

## Teaching Materials

### Teaching Strategies

Given current U.S. military interventions in the Arab and Muslim worlds, there are important lessons to be gained by delving into questions of women and gender in the French Empire in North Africa. First and foremost, pervasive, monolithic, and very negative portrayals of Arab or Muslim women as inherently oppressed, powerless, voiceless—as lacking any agency—are immediately challenged by the region’s recent history. In addition, the wide variations in women’s responses to imperialism—from militant action, to peaceful resistance, to obtaining a modern, French education in order to oppose the colonial order—demonstrates clearly that North African women were not passive bystanders. Moreover, students begin to perceive at the same time that invoking a monolithic, unchanging “Islam” for explaining women’s lives and social status fails to explain much, if anything. It also becomes clear how much politics, violence, and militarism in various guises dramatically influence women and gender relations not only in colonial states but also in post-colonial states. All of these lessons and insights drawn from the North African case study have wide, nearly universal applicability to other empires, whether modern European empires, or the American Empire. Finally, by choosing to narrate individual women’s life stories, and employing this strategy as the principal frame for the module, I hope to show the immense power of biography to take us into the past where we question received wisdom or unexamined assumptions—invariably about ourselves and the social universe we inhabit.

### Discussion Questions:

- How did different manifestations of French colonialism impact the lives of the North African women whose voices are heard in, or through, the fourteen documents found in this module? How and why did women’s daily experiences of French imperialism differ in each of the three North African countries?
- How did imperial politics and policies and colonial representations of North African women intersect?
- How do the stories of these individual women contradict the images and stereotypes of Arab or Muslim women found in current American media?

## **Lesson Plan: Treatment of Women in Colonial North Africa**

### **Time Estimate**

Three to four 45-minute class periods.

### **Objectives**

After completing this lesson, students will be able to:

1. summarize the treatment of North African women by both North African men and the colonial powers.
2. compare the treatment of European and North African women during this time.
3. evaluate the multiple perspectives of the treatment of North African women.

### **Materials**

- Sufficient copies of the following sources (in this order):
  - Source 10: Interview, Tewhida Ben Sheikh
  - Source 13: Autobiography, Leila Abouzeid
  - Source 4: Letters, Lalla Zaynab
  - Source 2: Paintings, Claude Antoine Rozet
  - Source 5: Photograph, Beautiful Fatima
  - Source 8: Photograph, Fatima the Moroccan
  - Source 7: Report, M. Coriat
  - Source 9: Autobiography, Fadhma Amrouche
  - Source 3: Personal Account, Visit to Tunisian Harem
  - Source 1: Personal Account, Captain Carette
  - Source 11: Law, Code of Personal Status
- White/black board and markers/chalk, or overhead, transparencies, and pens (if desired)
- Primary Source Analysis Worksheet: Images (if desired)
- Primary Source Analysis Worksheet: Texts (if desired)

### **Strategies**

- **Historical Background/Prior Knowledge:** Students should be familiar with the origin and early history of Islam before attempting this lesson. An understanding of the role of the Qur'an in Islam is important, though familiarity with it and/or knowledge of specific passages is not necessary.

Students should be familiar with the Age of Imperialism and how France, Britain, Belgium, and other European nations treated the colonial people under their control.

It would also be helpful if students had some knowledge of Western documents advocating freedoms/liberties like the English Bill of Rights and the French Declaration of the Rights of Man.

- **Hook:** Read or write on the board the following quote from the Qur'an. "Enjoin your wives, daughters, and believing women that they should draw their outer garments over their persons. That is more proper, so that they may be recognized and not bothered." (33:59). Have the students think about the meaning of this quote. Ask the students to brainstorm reasons why women were asked to do this. Why not men?
- **Treatment of North African Women by North African Men:** Give the students copies of Source 10: Interview, Tewhida Ben Sheikh. Have the students read the document and underline or highlight words or phrases showing evidence of how North African women were treated. Discuss the students' findings.

Distribute copies of Source 13: Autobiography, Leila Abouzeid to the students. Once again, ask them to read the document and find evidence of how North African women were treated by North African men. Discuss the similarities and differences between the accounts of the two women seeking an education.

