

women's survival tactics during curfews which isolated their community for fifty-three days.

While coping with the trauma of occupation, Palestinian women must also cope with the socio/economic upheaval of their community. The resilience they show in negotiating the demands of a rigidly patriarchal society is amazing. As eighteen year old Iman Jardallah says: "things are changing, but there are people who try to turn the wheel back." The more militant feminist among them are aware that though they have and are participating in the nationalist struggle, this in no way guarantees them a role within the newly formed Palestinian Authority. In fact as Ebba Augustin's essay demonstrates, it took the United Leadership of the Uprising more than a year to criticize the vicious fundamentalist veil campaign in Gaza. It seems that like all government in the region, the Palestinian Authority will not go out of its way to improve the status of women if this means added conflict with the fundamentalists. Furthermore, the Palestinian Authority has not shown any keen desire to implement a democratic rule. If it acquiesces to the women's demands for equity, it will have to do the same for other groups.

But Palestinian women are aware of what happened to their Algerian sisters after the end of their nationalist struggle, and they are not about to accept the same fate. Their struggles to organize within women's groups and within trade unions are an attempt to preempt such a fate. But only time will tell whether Palestinian women will achieve some of their goals through their own farsightedness, or because of the ultimate weakness of the Palestinian Authority, or even because the latter would wish to project a progressive facade to its Western donors. Time will also tell whether they will not actually find themselves caught between the devil and the deep blue sea as they manoeuvre their way between an unsympathetic patriarchal Authority, and the repressive Hamas groups.

The collection gives the reader a

vivid insight into a very difficult moment in Palestinian history—difficult inasmuch as it risks turning into a moment of lost opportunities what had been the hope that kept all these women going.

In recognition of the heroic fight of Palestinian women, I would like to have seen on the jacket of the book a collage of photographs of different faces, and not just the face of Hanan Ashrawi who figures very briefly through two short essays in this collection.

THE BOOK AND THE VEIL

Yeshim Ternar. Montreal, Quebec: Véhicule Press, 1994.

by Agnès Callamard

With the veil increasingly becoming the object of intense struggles in France, Quebec, Algeria, to name but a few, a symbol appropriated by the media, states, religious movements, and women to signify either cultural/islamic resistance against Western imperialism or cultural/islamic oppression of the women, and finally the site of the West/East divide and conflict, Yeshim Ternar's work *The Book and the Veil* is, indeed, an important and timely one. However, one should not expect Ternar to provide the reader with a definite or even a single analysis or understanding of the veil or the book, for her work deliberately throws a veil of fiction over reality, and it never completely unveils the faces, meanings, objectives behind the veil or the book. But it is because of its ambiguous representations, conversations, subtle analysis of the orientalist discourse and of feminism, that Yeshim Ternar's book is, indeed, an important one. One can only regret that her ethnographic fiction remains at the level of the "self" and of the construction and representation of the self through the veil and the book, and fails to unveil the other actors of this (mis)representation, including

the state, religious establishments, nationalist movements and ideologies, both in the West and in the East, and the deadly struggles that have centred around these actors' control over the veil and the book that is over the body and knowledge.

The Book and The Veil is constructed upon the encounter that occurred almost a century ago between two Turkish sisters Zeyneb and Melek Hanoums who fled Turkey and the harem for fear of persecution from the sultan; the English feminist journalist Grace Ellison who saw as her duties to explain the East to her country-people and enlighten Eastern women about self-emancipation; and Pierre Loti, a French Turkophile homosexual writer. To their voices, Ternar is adding her own, the one of "a post-modern anthropologist", "a novelist-ethnographer born in the East but residing and writing in the West," creating something that sounds like a dialogue (although it is never clear whether all voices really listen to each other) across space, time, and cultures, in the (spurious) search for self-understanding and self-identification. For both the veil and the book are, here, used as "facilitators" to undertake a research of the self.

In Ternar's, the veil is, of course, the East, the yashmak that Turkish women wore in the presence of men; it is oppression, sequestration, annihilation, a "barrier between the sexes;" but the veil is also the West: it is the blank, expressionless face of European women. The veil in the East is also a symbol of beauty, femininity, gender identity, for which the feminist Grace falls: "For all her interest in emancipation, Grace seems to enjoy being hidden and made anonymous by a yashmak...Grace remarks on how attractive a yashmak makes a woman;" and the veil is ultimately belongingness, for which the heroines of *The Book and The Veil*, along with the author, are striving: "Grace, you wore the veil in Turkey, whereas I never did. You travelled incognito with your Turkish sisters, whereas I always stuck out. You felt like they were your sisters in more ways than

one." And again, "[west of the Danube], Zeyneb felt alienated. Grace, on the other hand, at least in public, could don the veil and pass for a Turkish woman."

