Re-writing the Self in Fatema Mernissi's Memoir: *Scheherazade Goes West: Different Cultures, Different Harems*

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Abstract

In the context of women's identity politics, the discourse of 'Positionality' highlights the complexities of women's reclamation of subjectivity and individuality. 'Positionality' is one of the core tenets of poststructuralism, which generally maintains that recognizing women's identities requires recognizing the range of the different markers associated with race, gender, sociopolitical status, and cultural approaches. This perspective implies that one's own identity is no longer confined to a fixed or stable state but should be interpreted in relation to its social context, both temporally and spatially. Third Wave Feminists share a common perspective that has embarked on the same innovative path that not only questions the rigid definitions of identity but also moves beyond a narrow focus on gender as its exclusive domain of identification. In other words, this movement adamantly rejects the notion of an isolated, autonomous self. In this article, I argue that Fatema Mernissi's memoir *Scheherazade Goes West* (2001) is a comprehensive exploration of multiple selves, largely influenced by socio-political, historical, and cultural factors. Mernissi's approach recounts her experiences in the West which contribute to the formation of her multiple identities. This complex engagement with her surroundings allows Mernissi to navigate various aspects of her identity, thereby emphasizing its multifaceted nature, and elucidating the intricate interplay between cultural, ethnic, and gender dynamics. This multifaceted approach provides Mernissi with a clear understanding of her identity   (a rebirth), surpassing conventional binary classifications associated with Second Wave feminists' theory. Through her narrative and commentary, Mernissi reveals how identity is shaped by and intersects with societal discourses, illustrating the multifarious dimensions of her existence.

Keywords: Poststructuralism, Positionality Discourse, Identity Politics, Third Wave Feminism, Fatema Mernissi

الملخص

في سياق سياسات هوية المرأة ، يعرض خطاب الموقفية تعقيدات فردية الذات . بعبارة أخرى، تعد "الموقفية" إحدى مبادئ ما بعد البنيوية، التي تذهب بشكل عام إلى أن الاعتراف بذاتية المرأة يتطلب الاعتراف بمجموعة من الدلالات المختلفة المرتبطة بالعرق، والجنس، والوضع الاجتماعي، والنهج الثقافي. تشير هذه الوجهة إلى أن هوية الشخص لم تعد مقيدة بحالة ثابتة بل يجب الأخذ في الاعتبار، أثناء دراستها وتحليلها، النظر إليها في سياقها الاجتماعي، سواء أكان زمانيًا أو مكانيًا. تشترك النسويات من الموجة الثالثة في التحليل الذي يتجاوز التركيز النهج الجندري الضيق كأساس لتحديد هوية الفرد خاصة المرأة . في هذا المقال، أشير إلى أن سيرة مرنيسي الذاتية بعنوان "شهرزاد تذهب إلى الغرب :ثقافات وحريم مختلفين" (٢٠٠١) هي استكشاف شامل لذوات متعددة للكاتبة، والتي تأثرت إلى حد كبير بالعوامل الاجتماعية، والسياسية، والتاريخية، والثقافية. تروي مرنيسي في هذا السياق تجاربها في الغرب التي أسهمت في تشكيل هويتها. ومن خلال سردها وتعليقاتها، تكشف مرنيسي عن كيفية تشكيل الهوية من خلال الخطابات الاجتماعية وتقاطعها معاً، موضحة بذلك الأبعاد المتعددة لإعادة تشكيلها.

الكلمات المفتاحية : ما بعد البنيوية، خطاب الموقفية، سياسات الهوية، الموجة النسوية الثالثة، فاطمة مرنيسي.

World-renowned sociologist Fatema Mernissi (1940-2015) is known for her revalorization and buttress of Arab women in her numerous publications, regarding gender, femininity, and bicultural proclamations and observation; a credence that has stimulated many others to pursue it. Her entire literary legacy perforates the stereotyping that was induced against Arabs, especially Arab women, during the 1980s and 1990s. Simultaneously, she reclaims her identity and authenticity as a Third World woman through the penning down of her life narrative. Her memoir, *Scheherazade Goes West: Different Cultures, Different Harems* (2001), singles out, first and foremost, on her life experiences and her unorthodox predilections through a self-deprecating, thought-provoking, and analytic lens. It also challenges the West's negative representation of women and the mythical stereotypical codification of women of the Eastern cultures. Mernissi's scholarly portfolio and collected works often earn her more praise than criticism. This is primarily due to her developing a "feminist consciousness as she learns from a variety of role models and from personal questioning" (Donadey, "Portrait" 86). Arguably, Mernissi in *Scheherazade Goes West* strives for self-introspection and the creation of a new identity through her quest for a new probe of this self. On that account, this paper aims to illustrate that the concept of identity, in a broader sense, and specifically for Fatema Mernissi, is multiply actualized over time along with being neither unitary nor monolithic but "diverse and diffuse, negotiated situationally" (Evans, 2018, p. 5). This in-depth allusion to modern women's identities sets off a subtle relationship to poststructuralism and identity politics, both of which guide this research methodologically.

Fatema Mernissi's individualized style of narration is "crucial for analyzing, understanding, and … even reinventing the self, and a public activity that enables

[her] to interact and re-create the world around [her]" (Al-Nowaihi, 2001, p.478). This is set in defiance of the Eastern harem's myth and the deeply ingrained despotic binaries of self and other. Moreover, her memoir aims to negate the conservative Eastern vantage point that intelligibly upholds both patriarchal and gender disparity. It also challenges the Western political despotism of Eastern women, which is set in contrast with the Western ideals of gender equality.

Mernissi initiates a thoughtful inquiry into the distorted representation of Scheherazade in the Western culture through manifold interrogations in her earlier book *Dreams of Trespass: Tales of a Harem Girlhood* (1994). This discussion is further expanded upon in her memoir *Scheherazade Goes West* (2001), where Mernissi offers personal and vibrant narratives that delve into the intimate connection between individual identity and citizenship influenced by the nation's ideological framework and societal expectations. Moreover, she not only identifies herself with the abiding figure of Scheherazade in her perception of the constraints encountered by women in modern cultures, but also revives the legacy of her wit. She thus endeavors to challenge the outdated Western portrayal of Third World women, debunking the notion that they are silenced, disempowered, and ineffective stereotypes. This anticipated envisioning has been compatible herein with the imprecise and fanciful portrayal of these individuals:

> What happens to [Scheherazade] when she goes West? What changes do Western artists inflict on Scheherazade in order to make her conform to their fantasies when she crosses their frontiers? What are the seductive powers with which Western artists equip her? Does she become less or more powerful in their fantasy? Does she retain her status as queen or lose it? (Mernissi, 2001, pp.58-59)

Drawing on their perspectives, scholars like Jacques Dupont, Hans D., and Christiane   (a Paris-based French editor) , who are prominently featured in Mernissi's memoir, posit that such rigid bearings, referred to earlier, implicitly endorse the "hierarchical binary between the East and the West" in fixed societal frameworks. These structures, in turn, serve as the foundation for power dynamics and cultural biases that are sustained by these hierarchies (Rastegar, 2006, p.116). This stifling attitude reasserts the superiority of the West while putting in question the fundamental deficiencies latent in other non-Westerns. Towards the conclusion of her memoir, Mernissi, in a contemplative epistemic inquiry, acknowledges that contemporary Middle Eastern women have achieved significant agency, metaphorically describing them as having "gained wings", becoming as "powerful as Scheherazade's mythical 'Lady with the Feather Dress'" (Mernissi, 2001, p.201). Besides, these women's aspirations for autonomy, empowerment, and self-fulfillment are fervent, reflecting their determination to shape their own destinies.

