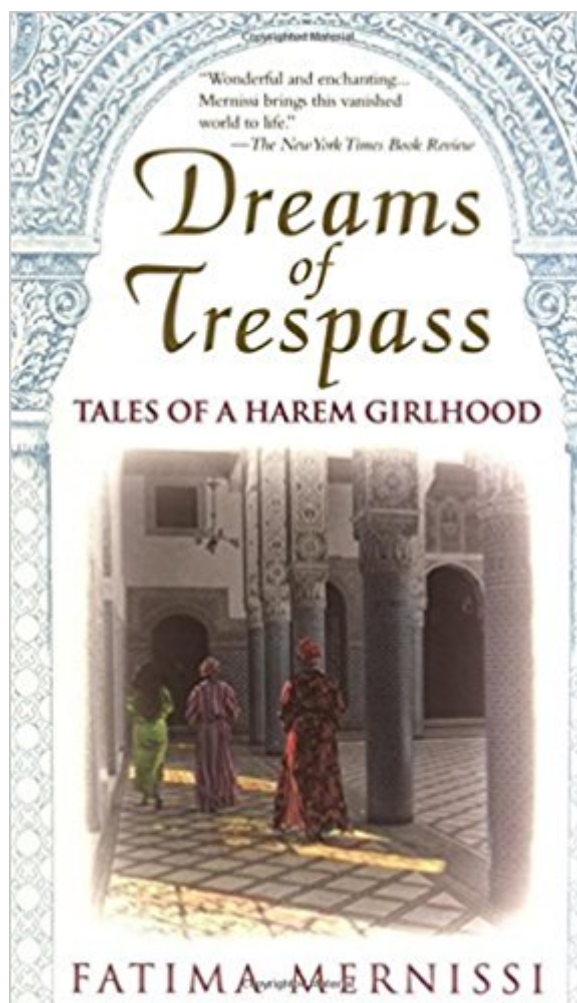


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# Dreams Of Trespass: Tales Of A Harem Girlhood



## Synopsis

I was born in a harem in 1940 in Fez, Morocco... So begins Fatima Mernissi in this exotic and rich narrative of a childhood behind the iron gates of a domestic harem. In *Dreams of Trespass*, Mernissi weaves her own memories with the dreams and memories of the women who surrounded her in the courtyard of her youth; women who, deprived of access to the world outside, recreated it from sheer imagination. *Dreams of Trespass* is the provocative story of a girl confronting the mysteries of time and place, gender and sex in the recent Muslim world.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

In 1940, harems still abounded in Fez, Morocco. They weren't the opulent, bejeweled harems of Scherezade, but the domestic sprawl of extended families encamped around a walled courtyard that marked the edges of women's lives. Though born into this tightly sheltered world, Fatimi Mernissi is constantly urged by her rebellious mother to spring beyond it. Worried that Mernissi is too shy and quiet, her mother tells her, "You must learn to scream and protest, just the way you learned to walk and talk." In *Dreams of Trespass*, an enjoyable weave of memory and fantasy, it is clear that Mernissi's fertile imagination let her slip back and forth through the gates that trapped her restive mother. She spins amiable, often improbable tales of the rigidly proper city harem in Fez and the contrasting freedoms of the country harem where her grandmother Yakima lives. There, one of Yakima's cowives rides like the wind, another swims like a fish, and Yakima relishes twitting the humorless first wife by naming a fat, waddling duck after her.

