

Feminist Identity Within Islamic and Social Constraints in Fatima Mernissi's *Dreams of Trespass: Tales of a Harem Girlhood*

Dr. Najat Ali Sharif*

Department of English Language and Literature, Faculty of Arts, Elmergib University
Alkhoms, Libya

*Email (for reference researcher): nasharif@elmerib.edu.ly

الهوية النسوية في ظل القيود الإسلامية والاجتماعية في كتاب فاطمة المرنيسي: أحلام التعدي: حكايات
من حياة فتاة في الحريم

د. نجاة علي الشريف*

قسم اللغة الانجليزية و آدابها، كلية الآداب، جامعة المرقب، الخمس - ليبيا

Received: 16-01-2026; Accepted: 26-03-2026; Published: 09-04-2026

Abstract

This study aims to explore the ways in which feminist identity is constructed in Fatima Mernissi's memoir, "*Dreams of Trespass: Tales of a Girl in the Harem*," by analyzing the interactions between the self and socio-religious constraints within the Moroccan context. The study proposes that women within the "harem site" practice a form of feminist agency that goes beyond mere trespassing on social norms and religious teachings, manifesting in the internalization and adaptation of cultural norms to preserve their feminist identity. The study deconstructs Orientalist perceptions that have reduced the harem to erotic dimensions, redefining the harem instead as a socio-political space managed by women in their domestic life and maintaining their feminist identity. Through a qualitative analytical method, the author analyzes the novel and highlights the subtle strategies and social practices, such as storytelling, employed by Mernissi's characters to negotiate the imposed harem or 'Hudud.' The study concludes that feminist identity in Mernissi's autobiographical novel is constructed to operate within—rather than outside of—religious frameworks, to understand and question them. Thus, the research offers a twofold critique: first, it challenges the Western-centric view of the harem; second, it criticizes local patriarchal structures that have employed religious interpretations to confine women's agency in both the private and public spheres and maintain their power.

Keywords: Islamic feminism, harem, identity, social and religious constraints.

المخلص

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى استكشاف كيفية تشكل الهوية النسوية في رواية فاطمة المرنيسي. "أحلام التعدي: حكايات فتاة في الحريم"، وذلك من خلال تحليل التفاعلات بين الذات والقيود الاجتماعية والدينية في سياق المجتمع المغربي. وتفترض الدراسة أن النساء داخل "فضاء الحريم" يمارسن شكلاً من أشكال الوكالة النسوية التي تتجاوز مجرد التعدي على المعايير الاجتماعية والتعاليم الدينية، لتتجلى في استيعاب المعايير الثقافية وتكييفها للحفاظ على هويتهن النسوية. كما تعمل الدراسة على مناقشة وتفكيك التصورات الاستشراقية التي اختزلت "الحريم" في أبعاد إباحية، معيدة تعريفه كفضاء اجتماعي وسياسي تديره النساء في حياتهن المنزلية للحفاظ على هويتهن النسوية. بواسطة منهج تحليلي نوعي، تحلل الباحثة الرواية وتسلط الضوء على الاستراتيجيات الدقيقة والممارسات الاجتماعية، مثل سرد القصص، التي استخدمتها شخصيات المرنيسي للتفاوض مع الحريم المفروض أو "الحدود". تخلص الدراسة إلى أن الهوية النسوية في رواية المرنيسي تُبنى لتعمل ضمن الأطر الدينية - لا خارجها - بهدف فهمها والتساؤل عنها. وبذلك، يقدم البحث نقداً ذا شقين: أولاً، يتحدى النظرة الغربية المركزية للحريم، ثانياً، ينتقد البنى الأبوية المحلية التي وظفت التفسيرات الدينية لتقييد دور المرأة في المجالين الخاص والعام، وللحفاظ على سلطتها.

الكلمات المفتاحية: النسوية الإسلامية، الحريم، الهوية، القيود الإسلامية والاجتماعية.

Introduction

One of the recent issues that has been overlooked is the exclusion of Arab Muslim feminist authors from the literary canon. Those writers, though the reputation of Arab and Muslims in general after European Colonialism and US neo imperialism, have reached prestigious positions. They, such as Ameen Malak, Ahdaf Soueif, and Fatima Mernissi, have struggled through their writings to present some of the feminist issues in the Islamic society. By

establishing postcolonial feminist and postmodernist literature, they have lunged forward in the literary canon, revealing what was silenced or erased throughout several years.