Mernissi's intellectual endeavor aligns notably with Patricia Meyer Spacks who delves more into this concept where the self is primarily an attitude rather than

a tangible entity. Both argue that one's subjectivity is primarily constructed through one's reflections on specific life experiences and is shaped by multiple layers of self-consciousness. In a similar vein, poststructuralists emphasize the ideological authenticity of individuality by asserting that "all subjects, not just female, are situated and relational" (Costello, 1991, p.131). According to these theories, individuals cannot exist as independent entities beyond the confines of the discursive relationships that have shaped them. Allan DeSouza eloquently expresses the idea that a person's understanding of self is intricately intertwined with their physical positioning and subjective perspective: "The [s]elf is in constant formation through discursive intersections of and with location" (2003, p.20). This notion is further encapsulated in DeSouza's emphasis that "the self is constructed from where one is and from where one sees, and also from where one is not and what one fails to see" (p.20). Allan DeSouza's proposition aligns harmoniously with Michel Foucault's elucidation of spatial relations. Foucault defines space as a complex web of interrelations that "delineates sites which are irreducible to one another and absolutely not superimposable on one another" (Foucault, 1986, p.23). By drawing parallels between DeSouza's perspectives and Foucault's conceptualization of spatial relations, a reciprocal understanding emerges. DeSouza's argument posits that the constitution of the self and the concept of 'location' are contingent upon the interplay between physical and conceptual spaces. This finds resonance with Foucault's assertion that spatial relations extend beyond mere physicality to encompass the intricate formation of meaning and power dynamics within a given spatial context.

In her analysis of the etymology of the term 'harem', Mernissi proclaims that it is a derivative of the Arabic word '*Haram*', which signifies "the dangerous frontier where sacred law and pleasure collide" (Mernissi, 2001, p.12). To be more precise, Mernissi asserts that the word literally specifies this prohibited and rather sacred territory, akin to an "institution" (Ibid) which had been conventionally conserved for the female fellows of the family. Expanding on this interpretation, Amani Hamdan, as quoted in Nausheen Ishaque's explicates that the term also denotes "the physical distance between men and women in public and private sphere" (2018, p.286). Despite these accurate definitions, the Western imperialist discourse of the modern epoch has affiliated the word 'harem' mainly with "orgiastic feast," "odalisques," "euphoria," and "vulnerable nude women" where "sex is anxiety free" (Mernissi, 2001, pp.13-14). N. M. Penzer[1] offers an illuminating insight into the structure, organization, and daily life within the harem, shedding light on its historical evolution and the roles played by individuals within its confines. His account encompasses aspects such as hierarchy, relationships, and cultural practices. Mernissi points out the notable contribution of N. M. Penzer's introductory passage in rectifying prevalent misconceptions surrounding the concept of the 'haram':

There are perhaps two main reasons why such false ideas have lingered so long in the Western mind. In the first place, so great has been the secrecy which has always surrounded the Imperial harem that first-hand and reliable information was seldom forthcoming. In the second place, the dividing line between fact and fiction, as far as the harem was concerned, was very thin and ill defined. (Penzer, 1965, p. 13)

Given these widespread misunderstandings, Mernissi recognizes the need to rectify this erroneous understanding of the 'harem', embarking on a mission to challenge and correct these misconceptions. However, it is essential to note that this confusing embodiment of the 'harem' does not constitute the core argument of the present paper. Instead, this paper pursues and briefly examines the dynamics of women self-empowerment which can be attained "through and in relation to others … [where] the subject-subject recognition allows both participants to maintain a subjecthood by allowing difference while appreciating similarity" (Aranda, 2012, pp. 556-557).

Mernissi navigates the complexities of her identity through mobility, which is likely to offer "sufficient space and scope for … individual development" (Aslam, 2015, p.1). Through mobility, Mernissi imperatively incorporates her personal experience in the West. Besides, she challenges the stereotypical representation of Arab women as backward, confined, sensual, passive receivers, and silent victims. Concurrently, the cultural myth that Western colonial or patriarchal empowerment prevails over Eastern women's disempowerment is to be dispelled. By putting the colonizer in close proximity to the colonized, Mernissi transcends the concept of binaries where she implicitly employs the concept of positionality in her analysis. This methodological approach streams with Third Wave feminists' understanding of power dynamics and relational perspectives: "a feminine subject who describes her history to the other and to herself as she rebuilds herself in the dimension of time" (Dos Santos, 2012, p. 20). This brings to the fore the correlation between women's subjectivity and mobility:

The new discourse should carve a positionality that does not assume an already constituted status of fixed power and powerlessness. It is a discourse that does not consolidate the centre/periphery division. It is a discourse, therefore, that allows power to flow multi-directionally. (El Naga, 2002, p. 63)

The self, in other words, is articulated on account of being continuously generated and shaped through its perpetual contribution to its surroundings and the outer

world on the one hand, while throwing off both intellectual and cultural preconceived notions on the other:

> This discursively constituted subject is produced through complex psychic, personal and collective identifications and disidentifications, shaping and shaped by stories, narratives, networks, unconscious processes, governance, interpellation and performativity. (Aranda, 2012, p.554)

Mernissi's acquisition of diverse knowledge and heightened consciousness regarding the 'other' predominantly unfolds through her extensive travels and intercultural engagements. These experiences function as powerful catalysts, propelling her towards an in-depth investigation into the legitimacy of prevalent sociocultural and androcentric disparities. Consequently, this transformative process significantly influences the formation of her identity, granting her the capacity to redefine her own sense of self, all the while asserting her agency. The vigor of mobility recalls Edward Said's concept of "traveling theory" [2] where he states that any theory is thought through as a work in flux, particularly when it voyages across time and place:

