In summary, Mernissi employs transdisciplinary methods to examine women's rights within an Islamic feminist framework. These transdisciplinary methods include historical inquiry, socio-political analysis, and linguistic analysis, as well as empirical research. In addition, Mernissi expresses interest in applying pioneering methods to interpret Islamic corpora as an opportunity to renew the Islamic heritage. By addressing the issue of women's rights in Islam, Mernissi also combines insights generated by secular and Islamic feminism. In what follows, I present my interpretation of Mernissi's thought and show that in addition to her secular and Islamic feminist approaches, Mernissi also takes a transcultural stance in defending women's rights.

2.5 The relevance of Mernissi's feminist thought for a transcultural approach to feminism

One of the approaches that is gradually appearing in philosophical books and articles is the transcultural approach. As the name suggests, transculturality refers to the exchange and dialogue between different cultures. In other words, transculturality goes beyond a singular, isolated, and autonomous notion of what a culture is and refers to pluralistic cultural entities. One could argue that postcolonial thinking paves the way for the development of a transcultural approach to thinking. Postcolonial thought challenges homogeneous notions of identity, the simplified representation of foreign cultures, and Eurocentric universalism. Thus, postcolonial thinking advocates the use of pluriverse knowledge that can better reflect the diversity of the world and the heterogeneity of knowledge. Postcolonial thought engages with subaltern studies (see 2).

In this line of thinking, Islamic feminism is related to the transcultural approach. This is because Islamic feminism draws less on the experiences of women from Western cultures or former colonies and more on those of Muslim women who face specific social and cultural challenges in their societies or even in their communities. In other words, Islamic feminism critically engages with colonial studies of Islam, thus, detaching the question of feminism from its Western location where it was born.[380] Islamic feminism opposes the monolithic constitution of Islam and its misogynistic representation that conveys the notion of a sexist Muslim culture and religion.[381] In doing so, Islamic feminism emphasizes the distortion of cultural and historical knowledge about Islamic culture. Islamic feminism promotes dialogue and the participation of women from different cultures and religions to support transculturality (see: 2).

380 Lazreg 1994: 8.

381 Benbrahim 2014.

In this context, this chapter illustrates Mernissi's transcultural approach to feminism. The section begins by exploring Mernissi's effort to deconstruct the clichés of Orientalist misrepresentations of Muslim women that portray them as submissive to patriarchal orders. The chapter also emphasizes Mernissi's reactivation of the Islamic heritage of Sufism in order to highlight her goal of breaking down cultural boundaries. Mernissi's reactivation of Sufi thought is intended to promote transcultural dialogue and cultural exchange.

The deconstruction of myths as one of Mernissi's approaches to transcultural feminism

In her novel, *Scheherazade Goes West: Different Cultures, Different Harems* (2001), Mernissi debunks several myths about Islam and Islamic culture in general. Myths refer to a traditional representation developed over time in order to represent cultures. Mernissi aims to dispel the myth of a single Arabo-Islamic identity. Furthermore, Mernissi seeks to deconstruct the myth of the passive Muslim woman who lacks intellectual capacities. She further deconstructs orientalist representation of the harem as a place of sexual desire.

Mernissi attempts to deconstruct the myth of an essential Arabo-Muslim identity by asserting that there are different identities in the Muslim world. In doing so, she presents several identities in the context of Islam by pointing out the dynamics in the Muslim world today. [382] Thus, the Muslim world is culturally dynamic, and there is not just one identity, but a great diversity of identities.