In this research, I will analyze a selected work by Fatima Mernissi, *Dreams of Trespass: Tales of a Harem Girlhood*, focusing on the theme of feminist identity. Mernissi (1940), a Moroccan feminist Islamic writer, has penned her childhood experience showing gender inequality and feminist issues in the Arabic Islamic society under French colonization. In her book *The Veil and the Male Elite: A Feminist Interpretation of Women's Rights in Islam* (1991), Mernissi provides an academic dimension to the tales that she tells in *Dreams of Trespass: Tales of A Harem Girlhood* (1994). In the latter, Mernissi demonstrates the boundaries and the walls of the harem, whereas in the former, she explains who built them and why they were built. She further discusses that gender inequality does not exist in Islamic teachings, but rather is a political idea. Mernissi claims that "If women's rights are a problem for some modern Muslim men, it is not because of the Koran nor the prophet, nor the Islamic tradition, but simply because those rights conflict with the interests of a male elite." (1991, p. ix). This speech means that the elite men manipulate religious mandates to protect their own power. In her novel, the reader encounters a variety of women's issues during World War II in a very religious, traditional, patriarchal society. Mernissi, from my perspective, addresses feminist, psychological matters that Moroccan women were suffering from.

The author invites the reader to follow the curiosity in the childhood life of a young girl, Fatima. Through this portrait, one can acknowledge the closed world of women during the early 20th century. Mernissi presents many examples of women groups in the novel; the obedient women who respect the traditions and beliefs and hope all women follow them, those are against patriarchal domination and call for woman's emancipation, the narrators who tell stories from *Thousand Night and One Night* and historical stories, and the lovers of the Egyptian singers, as well as those who dream, in the Fez balconies, by a world without walls or fences. In a patriarchal society, women are alienated and excluded from any authoritative positions for many years. Fatima Mernisii, throughout her novel *Dreams of Trespass: Tales of a Harem Girlhood*, has proved the female power and efforts to cooperate effectively in revealing many facts about feminist matters. She, through the main characters, such as her mother, grandmother Yasmina, and her aunt Habiba, attempts to voice her feminist thoughts and highlight the gender inequality in harem life. This idea proves that Mernissi's personality is socially constructed throughout the years that she spent among those women in spite of all social and religious barriers.

The feminist movement in the Arab world has grown later compared with the American and European feminist movements. However, the educated women, such as Mernisii, successfully attempted to produce some literary works showing the social and religious oppression of women applied by the patriarchal society. Patrick Kilby however; pointed out that "while third world women have been clamoring to be included and were leading drivers in the UN processes since the 1950s, Western development agencies, NGOs, have been very slow to incorporate women's needs into their development programs." (2015, p. 69). Margot Badran (2009) provides a historical survey of the emergence of Islamic feminism, and She claimed that the period between the 19th and late 20th century witnessed a radical transformation in Muslim women's self-awareness and their understanding of their social role. This condition resulted from their direct engagement with the currents of modernity. The feminist movement in the Middle East was not isolated, but rather the product of a convergence of three key dimensions. First is the context of modernity, which is a temporal and epistemological framework that nurtured the beginnings of this movement. Second is the Islamic identity, where religion played a pivotal role in shaping the demands and orientations of these movements, rather than being an obstacle. The third is globalization, which contributed to the transfer of ideas and transcendence of traditional boundaries (2009, p. 215). The emergence of the feminist idea in Egypt is the best example to this context. Badran stated that before the articulation of feminist's

idea in the late nineteenth century, women participated in the economic and technological transformation in Egypt. Although the state promoted feminists and activists to speak out, all the initiatives had been maintained for the authority purposes. Between 1860 and 1890 feminist consciousness is expressed in women's journals, salons' discussions and in the publication of some writings, such as essays, poetry stories. She confirmed that the feminist discourse firstly privileged in the writings of educated women. Thus through education women are exposed to deeper understandings of the Islamic justification for the Islamic veil (Badran, 2009, p. 20).

