

# MWWWI Newsletter

Muslim Women Writers' Workshop-International Newsletter

Volume 1, Issue 6

The Nurturing Pen

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Assalaam Alaikum! *MWWWI* welcomes you our readers to the sixth issue of our newsletter. We look forward to hearing from you! Your comments, contributions, info about upcoming literary events and your writing endeavors are welcome.



IQRAA! READ IN THE NAME OF YOUR LORD!

THE PEN IS MIGHTIER THAN THE SWORD!

## CROSS-CULTURAL GROUP HOSTS AUTHOR LEILA ABOULELA



Some *MWWWI* members were privileged to attend the Cross-Culture Group's March 26, presentation by Leila Aboulela on, 'Literature: A Bridge between the East and West,' at the Cultural Foundation in Abu Dhabi. This was not *MWWWI*'s first encounter with Leila. She honored us by conducting a writer's workshop for our 2<sup>nd</sup> year annual gathering at Dubai Ladies Club on May 5, 2007, which was a smashing success.

An award winning author, her first novel, *The Translator*, was published to critical acclaim in 1999 and was long-listed for the Orange Prize and the IMPAC Dublin Award. Her latest novel, 'Minaret' was published in 2006 and long-listed

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## WRITING ABOUT RELIGION: AWARDS

There are organizations that give awards for outstanding writing about religion. We're talking mainstream media here. One in particular is:



### Religion Newsletter Association (RNA)

Their motto is:

**'Helping journalists cover religion with balance, accuracy and insight'**

The organization, which has more than 570 members and subscribers, awarded nearly \$15,000 in prizes, at its annual banquet for excellence in religion reporting in the **mainstream media**. Normally, I would have given this article a pass except for one award that caught my attention:

### Best Radio Religion Reporting

*The top prize for a short radio piece less than eight minutes long went to Rachael Martin of NPR for a segment on Latina women converting to Islam. Martin's use of "natural sound to contrast the Latino music with the Muslim call to prayer was a wonderful way to begin the piece," the judge wrote. "Her clear voice and straightforward writing brought to life the very human conflict some of the women choosing Islam face within their families."*

Immediately I thought of the opportunities here for those Muslims who are reporters, reporter -

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again for the Orange Prize. A book of short stories, **Coloured Lights** was published in 2001 and contained her short story, 'The Museum,' which made her the first winner of the Caine Prize for African Writing in 2001. Leila talked about how her writing has been influenced by her experiences of living in the UK, her life in Khartoum and now in Abu Dhabi.

She began her lecture by reading the story, Majed, from her short collection: **Coloured Lights**. Majed was the narrative voice and main character. This is one of the few times Leila has written from a man's point of view. She mentioned that research has espoused a theory that when women write about men they are not writing about a dream man but themselves as a man.

The following are brief synopses of some questions and answers.

*Was the story, Majed based on a real man?*

Leila explained that she spent time in Scotland where Scottish women were married to Muslim men. She was exposed to mixed stories, problems and successes. She also said that the drinking in the story is based on the reality that drinking is part of the African culture. Even with the arousal of Islam, it is still part of the culture.

*"I notice you are not shy about writing about Islam. Is it a conscious effort?"*

"Yes." Her generation is not shy. "I read a lot and notice when religion is missing. My favorite novel is, **Jane Eyre**." She loves reading about spiritual and religious themes.

*"I write about what I find disturbing and moving. If I don't have the emotions then I can't write."* Leila Aboulela

*"Define differences between men and women writers?"*


She said that being a woman, "I don't have access to Arab life in the streets, only in the home." She explained that her mother was the first woman dean in the university and that she was aware that she worked outside of the home.

*"Is the immigration issue, more interesting presented as mixed or as non cross cultural relations?"*

She felt both perspectives are valid but she has always been interested in cross-cultural marriages.

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wannabees, freelance or otherwise, that could write about Deen-ul-Islam for the mainstream media in such a way as to promote tolerance and understanding. Indeed, it is we, the Muslims who practice this Deen who should be writing about it and insha' Allah, garnering awards.

However, in writing about Islam, for the mainstream media there are certain guidelines that should be followed. NRA has published a book, **Reporting on Religion: A Primer, Journalism's Best Beat**, It is [a free download](#) that presents the basics on reporting on religion and with resources and advice about the pitfalls. This guide will help the veteran journalists, rookies, radio, television and online media providers. For those who are interested go to their website, [www.nra.org](http://www.nra.org). **Zakia Iman Shahbaz** 



*"Your narrative voice is very strong. How does it come to you?"*

"There are no rules; it depends on the story". In short stories it is more difficult to write completely. "My writing is very deliberate; I'm not a natural born writer."