> Like people and schools of criticism, ideas and theories travel-from person to person, from situation to situation, from one period to another. Cultural and intellectual life are usually nourished and often sustained by this circulation of ideas … the movement of ideas and theories from one place to another is both a fact of life and a usefully enabling condition of intellectual activity. (1983, p.226)

In the process of crossing borders, Said argues that any theory has the potential to transcend its inherent limitations and expand "beyond its confinement" (2000, p.451) into new mediums where it can be liable to inquisition and, hence, modification. Despite this, it should preserve its intellectual crux while avoiding becoming the subject of orthodox deadlock reflection. In the same line, Hala Kamal states that Said's focus extended beyond mere interest in the conveyance of ideas; he was "particularly concerned with their transformation in process, and their influence upon this cross cultural translocation" (2018, p.133). The aforementioned process frequently augments the adaptability required to comprehend the proposed concepts that challenge established, monolithic, and hence rigid viewpoints, especially when confronted with diverse circumstances. Similarly, the examination of an individual's subjectivity can be situated within the framework known as the 'traveling concept', particularly as it aligns with Said's four-stage pattern of movement characterized by growth and transformation, notwithstanding the manifold challenges it entails. This serves as a quintessential manifestation of the intrinsic interplay between physical location and subjectivity. Hence, this process substantiates Mernissi's profound reconfiguration of her

identity and the remarkable development of her individuality as an esteemed scholar in the realm of Middle Eastern feminism. Notably, her active involvement in multiple experiences entails her with multiple positionalities throughout her transformative journey to the West: "[In] the end, learning from travel and from talking to strangers did turn out to be wonderful, enlightening experience … thrilling privilege" (Mernissi, 2001, p.24).

In her exploration of the intercultural dynamics between the East and West, Fatema Mernissi is accompanied figuratively by the legendary character Scheherazade. Scheherazade is lauded for the mastery of "the oral littérateur" skillfully merging "the realms of reason and fantasy together" (Ogunyemi, 2005, p.7). Consequently, she is renowned for her potency in showcasing the capacity of Eastern women to break free from traditional constraints and assert their intellectual and imaginative capabilities. Scheherazade's ingenuity in language and imagination, explicitly addressed by Mernissi and implicitly accentuated by Scheherazade, emphasizes the fact that "seduction of the master through an intense … intellectual exchange was considered to give him exquisite pleasure" (Mernissi, 2001, pp.134, 145). Nevertheless, this perspective was invalidated by the Orientalists within their respective societies. When Mernissi crossed borders, she ardently denounced and provocatively questioned the West's fallacy of their misperception of Eastern women as being intellectually incapacitated:

> What on earth, I wondered … is the exact meaning of orgasm in a culture where attractive women are denied brain power? What words do Westerners use for orgasm if the woman's brain is missing? (Mernissi, 2001, p.39)

Mernissi's inquisitive approach articulated in this statement challenges the ingrained notion of a fixed and immobile self: "So why does Scheherazade, the super communicator, lose her ethereal dimension, her vaporous quality, when she travels West?" (Mernissi, 2001, p.41). Mernissi expounds upon the authentic nature of intellectual interchange by asserting that: "Scheherazade survived because she realized that … she had to work on [the king's] mind" (Mernissi, 2001, p.40). Mernissi's historical and cultural juxtaposition scathingly scorns the oft-ignored factuality: "What changes do Western artists inflict on Scheherazade in order to make her conform to their fantasies when she crosses their frontiers?"(Mernissi, 2001, p.58), "Why did the enlightened West, obsessed with democracy and human rights, discard Scheherazade's brainy sensuality and political message in their versions of the tales?"(Mernissi, 2001, p.68) and "Why would a progressive man like Kant[3], who was so concerned about the advance of civilization, want a woman with a paralyzed brain?" (Mernissi, 2001, p.95). These inquisitive and self-reflexive encounters at this specific stage have been entangled with not only ethical but also social, political, and historical concerns. Gesa Kirsch and Joy S. Ritchie attest that feminist researchers deliberately communicate these controversial

subject matters while "using guiding questions like these for responding to ethical dilemmas" (1995, p.20). In her extensive discussions with European journalists, Mernissi delves into the implications of the misinterpretation and the flawed portrayal of the literary and historical figure of Scheherazade. This perspective, predominantly rooted in Western ideology, has traditionally been regarded as the sole frame of reference attributed to women from the Orient. Mernissi emphatically asserts that "the intellectual Scheherazade was lost in all these translations, apparently because the Westerners were interested in only two things: adventure and sex" (Mernissi, 2001, p.62). In brief, Mernissi's analytical technique presents a thought-provoking assessment of the issue at hand, affirming that "[the] American writer assassinated Scheherazade" (Mernissi, 2001, p.76).

One of the thought provoking argumentations took place after attending the epitomized German ballet 'Scheherazade' which Mernissi reflects upon as perpetuating clichéd notions of the Orient. To Mernissi's wonder, the Western Scheherazade conforms to the European mainstream outlook towards women of the Orient as odalisque figures "always throbbing with restrained sensuality" simply to manifest themselves (the West) as being more democratic and civil (Alloulla, 1986, p.74). The pervasive misrepresentations of Oriental women, including Scheherazade bounded by famous paintings, pictorial images, narratives and/or performances, attempt to undermine Eastern women's intellectual capacity and mental prowess. These shallow manifestations serve to reinforce the prevailing stereotype rather than aiding in the restoration of Scheherazade's image "as a political crusader fighting against despotic rule" (Mernissi, 2001, p.64).

Mistakenly, Scheherazade's Western frame of reference conflates her with a voluptuous figure whose sole presence is to serve her male partner's lustful sensuality let alone the erroneous depiction of the stereotypical paradigm of the so called Eastern harem life: "[T]he Oriental Scheherazade does not dance like the one [she] saw" (Mernissi, 2001, p.38). Instead, the Eastern Scheherazade is depicted as an individual driven by intellect, "purely cerebral", relying on her "most powerful erotic weapon a woman has-her *nutq*, or the capacity to think in words and penetrate a man's brain by using carefully selected terms" (Mernissi, 2001, p. 38). Mernissi sharply deconstructs such an Orientalist version on referring to Scheherazade's mastery of what she believes to be "three strategic skills" (Mernissi, 2001, p.47) among which are the wide range of knowledge in multiple phases, the use of dialogue[4] which is perceived as of psychological importance, and the ability to think and interact wittingly. In Harold H. Saunders' opinion, conversation is in no way an interchange of ideas or a form of renunciation of one's own identity. Rather, it is a process in which "each recognizes enough of the other's valid human claims that he or she will act differently toward the other" (1999, p.82).

