

Book Review

Headscarves and Hymens

by Mona Eltahawy
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Reviewed by Sheila Ayala

All apologists for Islam should read this book. In her candid narrative, Mona Eltahawy exposes the hypocrisy of the purity culture that pervades Islamic thought.

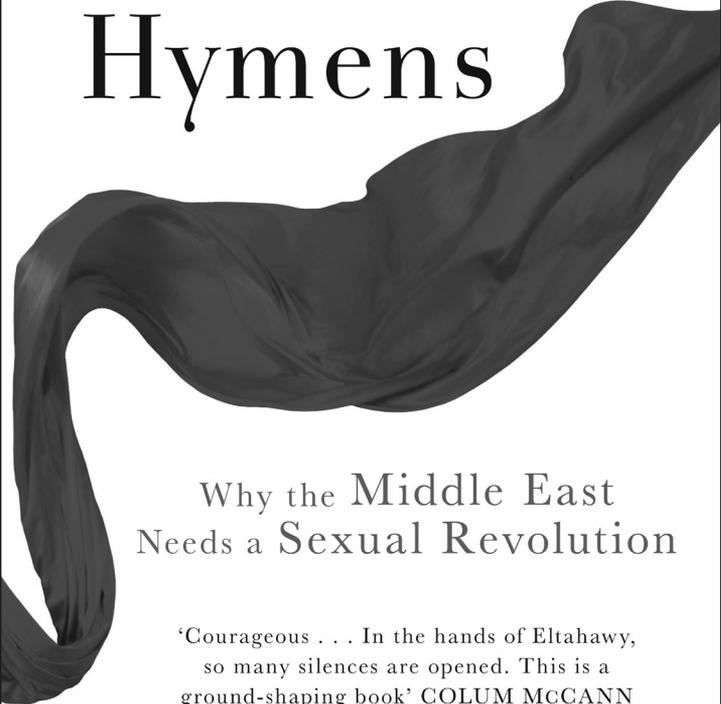
Eltahawy makes it quite clear that there is a strong hatred of women triggered by the guardians of Islam and such misogyny in the Arab world is an explosive issue.

Born in Egypt, Eltahawy and her family spent some time in England before moving to Saudi Arabia. It was a culture shock. But moving around like a walking tent doesn't prevent women from being harassed by men. On a pilgrimage to Mecca with her family when she was 15, Eltahawy felt a male behind her feel her buttocks. One would think that on such a sacred journey, the guy would be thinking pious thoughts of Allah and not about sex. Women can't drive cars in Saudi Arabia because, according to the clerics, driving will damage women's ovaries!

During the Arab Spring revolutions, women found themselves fighting on two fronts – for the downfall of dictators plus the emancipation of women. Sadly, to date, neither form of these revolutions has resulted in freedom, especially in Egypt. There, the current Egyptian government

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Why the Middle East
Needs a Sexual Revolution

'Courageous . . . In the hands of Eltahawy,
so many silences are opened. This is a
ground-shaping book' COLUM MCCANN

has sanctioned virginity tests on female prisoners, a violation akin to rape.

Eltahawy has disdain for people who claim that wearing a niqab is a feminist issue and is a woman's right. Women covering their faces, even if they do so freely, doesn't stop what this represents – that women should be kept hidden.

Several brave women are quoted in this book who are trying to reverse this hatred of women. This is a battle they must win because there is a universal truth: no one is free until we are all free. •

From the early nineties, Sheila Ayala has been an active participant in the Canadian humanist movement. Before retiring in January 2005, she was the Senior Administrator for Humanist Canada, formerly known as the Humanist Association of Canada.

