

# Brave and Bold

Stories of Arab Feminists  
Who Made History



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## Stories of Arab Feminists Who Made History

This book was made possible thanks to the dedicated efforts of colleagues from the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung in the Middle East and North Africa region



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Edits by Cory Rodgers and Samantha Elia

Dear Reader,



The book you are holding in your hands takes us on a journey through the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, where extraordinary feminists have defied norms, challenged adversity, and left a lasting mark on their societies. Since the initial spark of the idea for this book, many people have actively contributed to its development. This collaborative effort has involved authors, illustrators, activists, and colleagues. Here is how this book came to life.

The Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) is the oldest political foundation in Germany. Its rich tradition of promoting social democracy dates back to its founding in 1925. It is represented internationally by more than 100 offices outside of Germany. The work of the foundation focuses on the core ideas and values of social democracy - freedom, justice and solidarity - which align with the demands of feminist movements around the world.

Since 2018, the regional office of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung on Political Feminism and Gender in the Middle East and North Africa (FES PolFem) has worked with feminist activists and movements as well as women rights' organizations, supporting them in producing feminist knowledge, mainstreaming feminism into the public discourse, and advocating for gender justice.

These partners aim to carry forward the legacies of the region's feminist leaders. Through their tireless and courageous work,

they achieved what often seemed unachievable. Their stories, however, are seldom told. Meanwhile, in the MENA region and beyond, the political and social struggles of men dominate media reporting and school education. Therefore, FES PolFem decided to showcase a selection of Arabic-speaking feminists on social media, as part of its 16 Days of Activism against Gender-based Violence campaign in 2022. The campaign received many positive reactions and was shared widely in the region.

In order to tell the life stories, struggles, and achievements of these influential feminists to children, we decided to turn the campaign into a children's book with a coloring component. By doing so, we aimed to make these stories more tangible and interactive. Our hope is that they become a source of inspiration not just for children within the Arab-speaking world but also for those across borders and cultures. Our mission is twofold: first, we must raise awareness about these feminists among younger generations to inspire them to continue the fight for gender justice. But more importantly, we aim to reach audiences beyond the region, where stubborn stereotypes continue to cast Arab-speaking women as oppressed victims. The stories contained in this book show that feminism is a deeply rooted movement in the region, not a foreign import.

In a world that often oversimplifies complex issues, this book affords an opportunity to engage children in meaningful conversations about equality and social justice.

We believe that it is of utmost importance for children to understand that gender equality is not a far-fetched dream but can be achieved through the commitment and support of a new generation of feminists. By introducing them to these stories, we encourage them to question the world around them, challenge unfair practices, and cultivate a deep sense of empathy for others.

We would like to thank all those who played a vital role in creating this book.

A special acknowledgment goes to our colleagues at FES, especially to those who proposed influential feminists from their respective countries to be spotlighted here. We also thank the illustrator, editors, and translators for their outstanding work and unwavering commitment.



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## Hello Friends!

In this book you will discover the stories of 12 feminist activists from the Middle East and North Africa. Over the past century, these women have worked really hard to make life better for girls and women across this large and important region of our world, which stretches from Morocco in the West to Iraq in the East, and from Syria in the North to Yemen and Sudan in the South. These are stories of courage and heroism, but they are not fairy tales or fables. They are stories about real women who made a real difference in the world where we live.

But before we turn to the first story, let's talk about **feminism**. Maybe you have heard this word before, but do you know what it means?

Feminism is a **global movement** working towards equality between women and men. You see, sometimes in our world, girls don't get the same opportunities as boys.

Not so long ago, in some places, girls were not allowed to go to school, and women were not allowed to vote or decide how they wanted to live their lives. Isn't that surprising? And guess what? In some parts of the world, things are still like that today.

The **feminist movement** is trying to change this and make the world a more just and fair place for everyone. It is because of the feminist movement that women today gained many rights and opportunities

The people who participate in this movement are **feminists**.



What makes someone a **feminist**?

A feminist is someone who believes that girls should be treated equally with boys, and women treated equally with men. Feminists believe that everyone should have the same rights, get the same opportunities, and be treated fairly, no matter if they are a girl or a boy.

That's what being a feminist is all about!



Feminism is about letting people be themselves and not forcing them to do what we expect them to do based on their gender. Many people think that boys should like certain things, like playing with cars, while girls should like other things, like playing with dolls. But feminism says that it's okay for boys and girls to like whatever they want. You can be a girl who loves playing sports or a boy who loves dancing.

