

Access and post more content, build your own profile page - [JOIN NOW!](#) [LOGIN](#)



ARTS & CULTURES OF THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA



by [DORIS BITTAR](#) »

- [HOME](#)
- [ABOUT US](#)
- [CALENDAR](#)
- [EDUCATION](#)
- [LEVANTINE REVIEW](#)
- [ARTS](#)
- [GET INVOLVED](#)
- [CONTACT US](#)

LITERARY FORUM

All Readings begin at 7:00 p.m.

Rabih Alameddine — Feb. 22
 Micheline Aharonian Marcom — March 22
 Elias Khoury — April 26

EVENT CALENDAR

April						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S
				1	2	3
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	

NEW THIS WEEK

[Afghan American Indie Vocalist Produced by David Lynch](#)
Apr 5 2010 - 7:31am

[Novel on the Birth of Islam Tells Story From Viewpoint of Aisha](#)
Apr 4 2010 - 5:38pm

[Can Jews Be Arabs?](#)
Apr 4 2010 - 1:51pm

[Exhibit on Maria Callas at Istituto Italiano di Los Angeles](#)
Apr 4 2010 - 1:28pm

[The Veil](#)
Apr 4 2010 - 12:27pm

[Interview With the Man Behind Jewbonics](#)
Apr 1 2010 - 1:17pm

[Between Two Worlds](#)
Apr 1 2010 - 8:40am

[I, the Divine](#)
Apr 1 2010 - 7:39am

[Recent Book on Arab Jews Illuminates Ties to Arab World](#)
Mar 31 2010 - 5:05pm

[Greek Documentary Series Examines Southern California Life](#)
Mar 31 2010 - 4:10pm

["How We Live" Exhibit, Film Expose Poverty in Armenia](#)
Mar 31 2010 - 12:16pm

[Iranian "Nobody Knows About Persian Cats" Tells Music Tales](#)
Mar 31 2010 - 11:09am

["About Elly" From Writer/Director Asghar Farhadi Looks at Upper-Class Tehranis](#)
Mar 31 2010 - 8:34am

[Home](#) » [Levantine Review](#)

The Veil

posted April 4, 2010 - 12:27pm by Editor

This article of clothing by many names—veil, hijab, keffiyeh, chador—has become an international symbol for Islam, among other meanings.

The Veil: Women Writers on Its History, Lore and Politics



By Teresa Cutler-Broyles

Fabric. An article of clothing. A symbol. A concept. A sign of repression or an act of defiance. Historical attire and contemporary fashion. God. Mask. Muslim, Hindu, Catholic, Amish, Jewish. Ancient Greece, India, Egypt. Life and death. Men and women. Camouflage. Possibility, transgression or rallying point. The veil is or signifies all these things and more, and is explored through the eyes of twenty-one women in this lovely collection of essays. The first ever anthology of its kind, *The Veil* brings together "manifold—sometimes contradictory—perspectives from numerous traditions" to display the practices of veiling throughout the world and across the centuries.

Editor Jennifer Heath introduces the book, the authors and the veil itself as multi-layered and interwoven with history, politics and ever-shifting meaning. Presenting a tightly woven history of and recent scholarship on the veil, her introduction propels the reader into the varied styles and approaches of each author, preparing us for mystery. And the essays live up to this promise. The authors are novelists, abstract artists, historians, poets, dancers, filmmakers, professors, founders of humanitarian organizations, studiers of textiles, photographers; it is through these lenses that they offer us a way through our preconceptions, to a new appreciation for the myriad of possibilities the veil offers in today's world.