Badran added that "religion from the very start has been integral to the feminisms that Muslim women have constructed, both explicitly and implicitly, whether they have been called secular feminism or Islamic feminism" (2009, p. 2). The discourse, in this research, is limited to Islamic feminism movement, which is evident in women's capacity of rereading the religious texts and cultural heritage with a contemporary vision. The term 'Islamic feminism' emerged and began to spread globally in the 1990s, and it is defined as "a discourse and practice articulated within an Islamic paradigm. Islamic feminism, which derives its understanding and mandate from the Qur'an, seeks rights and justice for women, and for men, in the totality of their existence" (Badran, 2009, p. 222). Through combining the real life experience and interpretation of religious text, Muslim women succeeded in formulating an effective identity that transcends local frameworks. In the late 20th century, there was a shift towards Islamic feminism. A generation of women involved in Islamic movements, and they started criticizing male dominance. Besides, they developed a feminist consciousness based on their religious reference. Those women also struggled between independence and dependency. Their activism has historically oscillated between building independent entity and participating in male-led movements while working to critique and dismantle their structure (2009, p. 216).

In the final decades of the century many feminists and Islamic scholars, such as Fatima Mernissi adopt modern critical methodology to interpret religious texts, in order to provide contemporary readings that do justice to women and meet their needs. Badran claimed that radical feminist movement in Islamic world will be Islamic 'feminism' for some reasons. Contemporary Islamic feminism depends upon a movement led by educated women who offer a new interpretation of religious texts from a modern perspective, making it the only tool that has the capacity to break down the class and zone barrier within Muslim societies. Its significance today is highlighted as a necessity for identity in the context of globalization and diaspora communities, where digital technology contributes to strengthening the ideology. That is because it functions as a 'transnational' movement connecting Muslim women worldwide to gain rights-based achievements rooted in their cultural heritage (2009, p. 219). Mernissi waves a memoir to show how the feminist identity is formed inside Islamic traditional harem. These pages are limited to the analysis of feminist identity that has been presented in Mernissi's novel *Dreams of Trespass: Tales of a Harem Girlhood*, with special reference to the stories that highlight topics, such as Islamic feminism, and religious and patriarchal laws. Additionally, the presentation of the characters will be limited to the main characters and those women the author used to address some important issues

Research Methodology

In this study, I have adopted a qualitative method in analyzing and discussing the selected novel. Some literary material and historical sources have been used in the discussion of the feminist ideas and the political and social atmosphere in which the author wrote her novel. Additionally, the discussion has been supported with a significant number of sources, which deal specifically with the subject of feminism, post colonialism, and Islamic ideology in the Arab society.

Literature Review

Mernissi presents her personal experience in *Dreams of Trespass: Tales of A Harem Girlhood* (1994), describing the masculine dominance over women in the Moroccan and Arab societies

in general. Starting with a special reference to the kind of buildings and houses, which are designed according to men's desires, and as they think the house is the natural and permanent destination for women. Mernissi pointed out that the harem house “consists of long walls, big wooden doors that protect women from strangers, and foreign men cannot enter the Harem without permission.” (1994, p. 36). Mernissi does not criticize the style of the construction as much as she criticizes its purpose. She artfully describes the large house, its rooms and floors, and how all families respect each other's places under the supervision of the old woman Lalla Mani. The author also does not offer any explicit critique of her society. Still, her criticism can be interpreted from her characters' speech, especially the women, who show their feminist thoughts. In this respect, Adila Abusharaf argue that “many men [do] not consider equality as an advantage, but a loss of rights and powers. Deep psychological biases and fears mesh with religion and tradition and with the total organization of society to form a barrier (2006, p. 722). In some situations, the speech among the characters, such as Yasmina and Fatima, indicates to the equality between the genders does not oppose the Islamic teachings. In the same token, Abusharaf assures that “The main entry point for gender equality in Islamic juris prudence is the principle of Shura (consultation). This principle suggests that men and women should negotiate over their family and public affairs” (2006, p. 719).

The protagonist's definition of the environment that confined women at that time helps us to acknowledge Mernissi's opinion of patriarchal dominance. Fatima's curiosity makes her capture the women's speech and think deeply about its meaning, and finally leads her to conclusions about what will probably happen to her in the future. She hears her mother in the morning asking, “When shall I see the light of the morning?” (Mernissi, 1994, p. 36). She knows that no one will offer her an answer, but she asks to make all women in the house understand that her dream is to walk freely outside the harem. Mernissi learned from her mother how to reject any tradition that restricts her life, “you have to learn to scream and protest, just the way you learned to walk and talk.”? (Mernissi, 1994, p. 36).