Moreover, Mernissi emphasizes that despite the fact that there are different identities and ethnicities in the Muslim world, most women share the experience of a constant struggle against colonialism, patriarchy and political dictatorship. She writes: "Throughout the 1920s, Turkey had been the site of a radical struggle waged by a movement known as the 'Young Turks,' who fought against three things perceived to be intimately linked: despotism, sexism, and colonization."[383]

The struggle of Muslim women against dictatorship is reflected in their ambition to participate in political decision making and to become leaders in their Muslim countries. Their goal is to challenge male dominance in politics. Indeed, women with different ethnicities and identities in the Muslim world, such as Turkish women and Pakistani women, aimed to accomplish this goal. In this sense, Mernissi declares, "[their opposition of dictatorship] could explain why women have emerged, in spite of extremism, as political leaders in many Muslim countries, from Benazir Bhutto in Pakistan and Tansu Çiller in Turkey, to Megawati in Indonesia."[384]

382 Mernissi 2001: 22.

383 Mernissi 2001: 109.

384 Mernissi 2001: 23.

In addition, Muslims share the same cultural background regardless of their different ethnicities and identities. For example, the Arabs adopted the Persian name Scheherazade and wrote down her stories in Arabic literature. The different ethnic origins in the Muslim world are united in describing Scheherazade as a wise woman who convinces a man not to kill women by telling him stories every night. In her argument, Mernissi reactivates the Islamic heritage about Scheherazade to argue that Muslim women should be inspired to be like Scheherazade, with her strong determination and resistance. Despite her Persian identity, Scheherazade's narratives are disseminated and received throughout the Muslim world. Mernissi argues:

> Scheherazade is the Persian name of the young bride who tells the stories in *The Thousand and One Nights*. These stories are of 'various ethnic origins, Indian, Persian, and Arabic.' The tales, which are a symbol of Islam's genius as a pluralist religion and culture, unfold in a territory that stretches from Mali and Morocco on the Atlantic Coast of North Africa to India, Mongolia, and China. When you enter the tales, you are navigating in a Muslim universe that ignores the usual borders separating distant and divergent cultures.[385]

Connected to this myth of an essential Muslim identity is the myth of the subordinate Muslim woman, which Mernissi attempts to deconstruct. She does this by reactivating strong-minded women such as Scheherazade who is, according to her, an intellectual woman within the rich heritage of Islamic culture. Thus, I present Mernissi's deconstruction of the myth of Scheherazade as presented in orientalist works, in the German tale entitled *Die Herrin Subeide im Bade oder Von der Geschlechter Lust und List in den* arabischen *Nachten*, published in Germany in 1984, and in Sergey Diaghilev's Ballets Russes, performed in Paris in 1910. In these cultural and artistic Western products, Scheherazade is limited to a sexual and erotic dimension. In this regard, Mernissi relates:

> I spotted two of the few German words I knew, "*Arabischen Nachten*," in the subtitle. What does "*Geschlechter Lust und List in den Arabischen Nachten*" mean? I asked Hans in a low voice, so that no one else would hear. "Sexual desire and voluptuousness in the Arabian Nights" was his instantaneous translation. The book was a recent edition (1985) of Scheherazade's tales, illustrated by an East German artist. Yet his rendition of the Muslim storyteller was totally unfamiliar to me. I would never think of Scheherazade as nude and plump. Even though the climate is temperate in the Arab world, only delusional women in mental asylums discard their clothes.[386]

385 Mernissi 2001: 43.

386 Mernissi 2001: 34.

Rather than the sexist Scheherazade represented in orientalist books, Mernissi emphasizes the intellectual Scheherazade. Indeed, due to her intellectual abilities, Scheherazade saves other women from slaughter. Mernissi sheds light on the prioritization skills of Scheherazade which she enumerates as three. Mernissi argues, "the first skill is of an intellectual nature, requiring a wealth of knowledge."[387] "Scheherazade had read the books of literature, philosophy, and medicine. She knew poetry by heart, had studied historical reports … She was intelligent, knowledgeable, wise, and refined. She had read and learned".[388] The second skill, as Mernissi declares, "is of a psychological nature: the ability to change a criminal's mind by using words alone."[389] The third strategic skill is, as Mernissi tells us, the "cold-blooded capacity to control her fear enough to think and lead the dynamic interaction with the aggressor instead of being led."[390] Ultimately, Mernissi claims that Scheherazade convinced Shahryar not to kill other women through her persuasive skills and intellectual capacities: "she is a super-strategist of the intellect."[391] As we can see, unlike Scheherazade as portrayed in one of the orientalist tales, Mernissi gives voice to the intellectual Scheherazade, who uses her intelligence to save other women from being murdered. In this way, Mernissi attempts to deconstruct the image of the Western Scheherazade who has no intellect. In addition, Mernissi refers to Scheherazade as performed in Sergey Diaghilev's Ballets Russes. Mernissi quotes from Joan Acocella's description stating that the ballet performer Vaslav Nijinsky, who plays Scheherazade, appears "in brown body paint, and grinning, and wound with pearls—not so much as a sex object but as sex itself, with all the accouterments of perversity that the fin-de-siècle imagination could supply: exotism, androgyny, enslavement, violence."[392] Mernissi uses this Ballet Russe to argue that both men and women are mispresented as mere sexual being. In fact, both men and women are reduced to their sexual desire, which is the only way they can relate to one another. Consequently, this orientalist ballet denies the possibility of an intellectual dialogue between men and women, and that Scheherazade and her stories represent.

