does not stop at the borders of appearance and dress, so says Professor (John Julmeer):

Scheherazade character has a decisive influenced on the history of european women, and made the eighteenth century's greatest centuries in her life, their beauty and self-confidence, and their confrontation to Shahryar, that all men were unable to stop, and use of a weapon of femininity and knowledge together, had a significant impact in the formation of European women character. (Younis, 1988, p.233)



No one can deny the numerous objective studies on Thousand Nights and Night and Scheherazade's personality. Specifically, with the recognition of the validity of what Al-Mernissi viewed, but her observations were generalized, and selecting models to indicate her ideas, without mentioning the other side, to complete the image and read it comprehensively.

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## CONCLUSION

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In her over all work, Al-Mernissi has introduced intellectual and civilized reality of women between the past and present, and between East and West, and chose a central concept for this, which is the concept of Hareem, and dug profoundly in the various aspects of this concept in a creative and critical way. Perhaps, her moderate readings appeared in different aspects of this deep research, while her critical efforts focused on women did not make her biased against men, and her attention to the Arab and eastern women of Arab did not make her against the western women, but she read objectively the past and the present of women and what will be the future in the light of the various data.

The study addressed the most prominent aspects of the concept of the Hareem starting from realistic Hareem which she read through creative work: *Women on wings of dream* which is a work that focuses on Hareem in Fez in Morocco, which remained in place until the beginning of the twentieth century, and the importance of this work appear in its comparison to what settled in the west of the unrealistic image for the Hareem, this Hareem-based on the borders and separation is different from the paintings made by Western artists for Hareem woman and She provide reasons for the emergence of this image that is associated with Western aspirations and dreams for a weak and beautiful woman who is available, at a time when the West was developing and guaranteeing women's rights, which were digested for a long period of time.

It is also on the other hand makes the whole east a target through the representation of women, specifically Hareem, making it available to the West and an easy target, which is linked to his colonial intentions, and an attempt to subjugate the colonial jail in this image before the actual colonization.

In Section II, the study provided a serious review of Fatima Al-Mernissi on the study of Hareem historically in the East and the West, The West, which Hareem starts since the Greeks and Romans and was unfair to women and made them for fun and slavery, and deprives them of any rights when it comes to their children and taking power, while Hareem in the east, reached the climax in the Abbasid era during the reign of Harun al-Rashid, were his wives were highly educated and intellectuals, and some of their children took the power, as well as the eunuchs is not

an invention of the East, but of the Greeks and Romans who were imitated by the East as a previous civilization owners and have a strong influence.

It also moves to the present to find out the west still practices the Hareem on women but at a different from, hence, women are no more imprisoned in the place, but she is as such in time, and were imposed by conditions in the media, at a form not to exceed, in addition to the difficult work conditions that require them to go parallel to men without surpassing or excelling them, and in the return the woman is still a source of danger against the authority, and she has to be excluded and veiled, and prevented from being parallel to men, so how to surpass and excel them.

In the third part, the study discussed a new concept that Al-Mernissi called the political Hareem, it is the Hareem that made the religion its principle weapon, to prove through digging and deep reading that religion was fair women, especially in the reign of the Prophet Mohammad (peace be upon him), but the conversion occurred after his death, and was what is similar to retraction to the condition of women in the pre Islamic time from debasing some rights and stealing others, and a political imprisonment of women that took the religion as an instrument for it, it is what makes a new Hareem that differ in the form from the old Hareem, and agree with it in the content and essence. Al-Mernissi in numerous places of her books confirmed that the most dangerous impact and negativity of Hareem was prevailing in women minds as well as in men's mind, and of the east and west minds.

In the last part of the research she provided a reading of Scheherazade whom Al-Mernissi focused on, a representation of a woman and their various capabilities, and their potential to use their minds against power, however, women were deformed in the west in particular, which came in the false historic reading about women, and to the east which was represented by women to the west.

Finally, Al-Mernissi in her critical and creative project presented a deep reading for women, and focused on the hidden pattern that makes her current image as it is, eastern and western, masculine and feminist, despite their moderation and objectivity, which did not make her biased in an image without the other, or to the side without the other.

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