There are some debates about the definition of harem. Edward Said's view of harem contrasts with Mernissi's perspective. The orientalist harem, based on Said's vision, is a place of erotic behaviour and male pleasure whereas Mernissi's harem is a site of family life and boredom. Said (1978) showed how the West created a mythical image of the East in order to justify its colonization. He argued how women are sexually fetishized in harem. However, Mernissi deconstructs this vision by presenting the harem as a place of intellectual and political struggle. Said pointed out that the West always shows oriental women as silent, and they speak for them by Westerners. He claimed that “they [oriental women] are expressed by the traveller's representations of them...they never represent themselves, they never exhibit their own emotions, presence, or history.” (1978, p. 6). However, Mernissi showed the reality in her memoir, in which women directly represent themselves and shatter that silence. Reina Lewis alike contrasts with Said's view who focused on how the East is portrayed by the Western men, she claimed that “For the women who lived in them, the harem was a site of sociality, a place of work, and a centre of family life, rather than the eroticised theatre of Wester imagination” (2004, p. 182). One can argue that there is a conflict in representing harem and women between the West and Islamic world. Said (1978) pointed out that “The Orient was a place where one could look for sexual experience unobtainable in Europe....a place of escapism and sexual freedom.” (p. 190). This a 'mythical image' has been shattered by the characters in *Dreams of Trespass*. Mernissi, through her stories, attempts to describe what happens in the invisible world of the harem that is imposed by the patriarchal political structure.

Additionally, Mernissi considers that wearing a veil is one of the barriers that separates women from outside world. She claimed that “The veil is the expression of the invisibility of the women on the street; it is the physical expression of the 'hijab,' the curtain that descends between the woman and the world.” (1991, p. 189). In *Dreams of Trespass*, characters are ordered that certain things are forbidden in Islam. Although the brave woman Tamo is participating in

defending her country against French colonialism, she does this disguised. Mernissi links preventing women from doing some jobs in society with misogyny. She argued that "Misogyny...is used as a political weapon, as a means of disqualifying women from the exercise of power and the enjoyment of their rights." (1991, p. 42). Similarly, Lewis (2004) discussed the reality of the harem, which contrasts with Said's 'myth' about the harem. Lewis proves what Mernissi shows in her memoir, and agrees with her in defining harem. Lewis defined a harem as a domestic arena of the family. She presented that "The harem was not a place of constant sexual availability, but a domestic space in which women's lives were lived in a state of gender-segregated privacy." (2004, p. 13). Lewis' idea aligns with Mernissi's description of the harem. It is not a site of unlimited sex, but it is where women practice their social life and debate political subjects.

Furthermore, not only is the harem surrounded by boundaries (walls), but the social life inside harem also has some constraints. Fatima Sadiqi (2003) provided a structural meaning of social constraints and harem in the Maghrebi context. She suggested that "The 'harem' is the ultimate symbol of the domestic sphere, where women's identity is constructed through seduction and management of internal family affairs." (p. 25). She argued that in traditional Maghrebi thought, space is characterized by a gendered duality that separates the 'public' as a space for males and the 'private' as a site for females. This division does not stop at the physical boundaries of the sphere, but extends to create psychological and limited constraints that place symbolic limitations on women's power (2003, p. 23). Lewis added that women in the harem mastered oral traditions to demonstrate their identity because they were excluded from formal written Arabic (2004). One can recognize how the characters in Mernissi's memoir tell stories, such as Scheherazade, to enjoy their time and to criticize their condition in the harem. Sadiqi argued that "Storytelling in the Moroccan female tradition is a form of negotiated agency; it allows women to critique social constraints without explicitly violating the codes of 'hshuma' (shame/modesty)." (2003, p. 110). Characters in *Dreams of Trespass* see Scheherazade as a source of power, and the woman who wins at the end of her stories. Sadiqi claimed that the concept of "hashuma" is one of the strong social constraints that prevent women from trespassing into men's domains (2003, p. 88).

In the same vein, Saba Mahmood (2005) explained how women live within constraints. In her book *Politics of piety*, she attempts to prove that women in the harem are not passive because they do not participate in secular revolution, but rather they practice adherence and application of the Islamic norms. Mahmood argued that agency should not be identified only by 'resistance,' and if the ability to effect change in the world and to others is ever present in the concept of agency, the meaning and sense of that change cannot be fixed a priori as progressive or regressive, as emancipatory or submissive" (2005, p. 14).