Scheherazade has recently been appearing in decolonial writings on feminism; the phrase "Decolonizing Scheherazade" [translation mine] [393] is a perfect illustration of this. It is evident that the decolonization of Scheherazade from orientalist representation is also part of Mernissi's intellectual goals. As such, one can point

387 Mernissi 2001: 47.
388 Mernissi 2001: 47.
389 Mernissi 2001: 47.
390 Mernissi 2001: 48.
391 Mernissi 2001: 48.
392 Mernissi 2001: 69.
393 Mestiri 2016.

out that a decolonial aspect of Mernissi's thought is sometimes omitted, abandoned or misinterpreted by her feminist interpreters. Mernissi deconstructs prejudices by questioning what is conveyed through the classical imagery of Scheherazade: "a submissive, entrusted, even hostage woman of the private sphere, an object-woman sacrificed on the altar of male pleasure, a subaltern with no right to speech" [translation mine].[394] Consequently, Mernissi seeks to liberate Muslim women from sexist platitudes by decolonizing Scheherazade. According to Mernissi, women in Islamic culture have the freedom to pursue intellectual interests. In other words, Muslim women are neither mere sexual objects nor simply sexual subjects.

The myth of the harem is another aspect of Islamic culture that is restricted to sexuality in most orientalist representations. A woman resides in the harem, the place of sexual pleasure where naked and lascivious women frolic. In contrast, Mernissi wants to challenge this sexist representation of harem in her autobiographical novel, *Dreams of Trespass: Tales of a Harem Girlhood* (1994) and in her novel *Scheherazade Goes West: Different Culture, Different Harems* (2001).

Throughout *Dreams of Trespass*, Mernissi deconstructs orientalist myths about the harem. Mernissi presents powerful feminist perspectives among older, traditional, illiterate women who dislike patriarchy. Accordingly, Mernissi's presentation of the harem challenges the idea that Muslim women in patriarchy accept their subordinated situation to be under man and, thus, are unaware of their oppression. In this regard, Mernissi writes: "Right on our threshold, you could see women of the harem contesting and fighting with Ahmed the doorkeeper as the foreign armies from the North kept arriving all over the city".[395] In their confinement, women in harems invent fairy tales to escape their reality, giving them hope that their dream of trespassing the harem boundaries may come true. Mernissi recounts "Aunt Habiba's most popular tale, which she narrated on special occasions only, was about 'The Woman with Wings,' who could fly away from the courtyard whenever she wanted to."[396] In harems, women are aware that they are deprived of their rights. Mernissi declares: "Sometimes, she said that to be stuck in a harem simply meant that a woman had lost her freedom of movement. Other times, she said that a harem meant misfortune because a woman had to share her husband with many others."[397] Therefore, women in harems aspire to emancipation and know their rights, which include, as Mernissi tells us, "every woman was to have the same right to education as a man, as well as the right to monogamy—a privileged, exclusive relationship with her husband." [398]

