Fatema Mernissi and the Hadith: Agent of Social Change

A Lecture by
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The overall goal of the eclectic and critical approach of Fatima Mernissi to gender and women’s rights seems to be overlooked. Scholars and activists attempt to analyze her work within one academic category or another. With few exceptions, her overwhelming personal and professional commitments to social change appear to be forgotten.

In this presentation, I will focus on Mernissi scholarship/activism that addresses the Prophet Muhammad’s reported views and treatments of women, based mainly on the Hadith literature. During the last decade of my research that culminated in a recent monograph on Hadith, I was amazed, but not surprised, by how few references were made to Mernissi’s work on the subject.

It is especially important to realize that she had re-opened the way for women’s rethinking Islamic primary texts that will lead to social and attitudinal change. I will shed some light on her study of the Hadith, its apparent ramifications and consequences for building a feminist position that enables social change toward gender justice and woman’s agency.

I will synthesize some examples from her books, particularly her seminal book, the Veil and the Male Elite. The objective is to develop strategies for challenging both the injustices done to women in the name of Islam, and the different approaches that still view women as subjects of change instead of agents of change.