In this light, the docility of the women in *Dreams of Trespass* does not mean that they do not endeavour to maintain their identity, but they try to maintain their identity while inhabiting social constraints instead of trespassing on them. She added that "A theory of agency cannot be limited to those acts that disrupt social norms, but must also encompass those that are lived in the service of sustaining them" (Mahmood, 2005, p. 161). It can be noted that this idea is reflected in the social norms practiced by Mernissi's characters, such as prayers, religious rituals, and social assemblies that separate women in the harem from patriarchal society outside. The social constraints that are practiced by the characters create an Islamic feminist identity in Morocco, which is different from the secular feminist identity. The characters, such as Habiba and Fatima's mother, are engaging in religious rituals and storytelling not as rules, but as ways of building a self.

Women in Mernissi's novel are practicing a kind of agency by inhabiting some social norms, such as storytelling, in order to recast their history. By her style of writing, in which she merges personal life and political themes, Mernissi dismantles the colonial and patriarchal views. Anne

Donadey (2001) argued that such writers are rewriting the history not just telling stories about North African or Moroccan history. Lewis also pointed out that “Women narratives of harem frequently emphasize the importance of education and the exchange of information, presenting the space as one of intellectual development.”(2004, p. 240). Telling Scheherazade's tales evinces that social constraints helped to create a private feminist sphere where women succeeded in developing certain intellect and culture. Women in a harem are not isolated, but they live in a complex social grid that offers them different ways to connect socially with other women and an opportunity to practice power. Regarding this Lewis suggested that “The harem functioned as a networked space, where women from different households exchanged news, arranged marriages, and negotiated social standing” (2004, p. 75). In this respect Donadey affirmed that “storytelling...becomes a strategy of resistance, away of 'recasting' history from a female perspective that challenges both colonial and patriarchal master narratives” (2001, p. 28). This idea can be linked to Habiba in Menissis's memoir. Habiba's stories can be seen as a way to construct feminist identity under social constraints. By struggling against two worlds; 'Islamic and social constraints', Mernissi challenges the image that has been created by the Western stereotypes and domestic patriarchy. Donadey claimed that “Maghrebi women writers operate in a 'third space,' navigating between the constraints of a traditionalist local culture and the lingering shadows of a colonial educational system” (2001, p. 14). The following section is devoted to the analysis of Mernissi's memoir focusing on the topics discussed above by the writers and critics.

Analysis

From the initial chapters the author uses the word Harem as a mystery to the protagonist. She uses this word in several contexts and has been defined by many characters. According to the young girl Fatima, Harem is a place where women are not allowed to go out of the family house. Then in the middle of the novel the author mentions another meaning of this term, it is derived from the word Haram (banned), the opposite of the word Halal, which means permissible or allowable. She presents that Harem means the place where the family usually lives and where the man spreads his authority. In such societies man more frequently has to decide what is right and what is wrong, and who is only the agent has the authority to define the meaning of life for woman. Man in such patriarchal society defines the woman as the other because he does not want to lose his status. The writer traces the difference between the gender in Fez city and in the countryside. She further portrays many images of women who co-operated in war against Spanish and French colonialism, and strong women, who are fighting in a war against the patriarchal rules. Through the young curious girl experience the writer shows how women's life in Fez city and the countryside is different. However, both share the idea of respecting Harem. The patriarchal society derived the word Harem from 'Harem Mecca' to convince women that is the religion, which order them to be in the houses. This idea is obvious in Fatima's grandmother's speech-Yasmina

Mecca is a place where behavior is strictly codified. The moment you stepped inside, you were bound by many laws and regulations. People who enter Mecca have to be pure: they have to perform purification rituals, and refrain from lying, cheating, and doing harmful deeds. The city belonged to Allah and you have to obey his Shari'a [.....]. The same thing applied to a Harem when it is a house belonging to a man. (Mernissi, 1940, p. 61)

Many people think that women who accept this idea and put the responsibility of enslaving women on Islam are blamed because of their illiteracy, or misunderstanding of the Islamic teachings. Yasmina adds that 'Harem does not mean a limited place with walls but “once you know what is forbidden, you carried the Harem within, inscribed under your forehead and under your skin' (Mernissi, 1940, p. 61). As the story continues, Mernissi describes how the women in harem find ways to express their feminist ideas and practice agency, such as telling stories. The best a story for them is *Winged Woman*, when Habiba tells this story, all ladies and women

in Harem rise their hands like birds and dance, imaging that they are flying. Fatima has been convinced by her 17th year old cousin, Chama, that women have unseen wings, and her own wings shall grow as she becomes older. Fatima listens to adult stories and questions everything, and she sets with men in the family and compares them with women. When she listens to the stories of *Thousand Night and One Night*, she asks her mother why the princess cannot say whatever comes to her mind without considering the king's opinion? However, she has not got any answer more than the predestination of women makes her life like this way.

