

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 Loti'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 the 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 in to 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

voted with the hard-liners on matters of foreign policy and economic reform, did however break ranks with the most conservative sectors on issues concerning women's rights by relentlessly supporting legislative initiatives that would improve women's status—such as easing access to pension, improving benefits for single mothers, and ending discrimination in the distribution of foreign-study scholarships.

Brooks' account of American women married to Iranian men is remarkable in that it gives an entirely different picture than that shown in Betty Mahmoody's bestseller *Not Without My Daughter*. She tells us how Janet, an American expatriate, has come to love many aspects of her life in Iran and to relish the affection that Iranians lavish on the few Americans who live in Iran. According to Janet herself she feels like she is being treated as a queen. Her parents, however, back in the United States have had great difficulty in believing Janet's account. Influenced by Mahmoody's story, they fear that their daughter is also being beaten and denied food by her Iranian husband. It does not matter to them that Janet enjoys a luxurious lifestyle that would make many Americans envious.

Brooks tells the reader about happy as well as sad stories regarding the institution of arranged marriages. In one instance, she describes the happy story of a Kuwaiti woman whose businessman husband moved the business to London in order to allow her the opportunity to pursue a post-graduate degree in Europe. According to Brooks the two seemed very happy and content with the outcome of their arranged marriage. On the other hand, she depicts the story of a Jordanian couple who were married at a very young age. Later on, when the husband fell in love and then decided to take on a second wife, the first wife, lacking independent means of livelihood decided against seeking a divorce and chose to stay with the husband and the new bride in the same house. She simply had no other choice.

Still, Brooks reserves the most depressing picture of a Muslim society for Saudi Arabia where she found that women's oppression is greatly determined by the strictest adherence to some of the more fundamentalist laws of Islam. Furthermore, the author provides a good account of the rise of fundamentalism in the Muslim world and how even western-educated women are willingly accepting and following fundamentalist interpretations and practices of Islam.

In describing the author's journey through the Middle East the book brings out two important contributions to our understanding of women and Islam. First, that there are significant differences between Muslim countries so that, for example, it could be a terrible mistake to place Turkish women in the same camp with Saudi Arabian women. Simply put, Muslim Turkey does not treat women the way they are treated in Muslim Saudi Arabia. Brooks provides many examples of these differences throughout her book. The conclusion can be drawn then that the Muslim world does not treat its women in a homogeneous way. Second, and equally important, is Brooks' acknowledgment that women in Islamic countries are not just the passive recipients of government's ideologies, but much to the contrary are active agents in the processes of resisting, organizing, and fighting for social changes that positively improve women's status and situation.

The book, however, has some shortcomings. They have to do mainly with the journalistic approach undertaken by the author. The absence of a clearly identifiable theoretical approach becomes evident as one cruises through the pages. Thus, while Brooks raises some very important questions in the introduction, she fails to clearly provide an answer to them in the text. She rightly asks that since Islam does not have to mean oppression of women, why are then so many Muslim women oppressed? Or, is it possible to reclaim the positive messages in the Koran and Islamic history and devise some kind of Muslim femi-

nism? Could Muslim fundamentalism live with Western liberals, or would accommodating each other cost us both our principles? Brooks thoroughly searches the main sources of Islamic teachings and concludes that they do not provide a rationale or justification for the oppression that women endure in Muslim countries. But then she does not follow up her own conclusions and move to tell us what the reasons may be for that oppression to still continue today. In failing to explain why women's oppression exists, Brooks leaves open the door for the same misinterpretation that she is valiantly trying to dispel.

Thus, another image that the book conjures up is that somehow oppression of women is something specific to Muslim societies. As a liberated western woman pursuing studies on women in the Middle East, Geraldine Brooks has difficulty in accepting the lack of interest in feminist issues showed by some of her acquaintances. She feels bewildered by Muslim women's concerns with Brooks leaving her husband and family behind, never mind missing the husband's protection, and her putting her career before family. She shows puzzlement at not being envied or praised for her feminist views and practices. Why this is so is something that Brooks fails to answer. It is precisely in this area that similar studies have also failed to break new ground for the interpretation of women and Islam. The search is still on. Likewise, Brooks's lack of an adequate historical analysis of Muslim societies shows again in her discussion of the rise of fundamentalism which fails to explain why it is occurring at this particular time in history.

Last but not least, Brooks raises an important issue when discussing the relationship between race and gender. She argues that if the issues were race related the Western world would take action against Middle Eastern societies, but because it is a question of gender and not race, we say, oh well, that is their business. I think this kind of equation is completely wrong.

