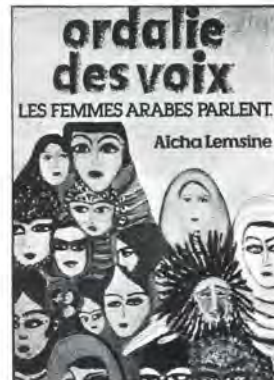


## Aicha Lemsine, Ordalie des Voix, les Femmes Arabes Parlent

Aicha Lemsine is an Algerian author who writes in French. Her book relates a series of interviews she made between 1980 and 1983 with women (and some men) in Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Kuwait, the Arabian Gulf, Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, Sudan, Egypt and Palestine. She introduced each country with a quick glimpse of its historic and geographic setting.

Using alternatively a lively narrative and an emotional poetic prose, the author then gives us a social picture of the countries she visited: the characteristics of their people, their customs, traditions, moral values, and mentality. She does not refrain from severely criticizing whatever she finds displeasing, be it social, moral or political. Much of her criticism is either veiled by subtle irony, or mixed with a lively touch of humor.

But Lemsine's main concern is women in the Arab world. Therefore the primary theme of the interviews and descriptions in the book is the lives of these women, the problems, difficulties and injustice, they have to face in society, at home, school or work. These problems range from illiteracy, the veil, divorce and polygamy, to the oppression and cruelty resulting from laws and customs such as excision and "beit etta'a" (the



husband's right to force his wife back home if she has left him because of his cruelty).

The book shows the various degrees of progress women have achieved in some Arab countries, as well as the different mentalities of the women interviewed. Some of them accept their plight passively, whereas others denounce and struggle against the injustice, oppression and cruelty their sex suffers at the hands of man, be he legislator, father or husband. Almost all of them firmly believe that Islam is not the cause of their misery, as the West assumes, and that a correct application of the Kor'anie law (Shari'a) is enough to ensure them freedom, justice and equality.

The book also stresses the rapid development of education, technology and social services in several Arab countries, and gives the reader some very interesting information.

However, since the conditions of women do not vary a lot in countries like Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, for example, the book tends to be repetitive. The reader also feels a lack of objectivity in the author's desire to defend the Arabs, for she sometimes stresses certain facts and avoids others, or makes statements that are contradictory to what we know about the Arab countries from people living there I'm referring to parts of her chapters on Saudi Arabia and Jordan, for example.

Moreover, many of the topics are dealt with superficially, e.g., her conversations with as controversial a person as Nawal el Saadawi, the well-known Egyptian feminist, or her chapter on women in Saudi Arabia based solely on interviews with Saudi women bank or company directors, doctors, professors, ministers, lawyers, writers and business women, as if they were the real and only representatives of all the women in their country.

**Nazik Yared**

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