Mernissi indicates to a very significant point about how women's happiness in harem is connected to man. Woman does not look to the man as a liberator, but man is the source of happiness. This idea can be noted in Habiba's speech when she asks Fatima and Sameer to go to the washroom before they sleep on her carpet saying that: "you have to know this carpet is one of the few things that reminds me by the happy memories in my life," (Mernissi, 1940, p. 32) as she is divorced. Then the writer presents the other group of women who live in the country side, where the farm house represents the traditional patriarchal life. The young Mernissi's grandfather is married to many women at the same time. Despite the differences between the life of women in the city and countryside, Mernissi addresses the same gender inequality issues. Yasmina defines the superiority by telling her granddaughter that "superiority does not mean having crown on our heads or wearing expensive clothes, but superiority means having freedom to get rid the social constraints" (Mernissi, 1940, p. 49). In another text, She also refers to Islam, and how men manipulates Islamic rules to place their dominance. Saying that Islam calls for equality, and we claim that we are Muslims why people do not apply this rule. She states that "All people should be equal, Allah said so. His prophet preached the same." (Mernissi, 1940, p. 49). Mernissi relies widely on Yasmina in producing very important idea and extending the presentation of the feminist issues. Yasmina tells her granddaughter that, as much as a woman is imprisoned in a harem, cannot go outside without her husband's permission, and shares one husband with other women, she cannot be considered a free woman. She adds that as the nationalists are struggling against French colonialism for freedom and equality, they should not enslave women. By presenting this idea, Mernissi starts revolving around colonization of the country and colonization of the woman. She shows how men, in Morocco, are fighting for the independence and how women are struggling to get rid of the social constraints, and stereotypical religious beliefs that place woman in a lower position in the society on the pretext of her weakness.

Extending the comments about Yasmina's speech, it can be obviously recognized that the author presents two parallel men groups appeared during the war times. There are those who defends the homeland, and those who claim defending women and supporting their rights. Indeed many men were armed to fight against French and Spanish colonialists, some of them are truly went to the war places, such as Alheba and his brother until 1934, but some took the advantage of being armed and went to looting and theft. So that, people suffered from colonialism and the spread of crimes. In this case women became doubly colonized; from the foreign colonization and local colonization from those who pretend that they are protecting women by the name of religion and beliefs. Mernissi mentions that: "In the midst of that chaos, the young girls were taken away from their families and sold them to rich people in the cities" (Mernissi, 1940, p. 50).

Mernissi offers another contrasting image of men like those modern nationalists who believe in monogamy and individual's freedom. Through Yasmina's imagination, in addition, Mernissi shows some similarities between Yasmina's life and Haroon Arrsheed's wives, as Yasmina lives with her husband Tazi and his wives in the same house. Ironically she says that: "my situation is better than Arrashed's wives because I have to wait eight nights to get pleasure from my husband, but they have to wait nine hundred and ninety nine nights because he has a thousand between wives and odalisque" (Mernissi, 1940, p. 51). Though the differences between women in the city and country side, the latter group enjoys their life more. They have

huge farms where they can ride horses, swim in the river, go fishing, and spend most of their time in nature.

After that, Mernissi starts presenting two contrasting groups of women are living in the two places; in Fez city and countryside. The first group represents the old women who supports the rules and traditions that restrict the women. In the other side, the group who want to end the enslavement, call for woman emancipation and having equal rights like men. The writer's obvious focus in *Dreams of Trespass: Tales of Harem Girlhood*, on social restrictions and religious mundane, and she bridges the idea of sociocultural issues with political colonial influence on woman's condition in the Moroccan society. This idea is very evident in the second group's dialogues when they tell the supporters of the male rules that French women have freedom, and equal rights as men, their society is developed, and their husbands are strong enough to invade other countries and colonize them like our country. They are saying this to the old women who claim that if women are given freedom to cooperate men in their jobs, they will distract men from working and this will affect negatively on the society's production.