Brooks forgets that Western powers are struggling themselves with issues of both racism and sexism. Both are a major problem in contemporary Western societies. For those of us who are working towards an antiracist and antisexist society the struggle is far from over. It will take a long fight to accomplish those goals. We need only to look at our histories and institutions in order to find out how we have treated women and minorities in the not so distant past. This might not be as blunt as Brooks's statement about black and whites; nevertheless, they are experiences that cannot be easily discarded. I think Brooks forgets some important factors which have nothing to do with race and gender, namely, economic interests and financial gains. History has repeatedly shown that Western powers' intervention in other countries' internal affairs has rarely been motivated by race or gender concerns but mainly by economic interests. The multinational intervention during the Gulf War is one such example. Therefore, to play off gender and race issues against one another is not only unhelpful but definitely harmful to the democratic and egalitarian struggle.

Despite the above criticisms, I find the book very helpful for a Western audience. It does not only give a more realistic picture of Middle Eastern women but it also shows the directions in which future studies should go. The fact that Geraldine Brooks spent six years in the Middle East makes her reflections all the more valuable. This is what I would call responsible journalism. I certainly recommend it as required reading for anyone interested in this topic.

LE TRAVAIL DES FEMMES

Les Cahiers du Grif, Éditions Complexe, 1994.

par Véronique Magnan

Le travail des femmes est un recueil de récits écrits entre 1975 et 1990 dans

lequel des femmes belges et françaises s'interrogent et témoignent sur leur propre condition face au travail en tant que femme, mère, objet de production et reproduction.

Le travail des femmes est fortement influencé par la conjoncture, la socialisation, et les décisions politiques. Plusieurs auteurs expliquent comment les mythes se véhiculent selon les emplois, les valeurs, les époques et les classes sociales. Aline Dallier, brosse un portrait historique sur les travaux d'aiguilles (tricot, couture, broderie, tapisserie) accomplis par les femmes. Considérés comme un art ou un passe-temps chez les femmes appartenant à la bourgeoisie et les artistes contemporaines, les travaux d'aiguilles ont pour beaucoup de femmes une valeur économique et sont source d'exploitation. En effet, comme l'explique l'auteure, bien que les femmes d'aujourd'hui ne travaillent plus dans les manufactures de XIX^{ème} siècle, elles travaillent de longues heures dans des ateliers au salaire minimum. D'autres emplois comme celui d'infirmière ou d'hôtesse de l'air véhiculent le mythe de la femme gentille, docile, dévouée, « au service de l'homme ».

Le travail des femmes pendant des siècles consistait à élever sa famille. Peu de choix s'offraient à elles à moins d'être dans l'obligation de chercher un emploi. De nos jours, comme le souligne Françoise Collins, la situation n'a guère changé. En effet, les femmes ne choisissent pas le travail à la maison ou l'usine, puisqu'elles font les deux. Peut-on qualifier cela de libération? Le travail a apporté aux femmes une certaine indépendance financière et l'a fait sortir de chez elle. Pourtant, première licenciée en cas de crise et rarement employée en fonction de ces qualités professionnelles ou intellectuelles, la femme doit constamment se battre pour acquérir ses droits ou faire appliquer ceux qu'elle a déjà acquis.

Les femmes aujourd'hui se battent non seulement pour une augmentation de salaire comme dans les années 70, mais également pour développer

une nouvelle relation entre la vie et le travail où les personnes ne seraient plus des robots mais des êtres à part entière. Pour cela une redéfinition de la production par rapport au temps de production, une meilleure distribution des prises de décisions et la reconnaissance du travail ménager s'imposent.

La réduction du temps de travail n'a pas amené des changements profonds parce que l'organisation actuelle exclut la possibilité d'une vraie gestion collective. Les hommes et les femmes sont trop occupés par leur activités professionnelles et leur famille pour s'intéresser à ce qui les concerne réellement et s'en remettent à des élus.

D'après Suzanne Van Rokeghem, une meilleure répartition des tâches passe par une ré-évaluation du travail ménager. Elle dénonce que le travail ménager n'est pas inclus dans le Produit National Brut (PNB). Elle constate que donner un salaire aux femmes qui restent à la maison est une solution à double tranchant. Sur le plan social, rétribuer les femmes restant à la maison ne remet pas les rôles des hommes et des femmes en question. En outre, c'est une solution qui divise les femmes: qu'advient-il de la travailleuse qui après sa journée de travail doit faire le travail ménager? Sur le plan économique, la rétribution du travail ménager ne serait qu'un simple transfert financier qui rejaillirait sur le niveau des salaires. S'il est payé par l'État, cela entraînerait plus de cotisation des travailleurs. S'il est payé par le mari, la femme perd tout espoir d'intervenir dans la gestion des biens communs et l'échelle des salaires est reproduite dans son absurdité. Si l'employeur prend en charge les frais par une super allocation patronale, elle serait récupérée d'un autre côté. En fait, cela reviendrait à faire rentrer les ménagères dans la catégorie des travailleuses domestiques les plus exploitables.

Edwige Peemant-Poulet expose le problème du partage des prises de décisions. Alors que les femmes participent à la croissance économique