On the grounds of this, Mernissi, as a sociologist, takes advantage of Scheherazade as a well-grounded argument to enhance her projected discourse with her American debaters and European informants. She calls into question the Westerners' misreading of other cultures while swapping their prevalent monolithic and colonialist vantage point. Mernissi also refers to other influential writers and thinkers among whom is the Egyptian writer Taha Hussein who placed significant emphasis on the themes of dialogue and the transformative potential of redemption in *The Dreams of Scheherazade*[5]. According to Mernissi, "[R]edemption, in Taha Hussein's work, starts when a dialogue is established between the powerful and the powerless" (Mernissi,2001, pp.50-51). This sustained pattern of constant debates, interrogations, and cross-cultural dialogue serves as "a means for cultural conflict resolution" (Pazargadi, 2017, p.29), especially upon handling the latent similarities and differences in both cultures. Mernissi writes, "[t]o learn to enjoy the fluidity of dialogue is to savor situations where the outcome of battle is not rigidly fixed, where winners and losers are not predetermined" (Mernissi, 2001, p.52).

In employing the rhetoric of dialoguing, Menissi tacitly creates no "dead ends," in Friedman's words (1998, p.40). Instead, she subtly draws our attention, along with that of other scholars, to what Friedman calls "the new geography of identity" (1998, p.19) which seeks to "encourage self-reflection and conversation across racial boundaries" (1998, p.40). This discourse, as has been stated earlier, moves beyond the discourse of "static positionality" (Ibid) and towards a more flexible identity that "acts situationally" (1998, p.47). Mernissi's refusal to adhere to binary frameworks can be understood as a subjective assertion of her autonomy, rather than a defensive portrayal of her nation. It is crucial to recognize that Mernissi's ability to reclaim agency, particularly in countering the hegemonic and constricting Western discourses surrounding Middle Eastern women, relied on the utilization of diverse discourses of confrontation, opposition, and representation.

Within the realm of poststructuralism, scholars such as Michel Foucault and Judith Butler place significant emphasis on the influential role played by discourses characterized by confrontation, opposition, and representation. Foucault's theoretical framework asserts the intricate intertwining of power with discursive practices. It underscores not only how established norms and dominant discourses maintain and exercise power, but also the counter-discourses that can, at one point, challenge and subvert these prevailing structures of power. Foucault articulates this interplay by stating that "[w]here there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power" (1978, p.95).

Mernissi's approach aligns with Foucault's view by critically engaging with and deconstructing the Western dominant cultural discourses and hegemony that uphold the marginalization of Eastern women. In other words, she shows a persistent resistance to the dominant narratives that tend to distort women's

individualization in Eastern societies. Likewise, Butler, drawing from poststructuralists' ideas, delves into the notion of representation. In her analysis of gender identity, Butler argues that gender is not an inherent or fixed identity, but rather a social construct that is continuously performed and reconfigured through acts and practices:

> [G]ender proves to be performative—that is, constituting the identity it is purported to be. In this sense, gender is always a doing, though not a doing by a subject who might be said to preexist the deed. (1990, p.33)

Hence, Mernissi strongly repudiates the Western encroachment upon her cultural legacy, particularly the deliberate imposition of the gender paradigm of fragility and submissiveness: "the West's understanding of Scheherazade and the harem world was skin deep, cosmetic and superficial" (Mernissi, 2001, p.74). Joumana Hadadd makes it explicit in the opening of her 2010 book *I Killed Scheherazade* where she boldly addresses the Western readers in a straightforward manner: "Dear Westerner," she emphasizes "if you are looking here for truths you think you already know, and for proofs you believe you already have; if you are longing to be comforted in your Orientalist views, or reassured in your anti-Arab prejudices […] you'd better not go any further" (p.17). Hadadd openly acknowledges her deliberate act of symbolically killing Scheherazade in an effort to remove the various misconceptions that had been attached to the image of Scheherazade and, on a more general level, to all women in the East. A deeper reflection on Haddad's perspective further expounds on the rejection of Western categorizations imposed upon women in the Middle East, wherein they are deemed as "veiled, subdued, illiterate, oppressed, and … submissive" (Haddad, 2010, p.18). In acknowledging Friedman's earlier assertion that one's identity is "constructed relationally through the difference from the other" (1998, p.19), it becomes imperative to also take into account Kirsch and Ritchie's recognition of the validity of "experience as a source of knowledge" (1995, p.13).

The power of research is also seen in Mernissi's memoir, where she refutes the prevailing epistemologies and gives more weight to the power of questioning in order to invalidate the constrained positions and the conflicting assumptions while dismantling the monolithic and dominant view of what was known as the 'other'. Mernissi aligns herself with Adrienne Rich's critique of the term "always", upon the latter's claim that this term reluctantly "blots out what we really need to know" (2003, p.31). In a similar vein, Kirsch and Ritchie also incorporate the opinion of Sherry Gorelick to further underline the importance of critically examining one's positioning within the research process: "[T]he researcher is transformed in the process of the research-influenced and taught by her respondent-participants as she influences them" (1995, p.15).

Mernissi sought to give credibility to her accurate portrayal of Scheherazade while simultaneously in all intents and purposes highlighting the pervasive Western discourse that was often overshadowed by a monolithic approach. Among Mernissi's consulted and cited references are Random House dictionary, Al-Jahiz[6], Ibn Hazm[7], Ibn Manzhur[8], the Egyptian writer Taha Hussein, Algerian-born expert Bencheikh[9], the Moroccan historian Abdesslam Cheddadi[10], and the British author A. S. Byatt[11]. These resources serve as the basis for her compelling arguments throughout the text.

In such an active process of exploring and endorsing the dissonant misconceived facts, Mernissi fosters multidimensional stances and voices: as a scholar, a feminist, and a representative of Middle Eastern culture. This dynamic process of researching, as explained by Na'amah Razon and Karen Ross, specifies the fact that in emphasizing the researchers' status, they (researchers) denote the connotation of "fluid identities to capture the flexible, overlapping, and at times conflicting identities researchers … hold" (2012, p.495). In a similar manner, while dwelling on different experiences and reflecting upon different situations, researchers transcend the so-called "dead-end binary", putting more weight on the "multifaceted nature of identities," which in itself is essential in going beyond the limiting "boundary and categorization" (Razon & Ross, 2012, p.500).

By traversing cultural boundaries and engaging with diverse perspectives, Mernissi finds it intriguing that "the absence of the feminine as a threat in the Western harem" was in their least concern ((Mernissi, 2001, p.24). At this point, Mernissi simultaneously accommodates and disrupts the dominant conceptualization of the West as beholding gender equality among its citizens. Further investigation leads her to a conclusive observation that "Kant's ideal of the brainless beauty, the power of the painted image, and Western movies" are to be deemed as "three … major weapons used to dominate women in the West" ((Mernissi, 2001, p.112). A similar opinion was voiced by Jacques Dupont, Mernissi's friend and fellow journalist from Paris, who states that the one quality about women that appeals to him, "at least at the level of fantasy,"((Mernissi, 2001, p.26) is their lack of intellectual dialogue.

