

Center for International Studies - Albuquerque International Association present

Middle Eastern Women Today: Odalisques, Terrorists or Just Like Us?

By Dr. Evelyn A. Early

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Albuquerque Museum of Art and History

The importance of the Middle East to Americans and New Mexicans in strategic, security and economic senses is clear from our daily diet of news. What becomes ever clearer is our need for **constructive engagement with the Muslim world**, a project hampered by **stereotypes, distortions and misinformation**. This is even more evident when one thinks of women in the Islamic Middle East, whose lives today are a mystery to most of the media.

Dr. Evelyn A. Early will contrast the stereotypes with the reality of lives of Middle Eastern Islamic women. The stereotypes have appeared in the popular literature as everything from **exotic odalisque harem figures** to veiled, treacherous terrorists. They have also appeared as **downtrodden working class wives** and as **socially activist royalty**. Dr. Early suggests the truth is best found in everyday real-life examples. We will see the world of M.E. women through:

- Revolutionary activities of veiled women** slipping through check points in war-torn Algeria
- the role of women in the jihadist movement**--both as consorts and as bombers
- negotiating for resources via wedding rituals in working class Istanbul
- the religious experience of **an American woman on the Hajj to Mecca**
- shrine visitation and **raising children** amongst women in Iran
- the impact of oil wealth** on women's status in the Sultanate of Oman
- images of beauty** in hair salons in Casablanca, Cairo, and Paris

Dr. Evelyn Early, a diplomat with the Department of State, is currently Senior State Department Advisor at the Air University in Montgomery, Alabama. She has served as Counselor for Press and Cultural Affairs at embassies in Rabat, Prague, Damascus, and Khartoum. She has researched in Lebanon, Egypt and Syria and taught anthropology at the University of New Mexico, Notre Dame University, and the University of Houston. Her B.A. is from Macalester College, her M.A. from the American University of Beirut, and her Ph.D. from the University of Chicago.

Please send your check to CFIS/AIA, PO Box 92995, Albuquerque, NM 87199 by September 10, 2009. \$15 – AIA members; \$19 – non-members. For details and updates please visit www.abqinternational.org or call 856-7277.