Veiled volunteers at Levantine Cultural Center: Jordan, Chelsea, Sarah, Mary and Jordann (l-r; photo by Mary El-Issa)

The book is divided into three overlapping sections, with the essays in each section connected through broad themes. Heath tells us that "mixing it up, without boxing it too tightly, helps provide freshness, rhythm, and harmony, and... will bring to bear the rhizomic and multiple truths inherent in the veil." Section one, the sacred, explores how the veil has functioned throughout history in its sacred aspects. Section two, the sensual, takes the reader through the veil's connections to the physical—body/spirit/emotion—world. And section three, the sociopolitical, helps readers connect the dots, putting into context the ways the veil is both perceived and manipulated by the currents of our political landscape.

Sacred. Sensual. Sociopolitical. The ways we misunderstand are legion.

**Bridging Cultures,
Building Understanding**

Support our Efforts »

SEARCH

LEVANTINE REVIEW

[Articles](#)

[Film](#)

[Literature](#)

[Music & Dance](#)

[Op-Eds & Satire](#)

[Politics & History](#)

[Life & Style](#)

CONTRIBUTORS & STAFF

Editor

[Jordan Elgrably](#)

Associate Editor

[Mischa Geracoulis](#)

Contributing Editors

[Omid Arabian \(Film\)](#)
[Mariette Tachdjian \(Music\)](#)
[Sholeh Wolpe \(Poetry\)](#)

Contributing Writers

[Dina Abou Salem](#)
[Mehnaz Afridi](#)
[Rheim Alkadhri](#)
[Omid Arabian](#)
[Doris Bittar](#)
[Sarah Burke](#)
[Dina Elkoussy](#)
[Yasmine El-Rashidi](#)
[Robert Fisk](#)
[Ari Folman](#)
[Elham Gheyntanchi](#)
[Daphna Golan-Agnon](#)
[Tara Marie Good](#)
[Adina Hoffman](#)
[Sarah Holswade](#)

Middle Eastern Theatre Anthology Challenges Stereotypes

Mar 31 2010 - 8:00am

THIS MONTH IN LEVANTINE REVIEW

Afghan American Indie Vocalist Produced by David Lynch
Apr 5 2010 - 7:31am

Novel on the Birth of Islam Tells Story From Viewpoint of Aisha
Apr 4 2010 - 5:38pm

Can Jews Be Arabs?
Apr 4 2010 - 1:51pm

[View Levantine Review »](#)

EDITOR'S PICKS

Saudi Female Poet Inflames and Inspires Conservative Nation
[View »](#)

Elan on "Muslims, Race and the Blogosphere"
[View »](#)

The Iraq Papers
[View »](#)

Istanbul Becomes Europe's Official Capital of Culture
[View »](#)

Raya Meddine Talks About Life in LA and Levantine Center in Beirut's Al-Akhbar
[View »](#)

Guernica, an online magazine of arts and politics
[View »](#)

FAVORITES & RECOMMENDATIONS



An exploration of modern Iran steeped in one family's rich memories of the past

[Books, Movies & Music »](#)



The Veil: your purchase benefits in part LCC (click image to buy from Amazon)

and death; the personal made exquisitely poignant. And graphic novels and comic strips are represented as well, illustrating the text and punctuating the issues.

Sprinkled throughout are photographs of women and men in veils, each making visible the underlying points. Kecia Ali asks "Who decides what something signifies? How can assigned meanings be subverted?" This indeed is one of the questions *The Veil* asks, and the answer is as varied and textured as its collection of essays. The veil is a focal point—an easily visible symbol—a doorway into mystery, and a screen that hides the same. In each essay, any easy conception of what it means is challenged, realigned, questioned, and ultimately what emerges is not one understanding of the veil, but many. And the common theme is the articulation of these many-faceted meanings.

[Shirin Neshat, an Iranian artist who lives in New York, has explored veiling and unveiling extensively in her work as a photographer and filmmaker.]



Shirin Neshat - Untitled

There is a darker message, a danger that lies not in the veil, nor in the practice of wearing one. No, the danger, as Heath tells us, is that the veil has "become a subterfuge, diverting us from" the real issues of poverty, education, disease, and inequality. We don't see these things because we instead focus on our own constructed misunderstandings.