The twelve feminists whose stories are told in this book were brave women who fought tirelessly to make life better for women and girls in the Middle East and North Africa.

They organized protests,  
wrote books,  
gave speeches,  
and worked together to raise awareness about the importance of women's rights.

They faced many challenges from people who did not want things to change, but they never gave up. The efforts of these feminists have brought us a long way toward achieving equality between men and women.



But the journey is not over yet; there is still much work to be done. Some inequalities and challenges still exist, and that is why it is important for all of us to continue to demand equality.

Reading feminist stories is not just important for girls or women, it's important for everyone!

These stories teach us about equality, respect, and the power of standing up for what's right. They describe the long struggle of feminists fighting for change and how they have benefited people in the region. So, let's dive into these stories, learn from them, and let them inspire us to create a fairer and more equal world for everyone.

If you find these short summaries inspiring, we encourage you not only to read more about the lives of these women, but to look up other feminists from the region as well!



We had a lot of fun choosing the feminists for this book. The only problem was that we could only select 12 stories from 12 countries!

There are certainly many more stories of incredible feminists who have fought and are still fighting for the rights of women and girls in the Middle East and North Africa.

The following are short and concise stories that share some of the biggest challenges and greatest achievements of the selected feminists.



## Fatema Mernissi Morocco | 1940 – 2015

Once upon a time, in the Moroccan city of Fez, there was a little girl named Fatema Mernissi.

Even though it was unusual for women to study at university, Fatema did just that. She became one of the very few women of her time to earn a **doctorate degree**. She went from being one of the rare women who studied at the university to becoming one of the even rarer women who taught there!

Fatema wrote many bold books about feminism. Her inspiration came from the strong and courageous women in her life, like her mother and aunt. One of her most famous books is called “Dreams of Trespass.” In this book, Fatema shared all the important lessons she learned from the women who came before her. She explained how their stories helped her stand up for herself when society treated her unfairly.

Fatema also did important research in the field of **women’s studies**. She traveled to many towns and villages, talking to women from all kinds of backgrounds. Her research was so impressive that it changed the way many people thought about women in Morocco.



## Assia Djebar

Algeria | 1936 – 2015

Have you ever heard the amazing story of Assia Djebar, one of Algeria's most famous **novelists**? She started off writing stories for books, until her own life became a remarkable story.

Assia's stories in her novels were all about the lives of Arab women and the tough challenges they faced. She didn't stop at just writing stories, though. She also fought for women to have more rights and opportunities to learn, work, and be in **politics**.

Now, let us take you back to the beginning of Assia's story, which starts in 1962, when Algeria became independent. Assia noticed that history books were only written about men revolutionaries, fighters and heroes. But she wondered, "What about the brave women who fought and were revolutionaries and heroines?"

She wasn't happy that their part in Algeria's history was being left out. So, she decided to rewrite the history of Algeria and make sure it included Algerian women and the important role they played in making their country free.

Thanks to feminist authors like Assia, the history of our region now includes the stories of brave women as well!



## Lina Ben Mhenni

Tunisia | 1983 – 2020

“Tunisian Girl” was the name of the blog of the Tunisian feminist, Lina Ben Mhenni. **Blogs** were (and still are) usually used like diaries - to tell personal stories. But Lina, who was looking for creative ways to confront the people harming her country, decided to use her **blog** to tell the world what was happening.

Through her **blog**, Lina told people about the injustices that were happening every day in Tunisia. Lina’s **blog** was honest, and lots of people liked reading it. It became so popular that the leaders in Tunisia started to worry that the whole world would find out about the bad things they were doing. They decided to shut down Lina’s **blog** and told her she couldn’t write on it anymore.

But Lina believed in her cause and knew that telling the truth was really important. She didn’t give up! She fought really hard and managed to reopen her blog!

Back then, most **bloggers** were using **pseudonyms** to protect themselves from getting into trouble with the government. But Lina was different. She used her real name because she was brave and not afraid of anyone.



## Salwa Bugaighis

Libya | 1963 – 2014

Who was the most famous woman lawyer in Libya?

That would be Salwa Bugaighis. She worked in the field of human rights and played an important role in shaping the very first government after the Libyan revolution.

However, when she became a **minister** in the government, something stood out - all the other **ministers** were men, and she was the only woman! In order to make things fairer, she demanded the appointment of other women to join her in the Government. Unfortunately, no one responded to her demands. But Salwa refused to give up, and so she decided to resign from the government - which means that she decided to leave her job as a minister.

