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SEX AND THE CITADEL



INTIMATE LIFE
IN A CHANGING
ARAB WORLD

SHEREEN EL FEKI

"A FASCINATING SURVEY OF SEX THAT IS RICH IN DETAIL. . . .
SHEREEN EL FEKI IS A BRAVE WOMAN." —*THE ECONOMIST*

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A Fig Leaf Is Dropped in Islamic Societies

'Sex and the Citadel,' by Shereen El Feki

By JANET MASLIN APRIL 7, 2013



"Men in Egypt, in the gulf, they always want to have sex in the wrong place," one Egyptian woman whispered to the writer Shereen El Feki, while she conducted her research into sexual proclivities in a rapidly changing Arab world.

The comment was about anatomy, not geography. And it's indicative of the frankness Ms. El Feki's "Sex and the Citadel" sometimes achieves. Though she warns her readers that she is not writing an encyclopedia or staging a peep show, Ms. El Feki does ask an array of highly personal questions about present-day sexual relations in Muslim societies, with particular emphasis

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Shereen El Feki

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

Shereen El Feki (born 1967 or 1968)^[1] is a British journalist and author, most notable for her book *Sex and the Citadel: Intimate Life in a Changing Arab World*.

El Feki was born in Great Britain to a Welsh mother and an Egyptian father. She grew up in Canada, visiting her grandmother in Cairo on a regular basis. After graduating from the University of Toronto with a BSc in immunology in 1991,^[2] then obtaining an MPhil and PhD in immunology from the University of Cambridge, she joined *The Economist* as healthcare correspondent in 1998. After the 2001 WTC terror attacks, she learned Arabic and started to research the Middle East, in particular, the issues of emancipation and women's sexuality, spending much of her time in Egypt.^{[3][4]} In 2005, she left the *Economist*,^[5] and from 2006 to 2008, she hosted weekly shows, *People & Power* and *The Pulse*, on *Al Jazeera International*.^[6] From 2010 to 2012, she was vice-chairwoman of the United Nations' *Global Commission on H.I.V. and the Law*.

In 2013, El Feki published *Sex and the Citadel: Intimate Life in a Changing Arab World*, which has been translated into Dutch, Bahasa Indonesia, French and German, with Spanish and Arabic translations forthcoming. "Sex and the Citadel" has been nominated for the Guardian First Book Award and *The Orwell Prize*: El Feki's TED talk on sexuality in the Arab region has received almost 1 million views since 2014.^[6] The book surveys sexual attitudes of women and men in Egypt and the wider Arab world, and presents results of her five years of research. El Feki concludes that taboos around sexuality are starting to be challenged in the Arab societies, and that such debates in personal life are key to change in the politics, economics and the broader public sphere. However, she warns that such change comes "by evolution, not revolution" over a generation at least.

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References

Shereen El Feki	
Born	1967/1968 (age 49–50) ^[1]
Nationality	British
Alma mater	University of Toronto (1991) University of Cambridge
Occupation	Journalist, author

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Sex and the Citadel by Shereen El Feki – review

Shereen El Feki's exploration of sexual politics in the Arab world is insightful and optimistic, but reveals little sign of change



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The Guardian Weekly

At Motalakat Radio, divorcées are keen to talk about feelings, while their male counterparts are mainly focused on money, and how they are going to make ends meet after the breakup and its attendant financial obligations. I asked Sabir if the audience ever spoke about sex as a contributing factor to marital breakdown, given inflated expectations going into marriage and communication problems thereafter. “Half of the women want to be divorced because [they are] not happy sexually. [But] they are scared to speak about that. First from society, scared from their families, scared from their children,” she explained. “If her son asks her, ‘My mother, why did you divorce my father?’ I think he will not accept that [if she explains it was for sexual reasons]. He is a boy in Arabian society, and he has no experience of sexual life and [does] not know that is very important to human beings. He will not understand his mother. She is scared to lose her son, her family.” It is the old double standard, Sabir explained. “So the woman is scared to talk about this. But a man goes and gets another wife; he gets to be very happy, with a woman, two or three. But she [does] not have this right. She has to be sad, unhappy, and [accept] bad treatment and just





RACE TO THE POLE

In Egypt’s emerging new order, liberals, whose thinking is along the lines of Dialmy’s, and conservatives, on the same page as Fath al-Bab, are fighting it out in all domains. This

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practice, finding new ammunition in the association of the law with the old government. Even more damning in their eyes was its connection with the former first lady, Suzanne Mubarak, who, quite aside from being part of a discredited

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Mubarak, who, quite aside from being part of a discredited regime, was active in promoting what many see as a Western women's rights agenda undermining traditional Islamic values—although *khul'* has its origins in Islam in the first place.¹¹⁵

No matter how they get out of their marriage, Sabir believes the upshot for women is a no-win situation: “[If she instigates proceedings], she is [a] bad woman, she is [an] evil woman, she broke the tie of the family. She told her husband to divorce [her], so she is [a] bad woman. From the other [side, if] the man divorces the woman, they say about her she is a loser woman, she can't keep her house, she can't keep her husband and keep him happy. They want her to be a clown for him, like the song, Elton John, 'Don't Go Breaking My Heart.' ”

At Motalakat Radio, divorcées are keen to talk about feelings, while their male counterparts are mainly focused on money, and how they are going to make ends meet after the breakup and its attendant financial obligations. I asked Sabir if the audience ever spoke about sex as a contributing factor to marital breakdown, given inflated expectations going into