Have the students read Source 4: Letters, Lalla Zaynab. Students should understand the patriarchal nature of North African societies. Ask the students:

- Why was the author forced to appeal to the colonial authorities?
- Would this have happened if it was a European woman?
- How widely were Western women educated at this time?
- How much control over property did Western women have?
- Is the issue religious or simply based on gender?
- Think of Elizabeth Blackwell earning a medical degree in 1849 or Olympia Brown being ordained a minister in 1863; how long was it until large number of women followed in their footsteps?

Remind the students that property rights really only came in the late-19th century and voting in the early to mid-20th century. Most British and all German women got the vote in 1918 and American women the vote in 1920; most major powers extended the franchise prior to WWII with the exception of France and Japan, which did not allow women to vote until 1945; Switzerland not until 1971.

- **Treatment of North African Women by Colonial Powers:** Distribute copies of Source 2: Paintings, Claude Antoine Rozet and Source 5: Photograph, Beautiful Fatima. After the students study the images and fill out the Primary Source Analysis Worksheet: Images for each source, ask them to compare the images of

women portrayed. Why the differences?

Pass out copies of Source 8: Photograph, Fatima the Moroccan. Have the students study the image using the Primary Source Analysis Worksheet: Images as a guide. Does this image reinforce either of the other two images? Why or why not?

Give the students copies of Source 7: Report, M. Coriat and Source 9: Autobiography, Fadhma Amrouche. After the students read the documents, ask them what the goals of the French schools were. Discuss the three “C’s” of colonialism mentioned in the introduction to the unit (the civilizing mission, commerce, and Christianity). To what extent did the schools promote these goals?

The students should understand that Islam alone doesn’t explain the treatment of women, as evidenced by the photos. Ask the students if the photos support or refute the verse from the Qur’an in from the "Hook." The students should understand that the extent of the three “C’s” of colonialism depended on what was best for France. Native views toward assimilation were not considered.

- **Multiple Perspectives?:** Ask the students what they think of when they hear the word harem. After listing the students’ responses on the board or overhead, write the following quotation from Qur’an on the board or distribute as a handout.

“If you have to ask his [Muhammad’s] wives for anything, speak to them from behind a curtain. This is more chaste for your heart and for theirs.” (33:53).

Ask the students to discuss this quote in light of their brainstorm on the harem and the prior discussion regarding the photos and the verse from the Qur’an in the "Hook."

Distribute copies of Source 3: Personal Account, Visit to Tunisian Harem. Discuss meaning. Ask students to explain whether their perception of the harem has changed from the earlier brainstorm of harem and discussion of the quote and what they think of it after reading and discussing the document.

Distribute Source 1: Personal Account, Captain Carette to the students. After they read it, ask the students to contrast the image of women in it with the account of the visit of the harem. What about with the quotations from the Qur’an found above?

The French have held the idea of personal liberty dear since the French Revolution, yet they refused to educate native women in Tunisia. Distribute Source 11: Law, Code of Personal Status to the students. Have them read the document. Afterwards, ask the students to explain how a “repressive” culture (Muslims) could grant more rights to women than a Western democracy did.

## Differentiation

**Advanced Students:** Ask the students to examine the following three translations of the same verse of the Qur'an:

“Men are overseers of women because Allah has given the one more strength than the other, and because men are required to spend their wealth for the maintenance of women. Honorable women are, therefore, devoutly obedient and guard in the husband's absence what Allah requires them to guard (their husband's property and their own honor). As to those women from whom you fear disobedience, first admonish them, then refuse to share your bed with them, and then, if necessary, beat them. Then if they obey you, take no further action against them and do not make excuses to punish them. Allah is Supremely Great and is aware of your actions.” (4:34). —Translated by Muhammad Farooq-i-Azam Malik; published by The Institute of Islamic Knowledge

“Men are the support of women as God gives some more means than others, and because they spend of their wealth (to provide for them). So women who are virtuous are obedient to God and guard the hidden as God has guarded it. As for women you feel are averse, talk to them suavely; then leave them alone in bed (without molesting them), and go to bed with them (when they are willing). If they open up to you do not seek a reason for blaming them. Surely God is sublime and great. (4:34).” —Translated by Ahmed Ali; published by Princeton University Press