Salwa did not leave her position as a minister because she was a quitter. She stepped down as a protest, to call for equality between women and men.



## Fatima Ahmed Ibrahim Sudan | 1933 – 2017

What was it like in the past to be a woman in Sudan?

Well, for one, women did not have the right to vote, their salaries were much lower than those of men, and even **maternity leave** was not paid! But all that changed when, for the first time, a woman won Sudan's parliamentary election and became the first woman **member of parliament** in the Middle East.

And her name? Fatima Ahmed Ibrahim!

While working in the Government, Fatima was very rebellious. She didn't just go along with things that were unfair or not right. She stood up and said: 'This is not okay!'

Fatima had great ideas about how to make **laws** fairer in her country. She wanted women to have the same rights as men. So, when she was a member of the **parliament**, she was determined to get those laws approved, and she succeeded! Because of Fatima, Sudanese women's lives changed forever.



## Huda Shaarawi

Egypt | 1879 – 1947

Once upon a time, in the country of Egypt, it was not typical for a woman to study or work.

But a young girl named Huda felt that this was wrong. She insisted that a woman can do everything a man can do, and more!

Huda believed that women can only be free if they work together. So, she started bringing together women from different parts of Egypt - some from poor families, some from rich families, some from the cities, and some from small villages. She wanted every girl to have the chance to learn. That's why she started a school just for girls, where they could study subjects like science, **philosophy**, and languages, which before were thought to be only for boys!

Because of the hard work of Huda and her feminist friends, things have changed in Egypt. Now, it's not only boys who go to school; girls do too! Girls can study and learn just like boys. And when they finish school, women can even go to university and pick any subject they like to study.



## Samaha Khalil

Palestine | 1923 – 1999

“My aunt Um Khalil,” is how people used to call the Palestinian feminist activist Samaha Khalil.

Samaha was famous for her **social work** and for starting a group called “Inash Al-Usra”. At first, it was just a few people meeting in Samaha’s garage. But they were so passionate and determined that they became the biggest and most important group that helps girls get an education in Palestine!

In 1996, Samaha did something really special. She became the first woman in an Arab country to try to become president. When she ran for president, she talked about how important it is for everyone in Palestine to have **freedom**, equality, and independence. Even though she didn’t win the **presidential election**, a lot of people voted for her and liked what she said. By running for president as a woman, Samaha showed other girls in Palestine that they can have big dreams and be leaders too.



## Asma Khader

Jordan | 1952 – 2023

Once upon a time, in a country called Jordan, there was a girl named Asma Khader who fought for **women's rights** and **social justice**. Her mom, Martha, had a clothing shop in the city of Amman, where they lived. Asma went to school in the city and also helped her mom in the shop. She loved learning and after graduating from school she got into the University of Damascus. Asma finished university with a law degree and started her own law office. Back then, there weren't many women lawyers, but Asma showed everyone that women could do this job really well.

Asma was such a skilled and committed lawyer that many people in Jordan really liked her. She even got a job in the Jordanian government! In that role, Asma made the rights of women and the **discrimination** they face a priority in Jordan.

But working in the government wasn't the end of Asma's mission; she always wanted to make an even bigger difference for her community! So, she also created and joined hands with **human rights organizations** to change **laws** that were not fair to women. She pushed for **laws** that gave women more freedom and safety. These **laws** passed and helped lots of women who really needed them.





## Linda Matar

Lebanon | 1925 – 2023

The journey to make the world better sometimes starts in schools or factories. But in the story of Lebanese activist Linda Matar, her feminist fight began in both places: the school as well as the factory.

When Linda was just 12 years old, she went to school at night and worked in a silk factory during the day. While at the factory, she noticed something that bothered her a lot. Even though women and girls worked really hard, they were treated badly. Linda was worried because women didn't get **equal pay** - they got paid less than men, even when they did the same exact work. Linda was also concerned that women at work could not share their thoughts or speak their opinions. Moreover, in Lebanon, women were not allowed to vote.

Linda was furious that women were treated this way, and she wanted to make it better. After she graduated from school, she joined a group called the **suffragettes** that was working hard to give women the right to vote. In 1952, thanks to all their hard work, adult Lebanese women were finally allowed to vote.

Linda didn't stop there. She remained an activist for more than 40 years. She traveled all around the world to places like China and Mexico to build support for the feminist movement, fighting relentlessly for the rights of Arab women and girls.



## Mary Ajami

Syria | 1888 – 1965

It was the year 1888.