Throughout the story, the reader explores various experiences that Fatima encountered during her childhood. Mernissi uses the important women in her life to present another image of the women who were suffering from such beliefs. Even inside the house not all women are free to accept or refuse anything. For example, her aunt Habiba is divorced, so she cannot speak openly about her needs and wishes, and even the colourful and wavy clothes are banned from them. All of this as a punishment because she does not have the skill to obtain a position in her husband's heart. So that, she is not intelligent enough to gain a respectful and prestigious position among Harem in the society.

Fatima preserves her childhood experience and her own definition of the sociocultural rules, as well as the adults' answers to her questions. She provides the reader with excessive information about the social changes and colonial domination in Morocco during the span of war. The young Mernissi learns feminist thought and gender equality from her mother and her cousin Chama, those are the significant women who has a desire to make rebellion against men. If one reads Habiba or Chama's stories, s/he can interpret how women in Harem use their imagination to create an image of liberated women. In one of the stories, Habiba tells how Arab lost the authority while Christians and Europeans successfully invaded the world. She states that whereas Arabs were busy in gathering women and enjoying their luxurious life, Europeans were engaged in gathering weapons and preparing armies.

Women in Harem also connect modernity with foreign society and learning many languages. They also consider the technological progress as a liberator. We find this idea Yasmina's speech when she attempts to comfort Fatima: "of course you will be happy! You will be a modern educated lady. You will realize the nationalist's dreams. You will learn foreign languages, have a passport, and speak like religious authority" (Mernissi, 1940, p. 64). There is another group of women has been displayed in this novel. This image can be found in Tamo's story. Tamo's figure represents a real courageous woman, but the moment of her collapse confirms the weakness and woman's emotion. Tamo's story is one of the effective and important stories in the novel. Initially the writer starts talking about the time of her arrival to the farm, which was during the war against the French and Spanish Conquers. Tamo arrives before the dawn, wearing white mannish uniform with female hair style, and riding a Spanish horse. The kind of her clothes helps her to ride a horse and keeping her hair style is to prevent soldiers from shooting her. Indeed, this image shows how the male courage and the stunt of the female combined in her persona. Then the writer goes in details in describing the male and female characteristics in Tamo's personality separately. As well as male clothes that she wears, she has heavy silver bracelets with buckles in her hands uses them to defend herself against any enemy. She carries a dagger on her right side, and Spanish gun on her horse. She appears as a fighter against the colonialists.

Mernissi provides the reader with a description of the other face in this personality. Given Tamo's physical strength and courage, she is a beautiful woman; she has big dark eyes, a tapered chin with a green tattoo, and brazen plexus falls on her left shoulder. After presenting the bravery of Tamo, the writer shows how this bravery is demolished when Tamo comes with two trucks full of dead bodies hidden under the grass. The bodies are her father, husband, and two children. While they are burying the bodies, Tamo is looking at the painful scene in silence. After they finished, she could not stand on her legs. Then Tamo spent months without talking, and she was screaming during her sleep because of the nightmares. Tamo's collapse is an obvious reference to the woman's fear of being alone after losing her dear loved ones.

When the writer describes the relation between woman and nature in the countryside, and how women in Fez harem imitating birds in their dancing, she connects both creatures to each other. Yasmina tells her granddaughter that the worst thing is separating women from nature, because nature is women's best friend. Nature helps women get rid of worries and fears. In the Moroccan countryside, the best activities for women are riding horses, running freely in the fields, lying on the green grass, and looking at the stars. One here can note that the patriarchal society gives the man right to dominate the women as he dominates the nature, such as Tazi, Yasmina's husband who owns the farm and many women. In this novel, the writer connects the feminist issues with postcolonial concerns, and shows the relation between the patriarchy and imperialism. The story of kidnapping children, especially young girls during war, such as Mina's story, to use them as workers in the houses or in the fields. In the novel, women seem powerless, and their incapacity comes from illiteracy and a lack of education. Ashcroft et al. (2007) point out that "The texts of feminist theory and those of post-colonialism concur on many aspects of the theory of identity, of difference, and of the interpellation of the subject by a dominant discourse, as well as offering to each other various strategies of resistance to such controls" (Ashcroft et al., 2007, p. 74).

