

# Women in Saudi Arabia

## Ideology and Behavior Among the Elite

By Soraya Altrorki

In a study of continuity and change among elite domestic groups in Jiddah, Saudi Arabia, the behavior and ideology of three generations involving thirteen families are studied and compared. The dimensions of the elite status weighted by generations are: reputation, descent, piety, wealth and individual achievement. The book includes a brief history of the city, Jiddah, a description of the people living there, the roles of women. Aspects of household life are discussed as they reflect the segregation of women from men in these families. Moreover, the institution of wafa (i.e. pattern of social visits between women, mutual

support and assistance, exchange of gifts and favors between friends) is examined as a mechanism for reducing isolation and insecurity of elite women. Marriage strategies are discussed from a cultural, social and economic point of view. Finally, the articulation of social changes with ideological changes constitutes a major underlying point in this study. A major contention of this book is that ambiguities and contradictions within sets of concepts (anger/contentment) have permitted women to make the changes they have initiated.

*The basic aim of this book was to study continuity and change of*

*domestic groups in an urban Saudi society. We cannot know what the patterns of relationships will be in the future, but the changes that have already occurred will not be easily reversed. Thus, the fourth generation of women will be the inheritors of the reinterpretations of ideology and modifications of social relations that have been examined in this study. (pg. 164).*

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# The Veil and the Male Elite

## A Feminine Interpretation of Women's Rights in Islam

By Fatima Mernissi

*" " Can a woman be a leader of Muslims ? " I asked my grocer. " I take refuge in Allah ! " he exclaimed, shocked, despite the friendly relations between us."*

All the monotheistic religions are shot through by the conflict between the divine and the feminine, but none more so than Islam, which has opted for the occultation of the feminine, at least symbolically, by trying to veil it, to hide it, to mask it.

It is not a work of history but it is intended to be a narrative of recollections, a vessel journeying back in time when women had their place as " unquestioned partners " in a revolution that made the mosque an open place and the household a temple of debate. This attitude is surprising since the Prophet encouraged his adherents to renounce the veil as representatives of the *Jahiliyya* and its superstitions. This contradiction led the author to question whether or not Islam's message had a limited and

superficial effect on deeply superstitious seventh-century Arabs who failed to integrate its novel approaches to the world and to woman. Mernissi raises many questions and analyzes various issues in a very interesting and descriptive manner.

Fatima Mernissi. *The Veil and the Male Elite: A Feminist Interpretation of Women's Rights in Islam.* New York. Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, Inc.