394 Mestiri 2016: 39.
395 Mernissi 1994: 1.
396 Mernissi 1994: 22.
397 Mernissi 1994: 34.
398 Mernissi 1994: 35.

In this way, Mernissi portrays the harem as a place of women's revolt against patriarchal rules and their aspiration to rights that protect their dignity. Hence, Mernissi deconstructs the orientalist representation of harem, in which women are expected to be obedient and willing to be sexual objects. For her, in situations where women are held back by patriarchal rules and confined within a harem, nevertheless they seek freedom. The harem presented by Mernissi is the place of reclusion of women who only dream of emancipating themselves, playing with their talent and intelligence. These women are in fact those who populate the domestic harems of the 1940s in Fez, Morocco, where Mernissi grew up. Mernissi presents her individual childhood experience as a child born in a harem. Therefore, one cannot assume that all women who lived in harems were intellectually active or striving for emancipation.

In *Scheherazade Goes West*, Mernissi seeks to deconstruct the misogynist and patriarchal harem exclusively associated with Islamic culture. She states that the West also has its own harem. In this way, the myth of the harem is shared across cultures, but it has different meanings. In this regard, Mernissi affirms:

> Unlike the Muslim man, who uses space to establish male domination by excluding women from the public arena, the Western man manipulates time and light. He declares in order to be beautiful; a woman must look fourteen years old. If she dares to look fifty, or worse, sixty, she is beyond the pale."[399]

According to Mernissi, Western women's appearance is prescribed by Western men according to established beauty rules and norms, such as looking tiny and young. Hence, Western men discriminate against Western women on the basis of a 'body size' norm. When a woman is overweight, 'big,' she is seen as outside the mainstream of beauty and, thus, as aging. Western women need to look thin, in order to appear young. According to Mernissi, the 'Western harem rules,' which exploit the image of women and deny their age due to the passage of time, are more dangerous than the Eastern harem rules. In this sense, she declares:

> These Western attitudes, I thought, are even more dangerous and cunning than the Muslim ones because the weapon used against women is time. Time is less visible, more fluid than space. The Western man uses images and spotlights to freeze female beauty within an idealized childhood, and forces women to perceive aging—that normal unfolding of the years—as a shameful devaluation.[400]

399 Mernissi 2001: 213.

400 Mernissi 2001: 214.

As evoked in Mernissi's thought, the harem culture exists in both East and West, to the point that Western and Eastern women are equally dominated by men. Both Eastern and Western men seek to manipulate women's bodies. Eastern men manipulate women's bodies by hiding them in harems for fear of sullying the public sphere of Muslim believers, because women's bodies are seen as imperfection (*awra*). Likewise, Western men control women's bodies through the time harem, which prescribes beauty standards of body size. As a result, Western women are subjected to being treated as objects, as bodies, as forms of nothingness. Therefore, in both 'harems systems,' women are limited to sexuality and considered merely bodies without any other capabilities.

Thus, Mernissi applied a transcultural approach by deconstructing several notions of myths associated with Islamic culture. She challenged the clichés of one Muslim identity by arguing that there are Muslims who are not Arabs (Iranians, Turks, Chinese, et cetera). Hence there is a transcultural aspect of Muslim identity that encompasses different ethnicities and cultural identities. In the same vein as Mernissi, I would like to add other facts that show the interreligious and plurilingual nature of the Arab world. There are Arabs who are not Muslims (Arab Christians and Arab Jews) in the Arab world, so the Arab world cannot only be defined as a Muslim one; it is an interreligious one. A number of languages are spoken in the Arab world, such as Kurdish, Kabyle, and Hebrew. The Arab world is therefore multilingual, so it cannot be reduced to just the Arab language. As outlined above, Mernissi also intended to deconstruct the myth of the subordinated Muslim woman and the myth of the sexual harem that are prevalent in most orientalist representations. With her notion of 'Western harem,' Mernissi provocatively questioned the myth of the harem by connecting it to western culture, thus, transforming the concept of a harem into a transcultural phenomenon that transcends the boundaries of the 'Orient.' Accordingly, Florina Bernardi writes:

> Mernissi introduced a cross-cultural analysis of the production and reception of representations of Middle Eastern women. Through her profound examinations of the long-lasting intercultural antagonisms between the East and the West, Mernissi approaches the issue of Otherness, often dismissing familiar orientalist readings and emphasizing instead cultural complexity, in a way that makes often hitherto unthinkable or unexpected suggestions for western readers. [401]

The myth of cultural boundaries is another myth Mernissi strives to deconstruct, through her interpretation of the Sufi heritage and understanding of the Islamic concept of *Adab*—the art of dialogue and communication—which she employs as a means of fostering her transcultural feminist approach.

401 Bernardi 2010: 412.

A transcultural dialogue: The transgression of the myth of boundaries (*hudud*)

It is essential to engage in dialogue with other cultures when applying a transcultural approach. The idea of transculturality is explored at the end of Mernissi's book, *Islam and Democracy: Fear of the Modern World* (2002), in which she presents a poem by the Persian Sufi Farid al-din Attar, entitled *The Conference of the Birds*. The poem of Attar expresses a dream of a world without boundaries (*hudud*), where one could freely explore cultures without being arrested. Mernissi declares:

> It happened in Nishapur in Iran in the spring of A.D. 1175. A man dreamed of a world without fear, without boundaries, where you could travel very far and find yourself in the company of strangers whom you knew as you knew yourself, strangers who were neither hostile nor aggressive. It was the land of the Simorgh.[402]

The illustration of Attar's poem in Mernissi's book clearly conveys a feminist idea, which can be interpreted as dreams of most Muslim women to live in a world without boundaries, to escape their private sphere and to discover other cultures.

Although the dream of trespassing boundaries no longer exists, the poet Sufi Attar, who preached tolerance, peace, beauty, and divine love through his poem, was assassinated by a despotic ruler. In this regard, Mernissi affirms:

> In his long meditations in Nishapur, all by himself Attar imagined that land where strangeness only enriched what we are to the ultimate degree. He committed his dream to paper, a long poem that he called *Mantiq al-tayr* (The Conference of the Birds). It instantly became famous, but intolerance and violence knocked one night at Attar's door. Genghis Khan's Mongol soldiers murdered Attar in 1230. The poet died, but the dream lived on through the centuries and continues to haunt our imaginations.[403]

The murder of Attar reminds us of the murder of the Sufi Al-Hallaj (see 2.3), who was also murdered for his belief in self-determination. Like Al-Hallaj, Attar was assassinated because he demanded to cross borders and to achieve freedom. Despotic regimes are always directed against freedom and against people demanding their rights because it challenges their authoritarian regimes. In this sense, one could argue that Mernissi is trying to convey a political message against political despotism that goes beyond recalling the assassination of Attar. In addition, Mernissi tells the

402 Mernissi 2002: 172.

403 Mernissi 2002: 172.

story of the poet Sufi Attar to express another feminist stance. At this point, she suggests that the prohibition of the circulation of Attar's poem in the 'Orient' reminds us of the prohibition for most Muslim women to leave the confines of their private sphere and to express their thoughts freely, without being subjected to male control. She argues: "Since that time, the Simorgh, banned in the Orient of the palaces, has haunted women's tales and children's dreams".[404] Thus, most Muslim women are forced to hide and keep their dreams to themselves out of fear of being murdered by oppressive and misogynistic male relatives and leaders, who see women's steps into the public sphere and crossing borders as a threat to their patriarchal tradition and oppressive regimes.

