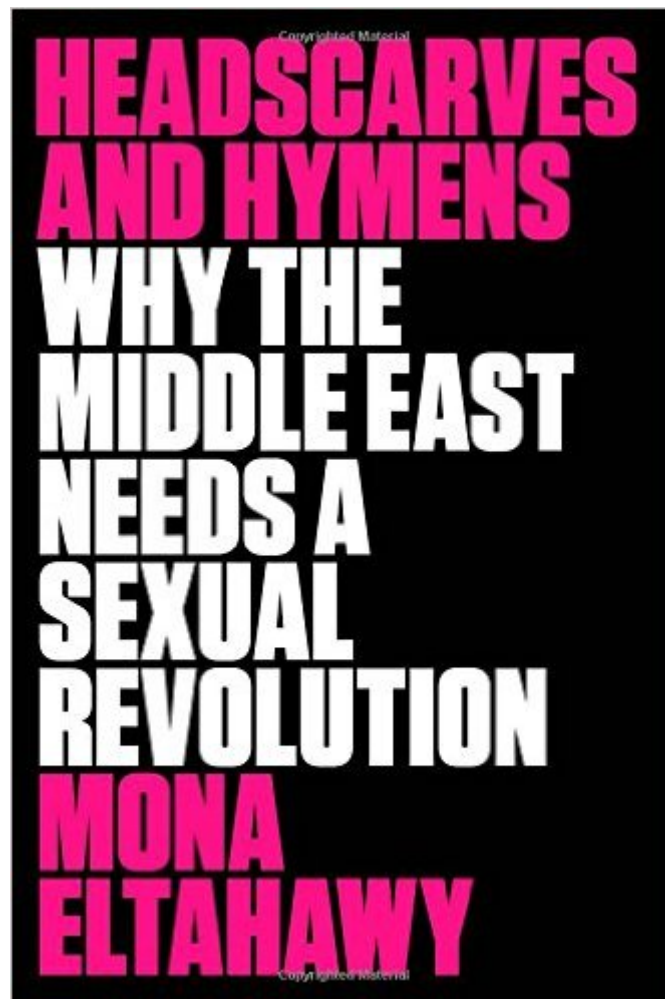


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# Headscarves And Hymens: Why The Middle East Needs A Sexual Revolution



## Synopsis

The journalist Mona Eltahawy is no stranger to controversy. Through her articles and actions she has fought for the autonomy, security, and dignity of Muslim women, drawing vocal supporters and detractors. Now, in her first book, *Headscarves and Hymens*, Eltahawy has prepared a definitive condemnation of the repressive forces-political, cultural, and religious-that reduce millions of women to second-class citizens. Drawing on her years as a campaigner for and commentator on women's issues in the Middle East, she explains that since the Arab Spring began in 2010, women in the Arab world have had two revolutions to undertake: one fought alongside men against oppressive regimes, and another fought against an entire political and economic system that represses women in Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia, Libya, Yemen, and other nations. Eltahawy has traveled across the Middle East and North Africa, meeting with women and listening to their stories. Her book is a plea for outrage and action, confronting a "toxic mix of culture and religion that few seem willing or able to disentangle lest they blaspheme or offend." A manifesto motivated by hope and fury in equal measure, *Headscarves and Hymens* is as illuminating as it is incendiary.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

You can't read this book without being outraged about the treatment of women in the Middle East. Mona has lived in Egypt and Saudi Arabia, and she has worked as a journalist in most of the countries in the region. She draws from a wealth of personal and professional experience. By reporting on the rampant institutionalized misogyny there, she is breaking many taboos against