In an effort to reveal parallelism between the East and the West's misconception of women's supremacy, Mernissi suggests that "[in] the Orient, men use space to dominate women" (Mernissi, 2001, p.112). However, in Western cultures, "men dominate women by unveiling what beauty ought to be" (Ibid). Jealousy is another overriding commonality that is homogeneous throughout both cultures. From Mernissi's perspective, "the jealous fights that rage in Muslim kingdoms are similar to those that rage in the republics" (Mernissi,2001, p.147), alluding to the working female class in both cultures. This cross-cultural understanding defies the Orient as stereotypes. With this in mind, Mernissi perpetuates her intercultural confrontation that reveals, in spite of everything, that the West has its own enclosed and hegemonic stereotypes as well.

Throughout her trip to Europe, Mernissi explores the constraints of modern women's dilemma, whether in the West or in the Middle East. Her exploration of these constraints is in terms of the societal-male reinforcement of the definition of beauty that contributes not only to limiting, but also to confining women whether in space or in body codes in both cultures: "[Mernissi] realized for the first time that maybe "Size 6" [12] is a more violent restriction imposed on women than is the Muslim veil" (Mernissi, 2001, p.213). When she was touching on the perpetuated Western Women's deconstructive patriarchal power ordeal, Mernissi was taken aback, labeling this challenging section: "Western Women's Harem" (Mernissi, 2001, p.208). Mernissi also has an unyielding propensity to unravel the forged Westernized feminist freedom, accenting the fact that it is never the religion per se that puts one in chains, but rather the strategic sociopolitical and cultural conceptualizations.

Envisioned by Pierre Bourdieu, the concept of '*La violence symbolique*'[13], or the 'symbolic violence' (Mernissi, 2001, p.217), enunciates that certain practices of Western patriarchal power are astutely thrust upon Western women. This form of violence extensively operates through the dictates of beauty codes, mostly "what women should wear and how they should look" (Mernissi, 2001, p.216) without inflicting any physical pain or agony. This is what Mernissi labels as "magic enchantment" (Mernissi, 2001, p.217). These intriguing body codes in terms of size and age are likely to "paralyze Western women's abilities to compete for power" (Mernissi, 2001, p.218). Mernissi quotes Naomi Wolf to present Wolf's viewpoint on this demeanor "body codes" (Ibid) that on no account touches on prettiness as much as it measures "female obedience" (Ibid). Again, this implies that women's self-perception is often reduced to a visual representation; a notion harnessed as "a major weapon used by Western men to dominate women" (Mernissi, 2001, p.185). Such internalized confinement amounts to Trinh T. Minh-ha's words that "all power discourses produce equal oppression" (1989, p.11). This emphatic and conclusive inference has been ascertained by Mernissi upon going back home. Envisaging this paradoxical notion, Mernissi echoes Norma Claire Moruzzi's proclamation that "the symbolic violence of sexual objectification within the internalized harem is much worse than any experience of spatial segregation within the household harem walls" (2016, p.458). With this in mind, Mernissi endorses the West as a multifaceted community which places strong emphasis on the unfeasible conviction of bodyweight and beauty ideals. This perspective highlights the relatively "distressing experience" that led her to apprehend the impact of "how the image of beauty in the West can hurt and humiliate a woman as much as the veil does when enforced by the state police in extremist nations" (Mernissi, 2001, p.208).

By the same token, Mernissi employs a humorous approach on Western men's perception of Western women, while disclosing their passive and malleable

position "[being] frozen into the passive position of an object whose very existence depends on the eye of the beholder" (Mernissi, 2001, p.219). Consequently, Mernissi substantiates that Western women have been turned "into a harem slave", despite being "educated," "modern," and "Western" (Ibid). Susan Stanford Friedman makes the following observation in her 2007 article, "Unthinking Manifest Destiny: Muslim Modernities on Three Continents":

> [While] Muslim societies control the feared power of female
> sexuality through prohibitions on space and bodily display,
> Western culture, she argues, exercises a parallel control
> through women's internalized hatred of their bodies and their
> obsessive anxieties about weight and standards of beauty to
> which few can measure. (p.98)

Furthermore, Christiane, Mernissi's French editor, substantiates the prevailing belief among Western men, regarding the rigid and subordinate role of their female partners. This is particularly evident within the realm of intellectual discourse, with a specific emphasis on the Enlightenment era. This belief is epitomized in the dictum: "'Sois belle et tais toi' - be beautiful and shut up" [14] (Mernissi, 2001, p.184). Christiane's assertion underscores the historical and societal context in which Western's women's intellectual contributions were lessened, perpetuating gender inequalities and limiting the agency of women within Western societies.

   In response to Mernissi's inquisitive query, Christiane cites Jean-Baptiste Molière's plays including *Les Femmes Savantes* (1672)*, Les Précieuses ridicules* (1659),and *Ecole des femmes* (1663) as well as John Berger's *Ways of Seeing* (1972) as being the most influential and stimulating representatives of the Western cultural canon, where they draw on and belittle educated women's achievements. Christiane even quotes Clitandre, one of Moliere's male characters, who articulates Moliere's aversion towards women: "Intellectual women are not to my taste" (qtd. in *Scheherazade* 184). Christiane's poignant reflection delves into the perspective presented by Berger which is captured in his concise phrase: "Men act and women appear" (Moliere, 1672, as cited in Mernissi, 2001 p.185). This assertion, comprising a "one five-word sentence" (Mernissi, 2001, p.185), reflects on Berger's belief that European men, throughout history, have predominantly viewed their female counterparts as static icons to be glanced at: "Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at" (Berger, 1972, as cited in Mernissi, 2001, p.185). Nonetheless, and in reference to contemporary times, Christiane profoundly delineates Western women's sense of bitterness and awe in being denied distinct and multifaceted contexts. This insightful observation tends to underscore the complex dynamics at play within the Western cultural paradigm:

> Everywhere you see powerful men surrounding themselves
> with younger women to destabilize the older and more
> mature women who have reached higher positions. A French

company might be housed in a modern glass building on the
Champs Elysees, but inside, the atmosphere is still that of a
repressive harem. (Mernissi, 2001, p.186)

Diya M. Abdo conjures up an obvious thematic notion about 'harem' in both cultures: East and West. Abdo's article echoes Mernissi's endeavor to bring forward an eye-opening reference regarding the association between spatial and behavioral confines. The essence of this approach is posited beyond the bounds of being identified as an entirely Oriental experience, but rather an internally constructed one that is routinely accustomed to the cultural background and place:

Women live in spaces codified by religion and men. Sometimes

the spaces are clear and sometimes not, but women and men have

internalized each other's roles in these spaces and unconsciously

play by these codes. (Abdo, 2017, para20)

The herein assertion invigorates this relational approach to positionality and therefore acknowledges that individuals exist in an intricate structure of social and cultural connections. Within this intricate structure, their identities are neither fixed nor static; rather, they are influenced by the interplay of multiple social discourses, including but not limited to gender, race, class, sexuality, and others. This dynamic interplay of discourses is an integral feature of the feminist's epistemological reference towards the modern approach regarding identity politics. Along a similar vein, Friedman also addresses this idea by noting that feminism as a theory is "like culture itself, develops syncretistically out of transcultural interaction with others" (1998, p.5). A case in point is the contextualization of women's experiences in multifarious locations and cultures while incorporating other constituents of identity upon analysis coupled with gender.

