

Example of the history of the middle east book review

[Sociology](#), [Women](#)



The Middle East experienced various issues concerning feminism, poverty and colonial rule especially in the period of the European invasion and control. During the colonial invasion, Syria remained under French rule while Egypt fell under British rule. The history of the two colonies experienced different events through both the colonial and the post-colonial periods. *Harem Years* by Huda Shaarawi and *Fragments of Memory* by Hanna Mina explore various issues that characterized the Syrians and Egyptians during this period. One of the stories occurs in Egypt while the other occurs in Syria. *Harem Years* describe the lives of the people in Egypt after the war while *Fragments of Memory* reviews the live that Syrians led before and during the war (Mina 35). The paper analyzes the claim that the two authors analyze the effects of the political situation and authoritative control by taking account of poverty and gender issues.

The two stories explore gender issues although from different points of view. *Harem Years* explain the feminist effects of the colonial rule in Egypt. Huda notes that women assumed the low position in leadership and family matters, in the society while men assumed the leading role in society. The stories highlight that women mainly do not have the freedom to express themselves or confront men. This is only capable the women hail from the rich lasses in the country or come from the elite group. On the other hand, Mina addresses the gender issues from a different point of view. Mina's story presents men as front players in the war in Syria fighting for their freedom of the people in the country. Despite the fact that the country finally falls under the colonial rule, the men fought hard to resist colonial forces (Sha'rāwī and Margot 42). Similar to Huda's work, Mina explores gender issues by

highlighting that women assumed an inferior state in the society. Besides their hard work, the society hardly acknowledges the effort of the women who are seen inferior to men. In the Mina's society, duties and responsibilities are categorized based on gender. Women assumed ' simple' home-based duties while, men engaged in ' important' duties. An important gender issue to account for is the fact that the society held a perception that men's duties were mainly significant than those of women. In essence, the society believed men were stronger than women were since they engaged in important roles like protecting the territory. Mina explores the issue of gender concerns from a strategic and controversial viewpoint by bringing out the idea of the power of a woman. This is in view that woman assumed the first hand step in overcoming the poverty by working tirelessly to bring up their children (Mina 39).

The two authors also explore the poor economic and social status of their communities and response towards colonization. Mina focuses on the tormenting poverty under which Syrian peasants lived. Mina tells the story of his poor state of his family by noting that they had to live under a fig tree and on a filthy roadside. He also accounts that he was frequently exposed to the sun and severe hunger. In essence, Mina presents a dramatic, in-depth view of the wretched life of the early 19th Syrian peasants. The Syrian peasants led a slave like lifestyle due to poverty in which they entirely depended on their masters, the landlord-owners. In the process, the Syrian peasants suffered severely under the control of their masters who took advantage of their state to exploit them for their benefits. Mina's narration provides a fascinating description of silk cultivation and its unprecedented

disappearance upon the introduction of the synthetic alternative. The economic effects of colonialism vary depending on the reception of the people to colonialism. Most of the people in Syria rejected the colonial invasion. The characters in the story *Fragments of Memory* rejected the invasion of the colonial masters in their country. Most of the people fought against the invasion by the French colonial masters. This led to brutal treatment from the colonialists who denied the people wealth and rights to express themselves. At the same time, the people did not get the right to go to school although the colonial masters accessed the educational facilities. The local community in the *Harem Years* by also led a poor life (Sha'rāwī and Margot 125). However, Huda's community does not present a persistence resistance like the one staged by Mina's community. Huda's autobiography shows the access to privileges by the locals, including access to education and health facilities. Essentially, both the stories show that the locals suffered under the colonial rule disregarding their respond.

The stories also address feminism in the society at different historical times with some of the people accepting the feminist views as normal and acceptable. *Harem Years* shows that the people did not value the women in the society. The women in the Egyptian societies after the colonial period did not have a voice before their male counterparts. Women were not offered a chance of engaging men in discussions. The society expected women to remain silent and conform to men's authority even when men made wrong decisions. The women could not go to school. Only women from wealthy families had the privilege of accessing education. The women had an obligation to marry and bear children for the family. Most of the women

faced such oppression throughout their lives except for women from royal families who enjoyed freedom before the men from the lower class families. However, in Syria, the women did not face discrimination especially after the colonial rule. Most of the women received equal chances and opportunities with their male counterparts. The Syrian culture opened many chances for equality in the society due to the unity of the people against the colonial rule (Sha'rāwī and Margot 68).

The sexist effects of the colonial rule in Syria and Egypt affected the lives of the people in a number of ways. First, the social lives of the people differed based on the social infrastructures in their countries after the colonial rule. The Egyptians interacted in their respective classes. The wealthy people interacted among themselves and lived in social groups. The low class people also segregated themselves and lived alone in their groups. In Egypt, the colonial rule simply led to the rise of social classes among the locals. The educated people mainly represented people who welcomed the British in the country. Huda refers to this group as the controllers of the economy.

However, Syrians undertook the colonial matter from a different point of view (Sha'rāwī and Margot 58). The people united to resist the French invasion of the country. The autobiography *Fragments of Memory* shows that Syrians valued the idea of a free and united state. Consequently, they fought against the colonial invasion in unity leading to strong social lines among the people (Hanna 68). The social classes did not exist in Syria because the people united to fight against the invasion of the country by the colonial masters. The unity led to the disappearance of the social gaps in the society as people remained united even after the colonial rule.

The two stories explain the effect of colonialism on people. Harem Years address the effects of colonialism while Fragments of Memory address the reactions of the people to the advancement of colonial policies and rules on Syrians. The colonial rule affected the family lives of the people in different ways depending on the community's reaction towards the colonialists. Most of the people who accepted the colonial masters into their countries, majorly the Egyptians, had intact families. The family ties for the Egyptians remained, and the colonial masters treated the families equally. The children had chances to live with their fathers and grandfathers although their economic benefits reduced drastically. However, the Syrians lived a contrasting life to the Egyptians in terms of their family ties. Most of the Syrians like the father to the narrator, fought against the invasion by the French colonialists. The French mistreated the people and brutally harassed the men leading to destruction of the family ties among the people. The destruction of family ties also came because of slavery advanced by the French because of the harsh treatment to the resisting locals.

Both the stories also present the idea of gender in the sense that the colonial rule and the feminist effects extended to the cultural lives of the people. The empowerment of men in the Egyptian culture led to derailed morals among men and the decline of cultural events like female cultural activities. Many families remained intact, but female ceremonies could not take place and women could not raise their concerns before the men (Mina 49). Men also abandoned some of their cultural activities because they could not undertake their activities peacefully as they did in the past before the colonial invasion. The case in Syria surpassed the Egyptian case negatively.

Most of the Syrians lost all their cultural ground as they faced the French oppression and mistreatment from the colonial masters. The families dispersed as the French soldiers fought against the locals who brutally rebelled against their rule in the country.

Harem Years and Fragments of Memory by describe important issues in the Middle East colonial period. Both stories evaluate the sexism that came with the colonial invasion of the Middle East and their effects among the people in the two countries. The authors of these stories focus on poverty, gender and social-economic issues of the local people during the colonial period. The stories underline the reaction of the people to the colonial invasion with the Syrians resisting the invasion while the Egyptians accepted the establishment of the colonial rule. In return, the colonial rule affected the lives of the people socially through destruction of their social ties and culturally as they no longer had the unity to practice their cultural activities.

Works Cited

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Sha'rāwī, Hudá, and Margot Badran. *Harem Years: The Memoirs of an Egyptian Feminist (1879-1924)*. New York: Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 1987. Print.