



Conference: "The Veil in Muslim Women's Writing: Theory, Poetry, Fiction", by Susan Stanford Friedman

In the Spring of 2015 **Susan Stanford Friedman**, invited by the GEMMA coordination, visited the University of Granada and the GEMMA students and scholars had the opportunity to attend her conference on May 20th. The conference, held at the Facultad de Filosofía y Letras of the University of Granada, was entitled "The Veil in Muslim Women's Writing: Theory, Poetry, Fiction."

Susan Stanford Friedman is Hildale Professor and Professor of English and Women's Studies specializing in Virginia Woolf. Her research interests include 20th and 21st century American, British, and Anglophone world literatures; Modernism/Modernity; Women's Writing (fiction, poetry, essay); Feminist Theory; Comparative Postcolonial, Diaspora, Migration, Transnational, and Border Theory and Literature; Narrative Theory; Psychoanalysis; Multiculturalism and Race Studies; Contemporary Cultural Theory, especially Anthropology and Geography; Film; and Religion. She has published over seventy articles and is the author of the following award-winning books, *Psyche Reborn: The Emergence of H.D.* (1981) and *Mappings: Feminism and the Cultural Geographies of Encounter* (1998). She is also co-editor of *Contemporary Women's Writing*, an Oxford University Press journal. She is currently working on her book *Sisters of Scheherazade* on feminism, Muslim Cultures, and Women's Diaspora



Writing. The issues addressed in her conference revolved

around her current research project which will be published under the above mentioned title *Sisters of Scheherazade*. The main theme was **the veil**, which she defined as a **signifier with a variety of meanings that can be interpreted** in numerous ways according to the moment in time, culture, society and people. She discussed the diversity of interpretations that can be deduced from the presence of a veil. In a Western context, the veil or the veiling can be read as synonym of

oppression, associated with terrorism and related to the need for emancipation, freedom or rescue. However, for Muslim minorities and especially Muslim women, the veil may mean a variety of things which do not necessarily have to do with coercion or oppression: the choice of veiling may take into account aspects such as religion, culture, safety, etc, and **it is women's decision whether to wear it or not.**

Professor Stanford Friedman also discussed the issue of the veil in light of Feminism and Feminist Theories. She discussed the Feminists' claim that they have their own right to interpret those extracts from the Quran that mention the veil, and introduced the audience to the Arab Feminist **Fatima Mernissi** and her most acclaimed publication, *Beyond the Veil* (1975). In her book, Mernissi argues that the veil means to control women's space (the veil as a "symbolic form of seclusion"), secluding women into the domestic spaces and veiling them when they are in the public spaces. She also uses the concept *fitna* (chaos, temptation), to criticize the fact that women are constructed as the embodiment of destruction, disorder and the dangers of sexuality.

Professor Friedman briefly talked about the veil in Modernity, and the movements for the unveiling and re-veiling in the 20th century, and she also gave some examples of Muslim women authors writing diasporic narratives, like Marjane Satrapi, Elie Shafak, Leila Aboulela, and Mohja Kahf.

After the conference, there was a session dedicated to discussion where many intriguing topics were raised. At the closure of the conference, some GEMMA students had the opportunity to approach Professor Friedman and chat a bit about their own interests and their future research projects.

Review written by Melissa Peláez and Laura Tejero.