The book is the West but it is also the Koran, it is emancipation, power and the projection of the self through the voice of another; but it is also the individualisation of the self and disenchantment, as Zeyneb experiences. The book is Grace's and Loty's orientalism but as well Zeyneb's representation of the Occident; it is Grace's attempt "to understand them... just as today [the author] is trying to understand one who wears the veil;" it is throwing a veil of fiction over reality, but as well the unveiling of reality. The book is finally Grace's works on Turkey, Melek's and Zeyneb's fictions following their flight to Europe, Pierre Loty's novel, and it is *The Book and The Veil*. Hence, while the reader might originally have thought of the book in total opposition with the veil, she/he is in fact confronted with the book (including the one being reviewed) carrying as many ambiguous, contradictory and "veiled" messages as does the veil itself.

And the reader, submerged within all these contradictory messages, should be looking for the clues, if she/he wishes to "remove the veil," and thus, to unveil the book, and ultimately unveil her/himself. It is a search, however, that might carry unexpected, painful, disenchanted and even tragic realisations, as Grace, Zeyneb, (and maybe Ternar herself) experienced. Hence Grace, in the process of veiling and unveiling, had come to the point where she needed her Turkish friends (that is veiled women) to ascertain her reality, and confronted the fact that as a feminist, she needed the company of men to feel whole and recognised. Zeyneb's search, which brought her from the Harem to Europe and back to Turkey, ended in her disenchantment and eventually in her death. "She had cast off the veil through a book, and when she did not like the story that emerged, she thought she could aban-

don the book and re-adopt the veil. What she did not know was that once you identify with life through books, there is no turning back."

What distinguished Grace and Melek from Zeyneb was that they were both able to understand the complementarity of the veil and the book, whereas Zeyneb saw her choices in opposition to each other —the book or the veil. *The Book and The Veil* carries multiple messages and different layers of analysis, but one tends to be recurrent in the text: it is that both the East and the West are indispensable to the other, but that such a recognition has to be learned; it is "our common history, our common desire to traverse the opposing currents of the Bosphorus and make sense of the East and the West that brings us all together." As soft and naively idealistic and humanistic as this message might sound, it is one that should be reiterated, and written and spoken, across books and across our veils, at a time when the West and the East are increasingly constructed and constructing themselves as two diametrically opposed and conflictual systems of thinking, histories and Peoples.

NINE PARTS OF DESIRE: THE HIDDEN WORLD OF ISLAMIC WOMEN

Geraldine Brooks. New York: Anchor Books, 1995.

by Goli Rezai-Rashti

Much of the writing about Middle Eastern women published by the Western press and academic publishers has often depicted them as passive, secluded and in need of being rescued from the oppressive rules of Islam. Islamic laws are identified as the main contributing factor in the alleged oppression of women in Muslim societies.

Nine Parts of Desire by Geraldine Brooks is a refreshingly different book in that she makes an encouraging effort at demystifying Western stere-

otypes and at showing a more truthful and realistic image of Middle Eastern women. The book's strengths come from the author's six-year residence as Wall Street Journal Correspondent in countries such as Saudi Arabia, Iran, Egypt, Jordan, The Gulf States, Israel and Eritrea. It is this on-the-field experience that allows her to show the reader the glaring differences that exist in the ways in which Islam is expressed and practised in different societies.

Geraldine Brooks tell us that the main reason for her going to the Middle East was to look for risk and adventure but that after one year she came to realize that as a Western journalist, and as a woman, she was in a better position to access the wealth of information on Muslim women by directly speaking to them and then writing about their everyday lives in an Islamic context. The outcome is positively encouraging for others scholars in the field.

She begins by acknowledging Western misunderstandings about Islam and Muslim women. In fact, she states that she wrote the book for those people who like her, before she visited Islamic countries, would look at a woman in a chador and burst into outrage or piety. She then sets out to show that neither is an appropriate attitude. She steadfastly maintains that often, but not always, and certainly not everywhere, women are wearing Islamic clothing for some well-thought-out political reasons (interview with the *Toronto Star*, February 26, 1995). For example, several interviews with Iranian women serve as an eye-opener for those consumers of western media who think that the Islamic revolution completely changed women's lives in Iran and sent them back into the seclusion of their homes. On the contrary, Brooks argues that some real progressive transformation has occurred as a result of the Iranian revolution, as more women are becoming involved in politics, making their voices heard, and effecting even more changes. She shows, as an example, how a woman member of parliament who generally