Regarding Mernissi's transcultural approach, Bernardi contends that Mernissi, who "as a postcolonial, polyglot, female subject has lived, studied, and worked in both the East and the West," reinterprets the East and the West as visual landscapes rather than geographical or historical landscapes. She looks through Orient and Occident to promote dialogue between their civilizations.[405] For this reason it remains a viable intellectual achievement for Mernissi to overcome boundaries in order to achieve dialogue between the East and the West. According to her, the following two intellectual strategies should be employed to foster a transcultural dialogue between the East and the West:

The first strategy is presented in her article entitled "Palace Fundamentalism and Liberal Democracy: Oil, Arms, and Irrationality" (1996). In this article, Mernissi focuses on the responsibility of Western, Eastern, and Maghrebian intellectuals to "[make their] differences intelligible."[406] To do this, Western intellectuals should explore the Eastern and Maghrebian cultures, not only to prove that they are open to other cultures, but also to interact with their Eastern counterparts in the Arab world. A dialogue between East and West is conducted on the basis of promoting an equitable distribution of "the world's resources"[407] and strengthening "commitment to democracy."[408] In this regard, Mernissi urges:

> Let us rethink the entire approach to economic development and democratization in the Middle East, giving 'stability' and 'security' a different and more positive meaning. Western intellectuals and policy makers can make a great contribution in this regard by adopting a sense of responsibility and commitment to democracy commensurate with their great capacity to control the world's resources. Reversing earlier policies of support for autocratic regimes and nurturing

404 Mernissi 2002: 174.
405 Bernardi 2010: 412
406 Mernissi 1996: 263.
407 Mernissi 1996: 264.
408 Mernissi 1996: 264.

> the revitalization of civil society in the Arab world would be a daring and constructive way to step into the twenty-first century.[409]

During an interview under the title "The New Arab Mass Media Vehicles of Democracy?" (2006), Mernissi expressed more of her ideas about global notion of justice, which one could add to Mernissi's notions of justice presented in (2.2). In this sense, she argues:

> I think that where there is not responsibility there should necessarily be one. We need a world where if you commit a crime, afterwards you can't hide yourself or excuse yourself saying that it was committed elsewhere. This means responsibility … this is logical, you can't commit a crime with impunity. But why does that happen today? Because we don't have a global justice that deals with everybody in the same way, and I believe that if there isn't a global justice yet, we should establish it, otherwise it's chaos, because there are no more boundaries and so it's necessary that responsibility should be global.[410]

To establish transculturality between the East and the West, Mernissi holds on to the necessity of a responsible and engaged dialogue that improves justice in resource distribution, a democracy cultivated by the West and the East, and a responsibility to punish those responsible for crimes against humanity. Developing these principles promotes global justice. According to Mernissi's thinking, democracy and global justice are fundamental concepts which form the basis of her transcultural approach.

Mernissi highlights the second strategy for transcultural dialogue between the West and the East at the end of her book *Islam and Democracy* (2002) as well in the above-mentioned interview of 2006. In *Islam and Democracy*, Mernissi affirms that scientific advances have enabled a dialogue between the West and the East. Although it is virtual, cyberspace and satellites enable the crossing of boundaries. In this context, Mernissi affirms:

> We can bring a new world into being through all the scientific advances that allow us to communicate, to engage in unlimited dialogue, to create that global mirror in which all cultures can shine in their uniqueness. Nothing makes me more exuberant than the vison of this new world, and the fact that we must go forward toward it without any barriers no longer frightens me.[411]

The notion of democracy is always regarded by Mernissi as a framework for establishing dialogue and communication among cultures. In connection with this,

409 Mernissi 1996: 264.

410 Mernissi and Leccese 2006: 350.

411 Mernissi 2002: 174.

Mernissi believes the new Arab mass media has fostered democracy by allowing individuals with different worldviews to voice their opinion. A democratic system, in this sense, contradicts any form of extremism, as Mernissi points out in her interview: "Extremism, actually, consists in using violence against someone that is different, that has different opinions, to impose one's own."[412] In her view, the abolition of extremism is necessary to establish respect for differences and pluralism. In this sense, she argues:

> Nowadays in the Arab countries the élite don't have any more the control on decisions, and they have lost the control of information. Of course there is a difference between us and you … now I am going to show you the difference that will make democracy in the Arab world set off at incredible speed … within three years the Arab world that we know will be different because of the media [ellipses in the original].[413]