In a country called Syria, there lived a girl named Mary Ajami. She was very ambitious and didn't want her life to only be about doing chores at home. But in those days, people thought that women should only take care of the house and kids.

When Mary was 22 years old, she did something amazing. She started a magazine and named it "The Bride." This was the very first magazine in the Arab world to call for the **liberation** and education of women. Many of the **journalists** who wrote for the magazine were also feminists, just like Mary. They used their stories and essays to change the way that people thought about women and what they could do in society. These journalists used **pseudonyms** to protect themselves because some people would get angry if women wrote about "**politics**" or "**freedom**," or even if they asked to have basic human rights.

To follow her ambition, Mary began organizing **intellectual salons** where women could get together and discuss important topics like **philosophy**, **politics**, religion, and poetry. By doing this, Mary showed how smart and thoughtful women can be, and she proved wrong those who believed women should only stay home and do chores.



## Naziha Al Dulaimi

Iraq | 1923 – 2007

Do you know the first woman to become a **minister** in Iraq was?

In fact, she was the first woman to become prime minister in the whole Arab world!

Her name was Naziha Al Dulaimi. When Naziha was a little girl, her dad used to read interesting stories to her and her sisters from newspapers and books about history and different cultures. These stories made her curious about the world and how societies can change.

As she grew up, she decided to become a doctor, but she also wanted to change the ways women were treated in Iraq. That is why she became known as one of the first feminists in Iraq.

She wanted to make sure that when women got married or divorced they had rules to protect them and keep them safe. She also didn't want young girls to be forced into marriage when they weren't ready. So, she fought really hard for a special set of rules called the **personal status law**. This law decides how things work in families, like marriage and divorce. In 1959, the **personal status law** suggested by Naziha got approved, and at that time it was a big deal because it gave women in Iraq more rights than women in other Arab countries had.



## Raufa Hassan al-Sharki Yemen | 1958 – 2011

Once upon a time, in a country called Yemen, there was a little girl named Raufa.

At school, Raufa noticed that the boys' books were better than the girls' books. So, she and her friends decided to do something about it. They went to the Prime Minister's house and asked him for better books for girls. And guess what? Their request was granted!

That's how the story of Raufa Hassan al-Sharki began. As she grew up, she realized that only men were writing in newspapers and magazines. So, she decided to write in one too! She became the very first woman **journalist** to write for a newspaper in Yemen.

But that's not all. The same girl who once protested in front of the Prime Minister's house grew up to become a **human rights** activist. She also became a teacher at Sana'a University.

Raufa was really passionate about her work. She encouraged women to speak up and vote, and she asked the government to have more women in **parliament**. To make this happen, she trained women who wanted to be part of **politics** and helped them get important roles in the government. They all worked together to make life better for Yemeni women.



As we come to the end of our stories, we have learned about some amazing feminists from the Middle East and North Africa who have made a big difference in the world.

These wonderful women have taught us how determination, courage, and never giving up can change the world for the better.

Through their stories, we have learned that change begins with a single voice, a single idea.

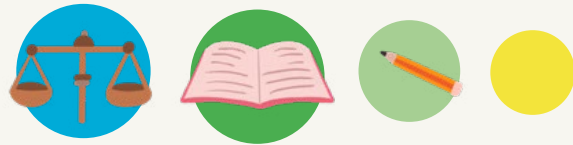
These inspiring women have challenged stereotypes, broken barriers, and worked tirelessly to create a more equal and just society for all.



But remember, the journey towards equality is not over. There are still battles to be fought and rights to be claimed.

This is why we all have to work hand in hand. Together, we can face greater challenges, help each other change things to the better, and complete what these amazing women started.

Together, we can create a future where every girl and every woman can learn, work, and make her own life decisions in a safe and secure environment.



## Glossary (Concepts)

### Freedom

Freedom is when we can make decisions and do the things we want without someone else forcing those decisions on us. In a free world, we are happy. Freedom means to be independent in what we think, say, or do. But at the same time, freedom is everyone's right, and this is what drives us to use our freedom responsibly, in a way that does not harm others or limit their own freedom.

**Liberation** is when a group or an individual works to regain their freedom or when it is given to them.

### Equality

Equality means that every person should have the same rights and opportunities. We achieve equality when we treat everyone with the same respect, regardless of the person's appearance, skin color, ability, country of origin, or gender.