Right through her feminist vantage point, Mernissi denounces the Western critics' colonial perception of the Orient as mainly patriarchal and monolithic. She also criticizes their widespread discourse of the implicit and explicit misleading portrayals of Arab women as being submissive-stereotype victims of the patriarchal establishment, namely 'the harem'. The inclination towards falsified depictions of Arab women has been, from Mernissi's perspective, predominant through the publicizing of famous Western paintings, among which are Jean Auguste-Dominique Ingres' famous painting *The Turkish Bath* (1862)[15] and Henri Matisse's Odalisques (1926-1927)[16], along with literary and historical books, such as Alexander Dupouy's *Scenes Orientales* (1998). Added to that are the diversified and rather celebrated artworks among which are *Scheherazade Ballet*[17], choreographed by Sergey Diaghilev, the filmed harems of Hollywood fantasies

Harum Scarum (1965)[18] and the different versions of *The Thief of Baghdad* and *Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves*[19].

In compliance with Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron's theoretical framework that refers to the mechanism through which power is exercised to sustain prevailing social structures, Mernissi highlights that the role of art is integral to the concealed power dynamics. Art, as a cultural manifestation, from her own perspective, becomes a tool manipulated by the ruling class to "impose meanings and to impose them as legitimate" (1990, p.xv). In other words, Mernissi hints to the indisputable power of visual arts and paintings in shaping, whether consciously or not, one's visual perception and ideology towards other cultures. These artistic expressions play a significant role in fostering diverse perspectives and speculations, propagating political positions, societal perspectives and speculations, along with collated identities. Likewise, Valerie Behiery's[20] reasoning on the "transformative potential" of the aesthetic works of art is credible "in its capacity to alter dominant social attitudes and viewers' perceptions" (2013, p.418). Herein, Mernissi attends to the fact that despite Kemal Ataturk's proclamation of a range of feminist laws in the 1920s that "granted Turkish women the right to education, the right to vote, and the right to hold public office" (*Scheherazade Goes West* 109), Matisse's simultaneous portrayal of the Turkish harem as slaves has led to a conflicted Western perspective on the female Orient. This dual narrative have engendered, from Mernissi's perspective, a complex Western viewpoint on women in the Orient.

Despite the Western preoccupation with distorted representations of the Oriental woman, Mernissi's strategic paradigm emphasizes Eastern women's agency and strength, challenging the prevailing stereotypes. Mernissi's ideology, as articulated in her work, features Eastern women as "self-assertive, strong-minded, uncontrollable, and mobile" (Mernissi, 2001, p.164). Mernissi's fascination with the empowering models of femininity of the late Persian and Turkish princesses is a solid example. The empowering paradigm is remarkably apparent in her detailed reminiscence of Princess Nur Jahan[21] and the Mughal miniature paintings[22], Jahangir and Prince Khurram[23] Feasted by Nur Jahan dated 1617, laid out on display in the Freer Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C. In accordance with the memoirist's perspective, the illustrated works of art communicate an artful paradox with regard to Ingres and Matisse's paintings in which women from the Orient in the latters' paintings had been depicted as "passive odalisques" (Mernissi, 2001, p.163). Specifically, this paradox is evident in the recurrent outline of Eastern women in stagnated positions of idles, and passive nudes who subtly mesmerize their viewers. The authenticity of these artistic endeavors becomes unmistakably apparent, particularly when examining the portrayal of Princess Nur-Jahan. The portrayal of Princess Nur-Jahan as "a bejeweled silk-clad warrior," (Mernissi, 2001, p.193) positioned in close proximity to King Jahangir, and her depiction as "not only clearly in charge but supported as well by an army of women" (Mernissi,

2001, p.191) serves as a testament to the authentic essence encapsulated within these narratives and artistic creations. Again, the king's Indian painter: Abu al-Hasan, and his Portrait of a Lady with a Rifle[24], epitomizes the lady's potency and remarkable out-of-door tangible presence. This is considered as a conclusive testimony that absolutely abolishes the preconceived prospect of the harem's segregation. Typically, Ibn Arabi[25] and his attraction to Nizam's intelligence and eloquence are to be deemed altogether. Being an expert in religious sciences, known as "alima," According to Ibn Arabi, Nizam ensures that when she chooses to convey her thoughts, she "makes her message clear (in afcahat, awdahat)". Similarly, in moments of brevity "she is incomparably concise (in awjazat a'jazat)" (Mernissi, 2001, pp.179-180). In the same manner Mernissi's references the romance tale of "Khusraw and Shirin" penned by the poet Nizami (1140-1209). In this narrative, Nizami elaborates on the adventurous Persian Princess: Shirin, portraying her as never been "disturbed one bit …by the death of wild beasts" (Mernissi, 2001, p.171). Moreover, Princess Shirin is epitomized as a competent chevalier chasing lions and ferocious animals in the woods together with prince khusraw. Additionally, it is noteworthy to mention Ibn Battuta, often regarded as the "equivalent of Marco Polo" because of his extensive travels and detailed observations. His observations provide valuable insights into the societal dynamics of the time, particularly his reflections on the "high consideration accorded by the Turks to their women" (Mernissi, 2001, p.194). According to Ibn Battuta, women enjoyed "a higher position than men" (Mernissi, 2001, p 195), shedding light on the diverse perspectives on gender roles and societal structures in the Turkish society. Finally is Harun Ar-Rachid and his obsession with any "intellectually and professionally competent jarya" (Mernissi, 2001, p.134).

Adjacent to Mernissi's defiance of the Western hegemonic discourse of the Oriental harem, she delineates that the women of the Orient in modern times are to possess a perceptive outlook towards their individuality and self-realization. In such defiance, she declares the surfacing of renowned Eastern women's figures, namely Benazir Bhutto[26] in Pakistan, Tancu Shiller[27] in Turkey, and Megawati[28] in Indonesia (Mernissi, 2001, p.23).