shaming the governments and the religious authorities, against exposing die-hard traditions that demean and cripple young girls and women, and against revealing the behind-the-doors double standards that exist for men and women in the home. The Arab Spring brought government upheavals in many parts of the region, but recognizing the equality of women and their rights has lagged far behind the political changes. Mona names the culprits and the victims, and pulls no punches. She writes, "We are in denial if we do not honestly reckon with the role of religion in maintaining the patriarch's rule at home, including how the men of religion help him to uphold his rule." Mona wants women to speak out about their situations. "As risky as it is to speak publicly about street sexual harassment and assault, though, speaking out against sex abuse, speaking out against the crimes that go on in the home, is riskier. Home is where the hurt is, and home is where we must start to heal." Hopefully, Mona's outspoken frankness will encourage other women to follow her lead. She concludes, "Women -- our rage, our tenacity, our daring and audacity -- will free our countries." This book is hard to put down, as it dashes from one outrage to another. Along the way, readers are left with countless imponderables -- why is a male baby's urine clean, but not that of a female baby? Why can't women drive in Saudi Arabia which produces so much oil? Where is the justice in suspending the prison sentence for a rapist if he marries his victim? Why is the Aisha's child marriage to Muhammad the model instead of that of Khadija who was 15 years older than Muhammad?

Mona is brave and brilliant, telling her story clear and loud, and calling for all of us to stand and be counted. As a journalist with years of experience in the Mideast Mona is able to tell us exactly what is going on, naming names and not holding back. Gender equality needs to happen now, this book makes it painfully clear that the abuse and subjugation of women goes on decade after decade and must stop. There are women throughout the middle east working for change and gender equality...that is the best way for change to come, from within these country's. We need to support their work. Men who understand this need to publicly take a stand. Women need to see that like Mona they can fight back and have every right to enjoy freedom and respect. Tell everyone about this book!

I LOVED this book! Here are some of my favorite quotes: "My own feminist revolution evolved slowly, and traveled the world with me. To this day I have no idea what dissident professor or librarian placed feminist tests on the bookshelves at the university library in Jeddah, but I found them there. They filled me with terror. I understood they were pulling at a thread that would unravel

everything. Now that I am older, I can see that feeling terrified is how you recognize what you need. Terror encourages you to jump, even when you don't know if you will ever land.

Almost a century after Huda Shaarawi removed her face veil, we are floundering—and we will continue to flounder as long as a woman's body remains the canvas upon which we signal our acquiescence to conservatism and patriarchy.

Women have fought alongside men in political revolutions that have toppled dictators. But once these regimes fell, women have looked around to find the same oppression, sometimes inflicted by the men they stood shoulder to shoulder with, by men who claimed to be protecting them.

Being a woman anywhere is dangerous.

Unless we draw the connection between the misogyny of the state and of the street, and unless we emphasize the need for a social and sexual revolution, our political revolutions will fail. Just important, women will never be free to live as autonomous citizens whose bodily integrity is safe inside and outside the home.

The god of virginity is popular in the Arab world. It doesn't matter if you're a person of faith or an atheist, Muslim or Christian—everybody worships the god of virginity. Everything possible is done to keep the hymen—that most fragile foundation upon which the god of virginity sits—intact. At the altar of the god of virginity, we sacrifice not only our girls' bodily integrity and right to pleasure but also their right to justice in the face of sexual violation. Sometimes we even sacrifice their lives: in the name of honor, some families murder their daughters to keep the god of virginity appeased. When that happens, it leaves on vulnerable to the wonderful temptation of imagining a world where girls and women are more than hymens.

The most subversive thing a woman can do is talk about her life as if it really matters.

Slavish obedience to the clerics, who know how to squeeze every last drop of advantage out of religion, is killing our girls. We must speak blasphemy, if necessary; be accused of being apostates, if that is what is required. Muslims are taught that Islam put an end to the Arabian practice of burying alive newborn baby girls because they were considered worthless and a burden, but as long as we stay quiet in the face of the abomination of child marriage, we are effectively burying our girls alive today.

I do wonder, sometimes, if I had had a daughter, how I would have brought her up. How—when it's taken me so long to unlearn the things I believe are most damaging to the cause of women's liberation and equality—would I have raised my daughter to disobey?

Words are important—the fight silence, alienation, and violence. Words are flags planted on the planets of our beings; they say this is mine, I have fought for it and despite your attempts to silence me, I am still here. Just as important, words help us find each other and overcome the isolation that threatens to overwhelm and to break us. Words say we are

here. -Mona Eltahawy, Headscarves and Hymens: Why the Middle East Needs a Sexual Revolution

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