“Men are in charge of women, because Allah has made some of them excel the others, and because they spend some of their wealth. Hence, righteous women are obedient, guarding the unseen that Allah has guarded. And for those of them [women] that you fear might rebel, admonish them and abandon them in their beds and beat them. Should they obey you, do not seek a way of harming them; for Allah is Sublime and Great.” (4:34). —Translated by Majid Fakhry; published by New York University University Press

As Reza Aslan points out in *No God But God: The Origins, Evolution, and Future of Islam*, due to the variations in meaning of a number of Arabic words, multiple translations can be correct in meaning, grammar and so on. For example, “*qawwamuna 'ala an-nisa* can be understood as ‘watch over,’ ‘protect,’ ‘support,’ ‘attend to,’ ‘look after,’ or ‘be in charge of’ women.” (70).

Discuss with the students how the variations of meaning in the passages above have contributed to the different perceptions of the treatment of women in Islamic regions of the world.

**Less Advanced Students:** Do more of the document investigation either in groups (reading partners/buddies) where the students read the documents to each other and work together to fill out the document analysis sheets. Or, read the documents aloud together as a class and fill in the sheets as a class to try to ensure comprehension. To build vocabulary, have the students identify words needing clarification. Assemble a list on the board. Have dictionaries scattered through the room (ideally one per group) to which students may be referred. This could also be done as a group brainstorm.

For the DBQ, have students fill out the Essay Writing Guide Worksheet and evaluate it based on use of evidence and structure before having the students write out the full DBQ.

**Document Based Question (Suggested writing time: 40 minutes)**

*Directions:* The following question is based on the documents included in this module. This question is designed to test your ability to work with and understand historical documents. Write an essay that:

1. Has a relevant thesis and supports that thesis with evidence from the documents.
2. Uses all or all but one of the documents.
3. Analyzes the documents by grouping them in as many appropriate ways as possible. Does not simply summarize the documents individually.
4. Takes into account both the sources of the documents and the authors' points of view.
5. You may refer to relevant historical information not mentioned in the documents.

*Question:* To what extent did the treatment of women in North Africa change over time as the region went from being colonies in the 19th and early-20th centuries to independence in the mid-20th century?

Be sure to analyze point of view in at least three documents or images.

What additional sources, types of documents, or information would you need to have a more complete view of this topic?

## Bibliography

Baker, Alison. In *Voices of Resistance: Oral Histories of Moroccan Women*. Albany: SUNY Press, 1998.

This is an indispensable source for understanding the roles played by women from different social classes in the anti-colonial movement in Morocco. The author interviewed a wide array of Moroccan women who participated in various ways in the nationalist struggle.

Charrad, Mounira. *States and Women's Rights: The Making of Postcolonial Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001.

This is a comparative historical and sociological analysis of the current differences in the legal statuses of women in the three former French colonies. The author locates present-day variations in the legal status of women in the pre-colonial and particularly the colonial periods.

Clancy-Smith, Julia. "Colonialism: 18th to Early 20th Century." In *Methodologies, Paradigms and Sources*, vol. 1 of *Encyclopedia of Women and Islamic Cultures*. Suad Joseph. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2003.

This article surveys the impact that European imperialism exerted upon knowledge about Muslim women and Islamic cultures. It focuses upon the two major colonial powers—Great Britain and France—although other European nations are considered for comparative purposes. The essay's historical parameters run from 1750 until the eve of the Great War.

Clancy-Smith, Julia and Frances Gouda, eds. *Domesticating the Empire: Gender, Race, & Family Life in the Dutch and French Empires*. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1998.

This multi-author volume has a number of essays devoted to women and gender in the French Empire; three chapters deal specifically with 19th- and 20th-century Algeria. Lazreg, Marnia. *The Eloquence of Silence: Algerian Women in Question*. New York: Routledge Press, 1994.

This historical survey analyzes Algerian women's condition from the pre-colonial through the post-colonial periods. Lazreg takes to task not only France and French imperialism for the fact that Algerian women lack many basic civil and legal rights even today, but also male nationalist leaders who refused to recognize women's contributions to the nationalist struggle after independence was won in 1962.