What this book brings home is that when we create meanings for the veil we miss the point. The veil becomes not only opaque, but a mirror that reflects back to us ourselves and our own misperceptions, our own fears. Through its remarkable breadth, *The Veil* becomes a way to see through that mirror to a deeper awareness. Like mist or a piece of silk, meaning shifts and transforms; *The Veil*—and the veil—reveal that truth lies in our willingness to let go of what we think we know.

These essays are personal; they explore dreams and inner soul-searching, the Old Testament, traditional Indian veiling, current Amish customs, and Brazilian masking traditions. They are historical; they look at men's veiling practices throughout the world, and at visual artists' depictions of "Orientalized" women. Many are intensely autobiographical and talk about invisible veils worn to hide one's true self, or recount filmic conventions that speak to both stereotype and history; others capture social and cultural theory, discussing how wearing a veil disrupts the male gaze, and the construction of truth is explored through a look at *National Geographic's* search for 'the Afghan girl' who had graced its cover decades ago. Forced unveiling is explored as well and its economic, emotional, political, religious, and even military impact in Iranian history made clear. Masks and veils together in another essay are vehicles for moving between various ancient religious practices through power, myth, dance, and the construction of truth is explored through a look at *National Geographic's* search for 'the Afghan girl' who had graced its cover decades ago. Forced unveiling is explored as well and its economic, emotional, political, religious, and even military impact in Iranian history made clear. Masks and veils together in another essay are vehicles for moving between various ancient religious practices through power, myth, dance,



Rebellious Silence by Shirin Neshat

Mary Hughes
David Ignatius
Laila Lalami
Alfred Madain
Saree Makdisi
Meena Nanji
Dick Platkin
Jen Reinhardt
David Shasha

Designer/Web Master
Rachel Campbell
Azel Design

Read the [call for submissions](#). New contributors are invited to query the editor, editor [at] levantinecenter.org.

© 2001-2010 Levantine Cultural Center. All rights reserved.

*Jennifer Heath is herself an interesting character. Born in Melbourne, Australia, she spent her toddler and little-girl years in Japan, her childhood in Bolivia, Chile and Colombia and finally came of age in Afghanistan. She studied in Switzerland and Venezuela and has spent her adulthood "traveling like a tinker," as her Irish mother put it. She is the author and editor of eight books, among them *The Scimitar and the Veil: Extraordinary Women of Islam*, which portrays over thirty extraordinary Muslim women from the birth of Islam through the 19th century. Forthcoming are *Land of the Unconquerable: The Lives of Contemporary Afghan Women*, from the University of California Press, and *Peanut Butter, Gooseberries, and Latkes: Writers Invent Origin Myths for Their Favorite Foods (with recipes)*, from Whole World Press. Heath is also is*

the founder of Seeds for Afghanistan and the Afghanistan Relief Organization Midwife Training and Infant Care Program.

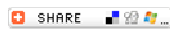
Teresa Cutler-Broyles is a writer and editor, and runs writing workshops in Italy and Turkey. She has an MA in Cultural Studies and is working on a PhD in American Studies, focusing on Islam in American media. Write her at teresa_cutler-at-comcast.net.



Jennifer Heath

Keywords: [Articles](#) [Levantine Review](#) [Politics & History](#) [Arab women](#) [Books](#) [burka](#) [hijab](#) [Muslim women](#) [veil](#) [women of the Middle East](#) [Home](#) - [Featured Article](#) [Levantine Review](#) - [Featured Article](#)

[Login or register to post comments](#)



[Email this page](#)

[Printer-friendly version](#)

Recommended Articles

[International Theater, "Beneath the Veil" Plays at the Irvine Barclay](#)

[Rania Matar](#)

[Amnesty Int'l Secretary General Irene Kahn on the Goldstone Report, Peace, Poverty, Human Rights](#)

[Nadine Labaki](#)

[I Am a Postcard](#)

[Privacy Policy](#) [Terms of Use](#)