### Justice

Justice is making sure that everyone is treated in a fair and right way. Justice is achieved when everyone gets what they deserve. Justice is also related to laws, rights and duties, and making sure that no one violates a law that we all respect. Justice and equality complement each other, and when we are fair to others, we help build a more equal world. When we

stop discriminating against people who are different and treat others as equals, we get closer to achieving justice.

### Social Justice

Social justice is making sure that justice reaches everyone in our societies. It means making sure that everyone, regardless who they are or where they come from, has access to their rights, such as education, healthcare, and other basic needs. In a socially just world, everyone has a chance to live a happy life without fear regardless of their race, religion, or gender.

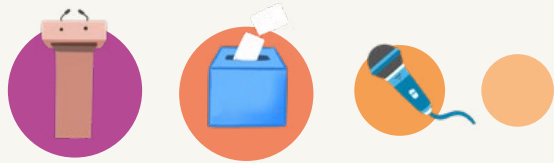
### Discrimination

Discrimination is an unfair act against others, which causes a person or group of persons to lose their rights because of differences in their appearance, skin color, religion, gender, or country of origin.

Women can be discriminated against just because they are women. For example, in some countries, girls may not have the same opportunity to go to school and learn as boys. This discrimination is harmful and goes against justice as well as equality.

### Philosophy

Philosophy is thinking deeply about things that surround us, from the simplest to the most complex. It's about being curious and wanting to understand the world around us. Philosophers are the people who study philosophy and try to answer the big questions like "What is right and what is wrong?" or "What is the purpose of life?"



## Glossary (Politics)

### Politics

Politics is about how people make decisions together - decisions that affect not only them but also other people. Imagine you and your friends want to decide what game to play. You might have different ideas. Some of your friends might want to play football, while others might prefer basketball. To decide which game to play, you all have to talk and share your views. You might even take a vote to see which game most people want to play. That's a bit like politics!

### Minister

A minister is one of the people who run the government. Ministers are chosen because they have experience in a specific area, such as education, health, or transportation. Their task is to implement projects approved by Parliament and to find appropriate solutions to improve and develop the country. They are also supposed to listen to people's complaints through state institutions and respond by making things better..

### Member of Parliament

A member of parliament (MP) or a deputy is elected by the people to represent them and make decisions on their behalf. MPs listen to the concerns of the people and try to improve their communities and the country as a whole. Choosing an

MP is just like choosing a class representative to speak for you and your fellow classmates.

The members of parliament meet in an important building called the "Parliament," where decisions are taken after deliberating and voting on them

### Candidate

A candidate (for parliament) is someone who wants to become a member of parliament in their country. Being a candidate for parliament is an important responsibility because it means that a person wants to make a positive impact on their community and the country as a whole. They want to help make decisions and create laws that improve the lives of everyone living in the country..

### Presidential Elections

Presidential elections are when people choose who will be the new leader of the country. This person is called the president. Elections take place over the span of one day, when adult citizens cast their ballots. Ballots are special pieces of paper on which people write down the name of the person they want to be the leader. Then, all the votes are counted, and the person with the most votes becomes the president of the country!



## Glossary (Laws and Rights)

### Laws

Laws are the rules that help us live together peacefully and fairly in our communities. Just like we have rules at home or at school, laws are rules that everyone in a country or a city must follow. Laws are created by the government to make sure people are safe and treated fairly, but they also provide guidelines for things like working conditions and education. Some laws are also put in place to protect the environment and animals.

### Human rights

Human rights are the basic rights and freedoms that every person in the world should have simply because they are human. Human rights include the right to be treated equally under the law, to have an education, to be safe, and much more. They help create a fair and just world where everyone is treated with dignity and respect.

### Human Rights Groups

Human rights groups are organizations made up of people who work together to protect and promote the rights and freedoms of all people. Human rights groups keep an eye out for any unfair treatment or injustice happening in the world. They raise awareness about issues like discrimination, poverty, violence, and unfair laws

### Women's rights

Women's rights are human rights, but women have been deprived of their most basic rights for a long time, just because they are women. Fighting for women's rights aims to put an end to this discrimination, to protect girls and women, to give them fair opportunities, and to provide the necessary safety for them. In many areas, women are still deprived of their rights, while men enjoy their full rights.

### Global Movement

A global movement is when a lot of people from all over the world unite to try and change something important. They share ideas, support each other, and work towards a common goal. The feminist movement is a great example of a global movement: people from all countries joined forces to make sure that men and women are treated the same and have the same opportunities.