According to Mernissi, dialogue and communication are integral to the concept of *adab*; for her, "*adab* means to add other brains to yours."[414] In simple terms, *adab* is a dialogue between individuals who represent different perspectives. In most cases, it ends with convincing the opponent of one's argument. Mernissi further affirms:

> This *Adab* experience is very important to learn: when the power in office proved to be interested to dialogue with the *stranger* and didn't try just to control, *to make some mafia*, and so on, it won; when it used a military strategy it failed. [415]

The concept of *adab* does not consist of controlling the opinion of the opponent by force, but on mutual intellectual exchange between individuals who hold different opinions. Communication and conversation are basic components of *adab*, not violent extremism or military tactics. *Adab* is equated with *jadal* in secondary literature dedicated to Mernissi's thought on transculturality. In this sense, Bernardi claims:

> Teaching and practicing *jadal* – the art of dialog and debate – the digital revolution and the satellite are, in Mernissi's view, the means to foster dialog, undermine fundamentalism and spread a "Humanist Islam." The importance of such technologies is relevant to combating the way that, throughout the centuries, the ideologies of colonialism and neocolonialism have limited the reciprocal body of knowledge (or body of truth) about the East and the West, directing mutually

412 Mernissi and Leccese 2006: 347.
413 Mernissi and Leccese 2006: 351–352.
414 Mernissi and Leccese 2006: 348.
415 Mernissi and Leccese 2006: 349.

> distorted gazes onto the Other, fixing rude and hostile biases and stereotypes – something that arguably became intensified even more after the 11 September terrorist attacks, when subsequent media coverage contributed to re-imposing or reinforcing a dominant image of the East as the source of a fundamentalist, unsettling and fatal ghost.[416]

For Bernardi, the digital age provides an advantage to the Arab Muslim world because it demonstrates a culture more open to communication and dialogue, which respects diversity and plurality. In the present time, digital technologies and social media have allowed the Global South and the Global North to become more open to one another. As an example, social media played an essential role in the Arab world during the 2011 revolutions. The social media platforms enabled protesters and bloggers from the Arab World to share, transmit, and report information about what was taking place in Tunisia, Egypt, and Syria to France, Germany, and the United States by simply logging onto one of the platforms. Due to social media, the world is becoming more open, one can travel without borders or passports.

Following Bernardi, it is correct to say that Mernissi has reactivated the notion of *adab*, i.e. *jadal*, in order to point out the humanism entailed in Islamic culture. Throughout her intellectual career, Mernissi dispensed with colonial, neocolonial, as well as orientalist stereotypes and clichés that portray the Arab Muslim world as misogynistic and extremist, where only male voices matter, and military weapons are the acceptable language.

One could further assert that Mernissi aims to challenge those representation through the revival of two Sufi practices: movement—in the sense of crossing boundaries (*hudud*)—and the art of dialogue and communication (*adab*). Mernissi reactivates Sufism as part of the Islamic heritage in order to claim that there was a rich philosophical tradition of dialogue, accepting different opinions, and being open to discovering other cultures. Indeed, Mernissi asserts that crossing boundaries is a fundamental element of Sufism. She writes:

> Therefore movement is important…and like Ibn 'Arabi, I like Sufism, because it means movement, there are no frontiers … your space is there, you are in your *dimension*, but you meet the *stranger*. This is globalization![417]

In addition, she recognizes that the notion of *adab*—the art of communication—is also integral to Sufi tradition. She declares:

416 Bernardi 2010: 412–413.

417 Mernissi and Leccese 2006: 347.

> Sufis, who believed in the communication strategy (*Adab*), avoided links with the power and withdrew from public life. They chose to practice their teachings inside *zawaya* and transmitted their vision of life to the masses.[418]

Mernissi's advocacy of the Islamic heritage of Sufism was of interest even to Western scholars to initiate an intellectual debate to free Islam from extremist and misogynistic ideologies. For instance, the orientalist scholar Annemarie Schimmel (d. 2003) asserts that Sufism was practiced not only by Sufi men, but also by Sufi women who were mothers of male Sufis and who also taught Sufism. For her, Ibn 'Arabi has developed his spirit in the search for divine love under Sufi women. In this sense, Schimmel affirms:

> Indeed, no one less than Ibn 'Arabi, the *magister magnus* of Islamic theosophical mysticism (d. 1240) studied under two women saints in Spain, among whom Fátima of Cordova must have been a person of extraordinary power. (…) It seems highly probable that Ibn 'Arabi developed some salient features of his mystical thought under the influence of Fátima as well as of that of a young Persian lady whom he met in Mecca during the pilgrimage and who inspired him to write delicate mystical love poetry. The female element plays an important role in Ibn 'Arabi's system so that he even sees in woman the highest manifestation of the Divine.[419]

Thus, Schimmel's study of Sufism in Islam highlights the dialogue that brought Eastern and Western cultures together and broke down boundaries between cultures. Alike Mernissi, Schimmel contributes to the deconstruction of the notion that Arabo-Islamic culture is misogynistic and patriarchal, valuing only men intellectually.

one could argue that Mernissi takes a transcultural approach to feminism in her latest work. According to Mernissi, the transcultural approach to be promoted requires, above all, the deconstruction of myths and stereotypes that misrepresent Islamic culture. Mernissi corrects false representations depicting Muslim women as submissive and sexist through her transcultural approach. In her work, she analyzes the harem as a transcultural institution that is practiced both in the West and in the East. By doing this, she "brings terms back together … that have been and still are deliberately separated, thus allowing for a better understanding and, ideally, less violence between 'Eastern' and 'Western' traditions."[420] Mernissi returns to the Islamic traditions of Sufism, which includes notions of dialogue across cultures. She thereby

418 Mernissi and Leccese 2006: 349.

419 Schimmel 1982: 148.

420 Mahboub 2016: 5.

"has built bi-, cross-, and transcultural bridges."[421] Mernissi's transformative work inspires us to continue promoting a much-needed dialogue between different cultures, religions, and societies.

2.6 Conclusion on the thought of Fatima Mernissi

The purpose of this first part has been to situate Mernissi's thought within the framework of *feminist philosophy*. Feminist philosophy defends gender justice as equal rights for women. Mernissi's feminist stance is based on *a transcultural approach* that introduces how feminism is practiced in other cultures. Mernissi's approach to feminism is characterized by her commitment to communicating across cultures and by combining different approaches to feminism.

A notable contribution of Mernissi's feminism is the combination of *secular and Islamic frameworks*. *The secular feminism* in most of the Muslim world emphasizes equality in the public sphere while retaining complementarity in the private sphere. This means that secular feminism does not advance equality in the religious domain, which is controlled by men, and the family law sphere, which is regulated by religion. This prevents women from participating in religious discourse. *Islamic feminism* aim at giving women more rights in both spheres through a full participation of women in the re-reading of Islamic religious texts for themselves in order to stand up for their rights. "Islamic feminism, which brings together interpretation and implementation, is a major force in the drive to move beyond patriarchy in Muslim contexts."[422] Thus, the purpose of Islamic feminism is to free Islam from misogyny, sexism, and fundamentalism by reinterpreting Islamic scriptures within a framework of gender equality.

The contribution of Mernissi to Islamic feminism is characterized by her *transdisciplinary approach*. As part of her defense of women's rights in Islam, Mernissi uses a variety of disciplines. She conducts linguistic research, for instance. She interprets the word 'veil' in Islamic legacy, and examines words such as freedom, innovation, and creation. Her linguistic study aims to correct false traditions and systemic beliefs that link words in Islamic corpuses and thought to their exact definitions without considering alternate meanings.

Another aspect of Mernissi's transdisciplinary approach is her *empirical research*, which is based on interviews, field work, and statistical analysis. Mernissi reveals the situation of women workers in subaltern positions. Her empirical studies contributes to improving the economic and social wellbeing of women by providing data that justify their demand for decent work. In addition to her empirical study,

421 Mahboub 2016: 6.

422 Badran 2010b: 11.