In manifesting her convictions of the Oriental women's agency, Mernissi, in an interview pursued by Serge Ménager pushes forth her affirmation that "feminism does not come to [her] from the West, but from harem women" (Mernissi, 1996, p.100). Within her memoir, Mernissi refers to a diverse range of female figures who embody not only perceptiveness and understanding, but also vision and persistence. These figures include Fatema's mother, whose argument reflects on women's submission and oppression as far as patriarchy is concerned. Yasmina, Mernissi's maternal grandmother emerges as a pivotal and influential female archetype in Mernissi's life who taught her about ethical codes, impedance to imperialism, and gender equality. Mernissi's depiction of those influential

female figures contributes to her expansive approach to the manifestation of an identity free of binary opposition and more into performativity- an essential aspect of poststructuralists' theory and its examination of identity politics. By the same token, the Egyptian feminists have been another driving force to self-realization among whom are Aisha Taymour[29], Zaynab Fawwaz[30] and Huda Sha`raoui[31]. From Mernissi's perspective, Huda Sha'raoui's endeavors demonstrate the undeniable agency and influential role played in confronting established societal norms, reshaping the framework of women's empowerment within the Egyptian context. Mernissi holds the view that Sha'raoui "managed to do two seemingly contradictory things at the same time- fight the British occupation and end her traditional seclusion and confinement" (Mernissi, 1994,p.114).

Mernissi's doctrinal approach emerges as a powerful means of unraveling the sociopolitical, historical, and gender-related contradictions and misrepresentations of her culture. This approach bestows upon Mernissi the distinguished role of a "reader of culture," endowing both the memoirist and consequently the reader with the agency to navigate and communicate their multifaceted subjectivities, re/signing themselves on the farther side of "the author's signature" (Benstock, 1998, p.9). James Olney's assertion that "the autobiographer creates a self in the very act of seeking it" finds, in fact, resonance in Mernissi's memoir (Friedman, 1988, p.36). It is no coincidence, then, that Mernissi's multi-layered experiences and established narratives accede to her negotiation of the intricacies of the Western notion of the Arab female discourse of marginality. Meanwhile, it assimilates the notion of her newly articulated self through and in conjunction with others "by allowing differences while appreciating similarity" (Aranda, 2012, p.557).

Within her memoir, Mernissi adeptly showcases a discerning comprehension of the societal status of women in the Middle East by engaging in a meticulous deconstruction of the Western perspective regarding the 'Oriental harem'. Repudiating the illusive imaginative norm, Mernissi not only purports the Oriental harem to be far from the mythic utopia (a fairyland), but rather muses on the essence of being a pragmatic locale that mediates on women's beauty, achievement, intelligence, and power:

> Ironically, in the Orient–land of harems, polygamy and veils-
>
> Muslim men have always fantasized, in both literature and
>
> painting, about self-assertive, strong-minded, uncontrollable and
>
> mobile women. The Arabs fantasized about *Scheherazade of The*
>
> *Thousand and One Nights*; The Persians painted adventurous
>
> princesses like Shirin, who hunted wild animals across continents
>
> on horseback … . No wonder that in a rapidly modernizing
> Turkey, photographs of women flying planes or manning guns
> were constantly reproduced in magazines. (Mernissi,2001, p.164)

In this regards, Mernissi's preeminent hypothesis in the analogy between the East and the West can refer to this ideological precept: "To possess, to know, to grasp, are all synonyms of power" (Evans,2018, p.24) .This, in turn, leads to the pivotal notion of the "restaging of her subjectivity", refusing at one and the same time to "counter the outside forces that seek to control and shape [her]" (White,2004, p.111).

In the correlation of the multiple facets of positonality entwined with the variable sociopolitical, communal and personal records, Mernissi engendered self-contentedness of her tripartite identity as an Eastern woman. The substantial therapeutic influence was comprehensively assimilated upon her eventual self-actualization and more crucially upon her conscious acknowledgement of the singularity of her experience as an Arabic North African female scholar. More remarkably, Mernissi on the personal level has attained self- empowerment in the event of the instantly incorporated debates with the Western interlocutors about her genuine cultural and historical background and /or the authentic renditions and critique of those discussions penned down, later on, in her memoir. Hypothetically, these interrogations had been rendered as a more flexible and fluid space, especially that such explicit speaking, per se, is deemed to be an empowering tool: "To learn to enjoy the fluidity of dialogue is to savor situations where the outcome of battle is not rigidly fixed, where winners and losers are not predetermine" (Mernissi, 2001, p.52).This strategic dogma is more spelled out in Menager's interview when Mernissi denoted : "J'ai appris beaucoup d'eux, sur l'analyse, des tas de choses, le lobbying, comment s'organiser, comment influencer la société. C'était important, c'était l'empowerment," which is translated as follows:

> I learned a lot from them about analysis, a lot of things, lobbying, how to organize, how to influence society. It was important; it was empowerment. (Rhouni, 2010, p.128)

In essence, if we probe more deeply, we find that much of the strength of the memoir lies in Mernissi's exploration of self-empowerment, encompassing her multifaceted multicultural experiences in the form of the dialogical and dialectical confrontations, interactions and deep self-reflection in her quest for self-knowing. These compelling strategies and encounters enact as an imprint that contributed to her own in-depth qualitative understanding and approbation of herself as a Middle Eastern Moroccan woman.

Mernissi's conclusive statement: "How can you stage a credible political demonstration and shout in the streets that your human rights have been violated when you cannot find the right skirt" (219), recalls Lisa Majaj's opinion on that matter. Majaj posits that "[e]very culture has its symbolic veils and harems, and Western women are not necessarily more 'liberated' than their Eastern sisters"

(Majaj, 2001, p.25). By embracing the opportunity to traverse and journey both physically and mentally, Mernissi got the chance to abandon the so-called gender legacy of frailty which often silences "women's agency, ignoring cultural contextualization and suppressing understanding of gender's interaction with other constituents of identity" (Friedman, 1998, p.5) .This new vantage point is apt to question the previously assumed notion of the self as a fixed and an anchored entity:

> [I]dentity is socially constructed, shaped by a variety of
> cultural, political, economic and historical influences as well
> as institutions and practices, and is modified throughout life.
> (Christou, 2006, p.20)

It cannot be denied that prior to the advent of poststructuralists' theories, the reference to the 'self' had been restrained to a unitary and idiosyncratic thrust: "[I]ts core is understood to be unitary, irreducible, atomic; its boundaries separating inner from outer, well defined, stable, impermeable; its relationship to the world, unencumbered by alternative, absorbing roles" (Smith,1990, p.11).On the flip side, the interplay of positionality and its relation to the diversified life experiences that one goes through deconstructs the ideological discourse of stability and centrality of the subject according to poststructuralism, an aspect that entwines culture and human existence:

> People as beings 'in a situation', find themselves rooted in
> temporal- spatial conditions which mark them and which they
> also mark. They will tend to reflect on their own 'situationality'
> to the extent that they are challenged by it to act upon it. Human
> *Beings are* because they are in a situation. And they *will be more*
> *the more* they not only critically reflect upon their existence but
> critically act upon it. (Freire,1995, p.90)

Subjecting herself to different positionalities pertaining to heterogeneous situations: social, cultural and gender dialectics, Mernissi's fully-fledged identity is notched through the presiding and rather open-ended interactional and cognitive mechanism extended between 'self' and 'other'. Briefly, "the self comes back to life through the Other" (El Naga, 2002, p.65). By embracing this shift in perspective, this paper acknowledges that one's subjectivity and individuality is not a fixed entity, but rather a dynamic construct influenced by diverse factors and experiences within specific social and cultural contexts.

Notes

1- The 1965 book by N. M. Penzer refers to the harem institution and its historical basis as well as the common misconceptions, mostly in Western contexts.

2- See Edward Said's "The World, The Text, and The Critic" (1983).

3- Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) is a German philosopher who believes that even though the usual distinction between men and women may continue, he doesn't offer the ideal gender role benchmark.

4- See Harold H. Saunders' reference to 'sustained dialogue in *A Public Peace Process: Sustained Dialogue to Transform Racial and Ethnic Conflicts* (1999).

5- *The Dreams of Scheherazade* (أحلام شهرزاد), authored by the Egyptian writer Taha Hussein and published in 1933, tackles multiple themes among which are women's identity and empowerment.

6- Al-Jahiz, whose full name is Abū ʿUthman ʿAmr ibn Baḥr al-Kinānī al-Baṣrī, is a ninth-century Arab writer and renowned figure known for his proficiency in prose writing.

7- Abu Muhammad Ali Ibn Ahmad Ibn Sa'id Ibn Hazm is widely recognized as an eminent Islamic scholar. He wrote many books in many areas of interests, including theology, history, literature and poetry

8- Ibn Manzhur (Ibn Manzūr), (1232 - 1311) is a highly knowledgeable lexicographer. His most notable and comprehensive encyclopedia is known as *Lisān al-ꞬArab*, or *Tongue of the Arabs*.

9-Jamel Eddine Bencheikh is a French-Algerian poet and scholar. He provided an authentic translation of *The Thousand and One Nights*.

10-Abdesselam Cheddadi, a native Moroccan. He pursued his studies in philosophy and history at the Sorbonne. His scholarly endeavors focused primarily on the complexities of contemporary Arabic culture.

11- A. S. Byatt's literary career revolves around the assertion that gender construction is inseparable from social and cultural influences.

12-The incident at the American department store, where Mernissi was told that her hips were too large for a size 6, was a disheartening moment. This anecdote referred to earlier makes reference to Western conceptions of beauty as well as, indirectly, to the cultural definition of femininity, which are frequently reinforced and shaped by male (*Scheherazade Goes West* 208).

13- See 'La violence symbolique', Pierre Bourdieu in *La Domination Masculine* (1998), or *Masculine Domination*, translated by Richard Nice.

14-Sois belle et tais-toi" is a French phrase that gained popularity in the 1950s and 1960s. This phrase is often associated with the film industry and the objectification of women in that context.

15- *The Turkish Bath* (*Le Bain turc*) was originally painted between 1852 and 1859. Ingres's artistic artwork is criticized as missing personal encounters with the intended subjects of his paintings (Bentahar 27-28).

16- Henri Émile Benoît Matisse is a French painter and visual artist. In the 1920s, Matisse created more than 50 odalisques. The 1926 piece of art that Mernissi referred to in her autobiography is mostly named "Odalisque with Tambourine (Harmony in Blue)".

17-In 1910, Sergey Diaghilev's *Scheherazade Ballet* enjoyed great popularity in Paris. The central theme of this piece was adultery in a harem, a recurring theme frequently addressed by Western authors and artists.

18- The 1965 American musical comedy film "Harum Scarum," featuring Elvis Presley, follows the story of Johnny Tyrone who was taken as a captive during a tour in the fictional Middle Eastern nation of Lunarkand. The film, typical of many Western and Orientalist works, perpetuates stereotypes by portraying Arabs as savage and barbaric.

19- The folktale "Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves" holds a prominent position within the collection of stories *One Thousand and One Nights*. The movie relies excessively on the stereotypical representation of Oriental men buying women.

20- Valerie Behiery is well known for her profound belief in the therapeutic power of arts to unveil and heal both individual and social disorders

21-The Mughal Empress Nur Jahan (r. 1611-1627) was known to be an ardent hunter, skillful and powerful with an intriguing performance as a leader and a warrior.

22- Miniature artworks, comprised of intricate optical units, predominantly found within Mughal manuscripts, serve as invaluable sources of knowledge.

23-This exquisite artwork depicts the empress relaxing close to her husband, Jahangir, and Prince Khurram, the future ruler Shah Jahan, in the Ram Bagh garden, preserving an unmistakable equality.

24- Abu al-Hasan (b. 1589, d. c. 1630), a renowned painter, created a notable artwork titled *Nur Jahan Holding a Muske*. This painting showcases Nur Jahan as a warrior. This artwork, like many others, emphasizes on the political and military prowess of women in Islamic societies.

25- Muhyi al-Din Ibn al-Arabi is a Sufi scholar, and a poet. *The Tarjumn al-ashwq*, also known as *The Interpreter of Desires*, is a compilation of love poems written to the Lady Nizami.

26-Benazir Bhutto, a prominent Pakistani politician, made history by becoming the first woman to lead a Muslim country in contemporary times.

27-Tancu Shiller was born in Istanbul, Turkey, in 1946. She is a well-known Turkish economist and politician who served as country's first and, to date, only female prime.

28-Megawati Sukarnoputri is the first female president of Indonesia. She became the sixth woman globally to lead a Muslim-majority nation from 2001 to 2004.

29- Aisha Taymur (1840–1902) is recognized as the most renowned Egyptian poet, novelist, and cultural critic of her time. Taymour's written works have been recognized as significant, paving the path for many women to express themselves.

30- Zaynab Fawwaz (1860-1914) was a Lebanese feminist, author, playwright, poet, and a biographer. Her approach as a woman activist was primarily concerned with promoting women's educational autonomy, freewill and resisting the imposition of veiling practices on women.

31-Huda Shaarawi (1879-1947), a distinguished patriot and Arab Muslim activist, played a prominent role in advocating for women's rights in Egypt

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