This rich, magical and absorbing growing-up tale set in a little-known culture reflects many universals about women. The setting is a "domestic harem" in the 1940s city of Fez, where an extended family arrangement keeps the women mostly apart from society, as opposed to the more stereotypical "imperial harem," which historically provided sex for sultans and other powerful court officials. Moroccan sociologist Mernissi ( *Islam and Democracy* ) charts the changing social and political frontiers and limns the personalities and quirks of her world. Here she tells of a grandmother who warns that the world is unfair to women, learns of the confusing WW II via radio news in Arabic and French, watches family members debate what children should hear, wonders why American soldiers' skin doesn't reflect Moroccan-style racial mixing and decides that sensuality must be a part of women's liberation. With much folk wisdom--happiness, the author's mother told her, "was when there was a balance between what you gave and what you took"--this book not only tells a winning personal story but also helps to feminize a much-stereotyped religion. Photos. BOMC and QPB selections. Copyright 1994 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

A fantastic, very well written book. The fascinating memoirs of Fatima Mernissi's childhood, together with her extended family and relatives, living in a "domestic harem", are so charmingly narrated. The book is originally written in English, although the author is an Arabic native speaker. Fatima Mernissi's writing is like a liquid velvet flowing through the pages of her book, scented with Moroccan orange and lemon-tree blossom. If you wish to enjoy the above book, take your time, choose a comfortable armchair, far from noise, fly to 1940's Morocco and enter the author's harem.. Here is her mother's intriguing point of view about happiness (page 80) : "When I asked her (her mother) how much happiness she had in her life, she said that it varied accordingly to the days. Some days she had 5%, others (...) 100%". I wished to congratulate Fatima Mernissi for her book and for the nostalgic read she offered to me. I felt deeply sorry when I saw that she died last year, at the age of 75.

This book is a wonderful chronicle of a unique cultural crossroads from a unique and delightful perspective. Set in Morocco, where Arab and western worlds were colliding in the 1940s, the story is told from the perspective of a little girl who is trying to make sense of her swiftly changing world. She was born into a traditional family's harem at a time when women's rights in the Arab world were starting to take hold and modern culture was beginning to obliterate the traditions of centuries. She tries to make sense of both worlds as she navigates her journey from childhood to becoming a

woman and defines her sense of self. The parallels to today's world are uncanny and timeless.

I purchased this for a book club group I am in. I started it a couple of times, but I found the writing to be overly repetitive and the plot slow moving, so I never could really get started. The subject matter is interesting - 1940s Morocco, in a communal residential compound shared by extended family - but there wasn't much that grabbed my attention and held it, or anything about the character that intrigued me and made me want to continue to book. It continued to feel like a chore to read. So, I never finished it, and didn't speak much about it at my book club discussion.

An interesting look at Morocco during the French occupation and in particular it was an interesting glimpse into harem life during that time period. The only reason it got three stars is that it isn't written all that well. I felt like I was reading a diary of an 11-year-old so it tended to be repetitive and a little bit boring in places.

I was rather surprised to see a couple reviewers blasting Mernissi for writing that seemingly "attacks the religion of Islam," and for misusing the term "harem." I'm quite sure our author knows exactly what a harem is, and I'm sure authors of MEMOIRS are more than welcome to display their personal thoughts, feelings, and opinions. This aside, Mernissi does not attack any religious institution in her book. She simply writes of her own mental progression, and the diverse influences on that progression throughout her youth. Do not read this book expecting political fireworks or a grand emotional saga. If those styles seem better suited for you, I recommend Savushun. This novel is a much gentler, more subtle investigation of the culture through the eyes of a young girl who is trying to make sense of her world. I find the innocence of this novel very endearing, and feel that the understated messages make this book a more powerful read than most memoirs. I hope to read this novel with my English students this year.

An excellent book about domestic harems in 1940's Morocco.

I will be traveling to Morocco soon, and I was captivated by this book. This memoir is set in the background of the French and Spanish occupations, with some incursions by Germany right before World War II, and takes place in the harem where Ms. Mernissi grew up, with visits to other harems. It is the story of her girlhood, and recounts the struggles of some of the women to emerge into more modern, less traditional roles, mainly through encouraging their daughters' educations and

aspirations, and the battles of some of the other women to cling to traditions. A great glimpse into Moroccan traditions, lovingly told.

She writes beautifully. A very touching memoir.

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