### Equal Pay

Imagine you and your friend are doing the same job, like cleaning up a room. You both work equally hard and do the same tasks. Now, imagine if someone told you that your friend would be paid more than you even though you did the exact same work. That wouldn't be fair, right? Equal pay is a way to make sure that everyone gets the same amount of money for doing the same job. It doesn't matter if the person doing the job is a boy or a girl or what they look like. What matters is that you are doing the same work, and you should be paid equally for it.



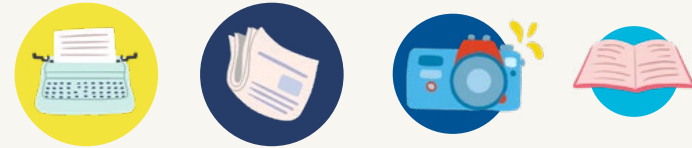
## Suffragettes

The word 'suffrage' means having the right to vote. Although most people today see suffrage as a natural right for everyone, this was not always the case. In the past, most countries only allowed men to vote. So, some brave women decided to do something about it and change the rules so that women could also vote. These amazing women were called "suffragettes."

## Paid Maternity Leave

When a mother has a baby, she needs time to take care of the baby's needs. Babies need a lot of attention, love, and care, especially in the early months. Maternity leave is a period of time during which a woman is entitled to leave work in order to rest after childbirth and take care of her newborn.

During that period, the mother is entitled to receive her salary so that she does not neglect her newborn for the sake of the job. Taking care of a newborn is a task that requires a lot of effort, so it is difficult to keep doing another job at the same time.



## Glossary (Education and Profession)

### Journalist

A journalist is someone who gathers information and brings news to people. Journalists go to different places, meet people, and find out what's happening in the world. They ask questions and write or talk about what they discover. They work to bring news, stories, and important information to people through newspapers, television, and the internet.

### Blog / Blogger

A blog is like a personal online journal or diary that someone creates and shares with others on the internet. It's a place where people can write about their thoughts, experiences, or share information about different topics they are interested in.

The person who writes a blog is called a blogger. In the Middle East and North Africa, many bloggers have used blogs to engage in politics.

### Doctorate

Imagine you love learning about a certain subject, like dinosaurs. You spend a lot of time studying and becoming an expert in that subject. When you have a doctorate (or a PhD), it means you have studied a lot, read many books, and worked for years on a topic. The doctorate is the highest level of degree you can receive from the university.

## Women's Studies

Imagine you have a special class where you learn all about the amazing things women have done and the issues they face. Women's studies is just like that class! It's a way to learn about the lives, accomplishments, and struggles of women and how they have shaped the world we live in.

## Social Work

Social work is a special kind of job that focuses on helping people and making the world a better place. Social workers use their skills and compassion to support individuals, families, and communities who may be facing challenges or going through difficult times.

## Intellectual Salons

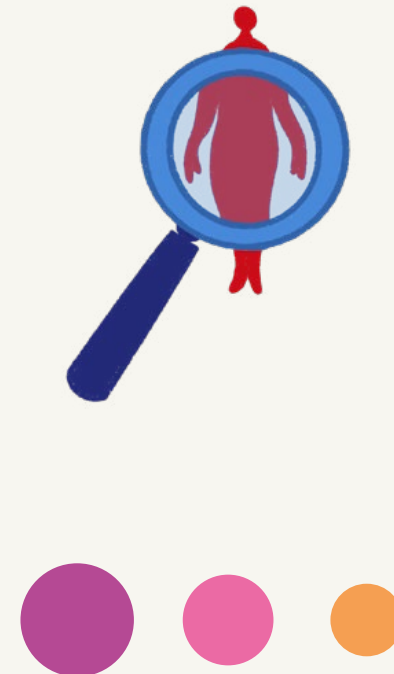
Intellectual salons are gatherings where people come together to have interesting and meaningful conversations about different topics. These gatherings were very common in Europe in the 17th and 18th centuries. After that, they moved to the Middle East and North Africa, where they were spaces for women to participate in public affairs.

## Pseudonym

A pseudonym is a special name that someone uses instead of their real name. It's like having a secret nickname that you can use when you want to keep your true identity private.

## Novelist

A novelist is a very creative person who loves to write stories. They use their imagination and words to create amazing adventures and bring characters to life.



# Coloring Pages





Fatema Mernissi



Assia Djebar





Lina Ben Mhenni



Salwa Bugaighis





Fatima Ahmed Ibrahim



Huda Shaarawi





Samiha Khalil



Asma Khader





Linda Matar



Mary Ajami







Naziha Al Dulaimi



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السياسية**

POLITICAL FEMINISM