In *Dreams of Trespass: Tales of A Harem Girlhood*, Mernissi shows that telling stories is one of the ways that women in a harem use to express their feminist thought. In the harem, women focus on *The Thousand Nights and One Night*, especially the story of the Kamar Azaman. They show the similarities between Princess Budur and their own life. Mernissi refers to this as a story to show that even if the society etherizes women or puts her in a lower position, she can solve vital problems. For example, when the Princess Budur impersonated her husband and put her odalisque in her position, Habiba tells the women that: "Weakness, my ladies, is not a disadvantage, and being weak does not mean that you lack creativity." (Mernissi, 1940, p. 56). When Budur decided to tell Princess Haia the truth, which is that she is not the prince, and did everything to find him. Then they lived together. Here, the author indicates the woman's solidarity and that women are capable of offering love, friendliness, and kindness to each other. Women can also support each other even if the man is against them; they can win. Regarding this idea, one can comment that Princess Haia agreed to live with Princess Budur without identity to help her. Even though their marriage is unreal, both refused to allow the king to know who she is (Budur).

CONCLUSION

The subject of women resistance to the traditional patriarchal dominance is not a new phenomenon in literary canon. It has been traced back to the nineteenth century or before when female authored literary works appeared to the surface reaching the centre. Their writings have been considered as one of the most rich literary genre. That is because feminist issues mostly associated with other themes like postcolonial literature, gender studies. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin assure that: "Feminism is of crucial interest to post-colonial discourse for two major reasons, first, both patriarchy and imperialism can be seen to exert analogous forms of domination over those they render subordinate. [...] Second, there have been vigorous debates in a number of colonized societies over whether gender or colonial oppression is more

important political factor in women's lives." (2007, p. 93). For instance, the novelist Fatima Mernissi, as one of the Muslim Arab feminists, is concerned with the status of Muslim women in a very traditional society during the history of French colonization in Morocco. Through a detailed analysis of her novel *Dreams of Trespass: Tales of A Harem Girlhood*, this research discussed the meaning of harem from different perspectives. Additionally, how the women's dreams and hopes, in a harem, are reflected in several ways, and how they practice agency and maintain their feminist identity within a religious and social harem. Throughout the stories narrated by the characters, and the comparison between Arab and French societies, as well as connecting fashions with modernity, the writer shows how women in Maghrebi society express a variety of feminist issues. Characters, in Mernissi's autobiographical novel, construct their feminist identity by several mechanisms, such as religious rituals and storytelling, which shows that they operate within social and religious frameworks, not by trespassing on them.

References

1. Abusharaf, A. (2006). Women in Islamic Communities: The Quest for Gender Justice Research. *Human Rights Quarterly*, 28(3), 714–728. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20072759>
2. Ashcroft, B. Griffiths, G. & Tiffin, H. (2007). *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts*. Routledge.
3. Badran, M. (2009). *Feminism in Islam: Secular and religious convergences*. One world Publications.
4. Donadey, A. (2001). *Recasting post colonialism: Women writing between worlds*. University of Nebraska Press.
5. KILBY, P. (2015). *NGOs and Political Change: A History of the Australian Council for International Development*. ANU Press. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt183q3dm>.
6. Lewis, R. (2004). *Rethinking Orientalism: Women, travel and the Ottoman harem*. I.B. Tauris.
7. Mahmood, S. (2005). *Politics of piety: The Islamic revival and the feminist subject*. Princeton University Press.
8. Mernissi, F. (1991). *The veil and the male elite: A feminist interpretation of women's rights in Islam* (M. J. Lakeland, Trans.). Addison-Wesley. (Original work published 1987).
9. Mernissi, F. (1994). *Dreams of trespass: Tales of a harem girlhood*. Perseus Books.
10. Rhouni, R. (2010). *Secular and Islamic feminist visions in the prophetic work of Fatima Mernissi*. Brill.
11. Sadiqi, F. (2003). *Women, gender and language in Morocco*. Brill.
12. Said, E. W. (1978). *Orientalism*. Pantheon Books.

Disclaimer/Publisher's Note: The statements, opinions, and data contained in all publications are solely those of the individual author(s) and contributor(s) and not of SAJH and/or the editor(s). SAJH and/or the editor(s) disclaim responsibility for any injury to people or property resulting from any ideas, methods, instructions, or products referred to in the content.