*Do you worry about the effect writing negative things about Muslims may have on non Muslims and the resulting continuous good or bad deeds you may incur?*

Yes, she does. But once she writes something, she is finished with it. If she continued to worry she would not write. She would give it up altogether.

There are so many shades to her writing. A man in the audience commented that Leila seemed to be so different from her heroines, appearing to be an ordinary Muslim. This is a sign of a good writer being able to distance yourself from your heroines.

*"My writing is very deliberate. I'm not a natural born writer."* Leila Aboulela

A whoop of laughter rose from the audience when she was asked why she did not write about the Emirates. "The Emirates, you have to see it to believe it." "So, I feel a book about it would not be believed." Her current book is a 1950's-historical novel about the Sudan.

After the informative and enjoyable lecture, she signed her books, **The Translator** and **Minaret** that were briskly sold afterwards.

Zakia Iman Shahbaz 

(Her books are available on Amazon.com)



## THE POETRY CORNER: *Cornucopia*

### Out of Gaza

His tattered, bloodstained T-shirt slightly ballooning as  
the air rushes.

His tears rolling one by one, clearing his dusty cheek  
like the tank that rolled over his home and falling onto  
the unearthed land of his father.

The trees ripped up one by one, destroying his  
livelihood.

His chest filled with hope and determination.

He is not broken nor derailed.

One foot in front of the other, down the dusty road.

Traveled by many, never to return . . .

Yet filled with hope.

J.O.Y., Dec. 24, 2007

### Unseen and Unheard

They're worlds are some without light and some  
without sound.

Their hands feel and touch reaching for the textures  
and refined lines or listening for the faint sounds.

Their skin, sensitive to every degree of change or  
vibration.

Gifted in ways which we cannot fathom.

Eyes and faces filled with hope and desire of attaining  
greatness.

A greatness only defined by themselves.

Guide them and help them.

Perhaps you will find guidance yourself.

J.O.Y., Jan. 15, 2008

### Blind Leading the Blind

What is the answer to my question?  
What is my question?  
I am asking when I wake up  
Silently.

There is something that I must do  
There is something that I am not doing  
What do I do until I find out  
Until I put it into words?

Am I lost or missing?  
I can't turn to my elders.  
My peers compare themselves to me;  
Blind leading the blind

Nasrah Rose, Jan. 2008.

### Forgotten Necessity

In the midst of our smiles and laughter  
Awaits things that really matter  
Awaits a reminder.

Some reminders remain your whole life  
In the form of something you can't make right  
So please, makeup your mind this night.  
What will it be?

Grab my hand now let it slip  
And try to catch my fingertips  
Only catch my fingertips  
As I slip  
Away.

Now... when you forget to pray  
Reminisce  
On how hard it was this day  
To grab hold of me as I fled away  
From your grasp when you most needed me.

Nasrah Rose, March 2008

## Laborer's Lullaby

Do they even know that you are afraid of heights?  
Probably not.  
You just remember their faces, so sad and hopeful  
Thinking that you can change their world forever.  
Maybe you could.  
Have they ever felt hell's breath?  
Arabian sun from May to October.  
Hot, moist winds feel seven hundred feet up in the air,  
can make Ramses' stone  
likeness feel dizzy.  
"Can you send me some new Jackie Chan cds?"  
"Insh'Allah."  
"Oh, and the school fees, and Mama needs an  
operation. Don't forget, ok?"  
The probably don't know that just like eggs  
Sometimes, people fall and crack and all of their yolks  
Spatter all over the ground.  
"Where's the money, Baba?"  
"Jawlo, I will send it in two days, ok?"  
It's easier to shave your head to get the dust and rocks  
out of it, but if you  
did, the sun would soften your skull.  
Dignity, lost.  
Sleeping ten to a room,  
Everybody's itchy.  
Chicken pox spreads faster than news about Britney  
on the net.  
"Amoo, Ana 'eyez thahab minal emirat, meshy ya  
habibiti, hadr."  
Allah created male and female, but you forgot,  
Going into Ibn Battuta you see her, woman, wow!!  
Eyes have to drink it in so that you can remember her  
until next month  
Your wife's face, you wonder is it the same.  
"Who was that Uma?"  
"That was your ata."  
"I have a father? From where?"

Your children realize that, *Are You My Mother*, where a  
chick pops out an egg  
Your children realize that, *Are You My Mother*, where a  
chick pops out an egg  
Is not *their* autobiography.  
And when you finally give up, and go home, everyone  
sad,  
The money tree has dried up.  
Maybe because it lacked water,  
Love and consideration  
Or maybe it was just heat, isolation, and loneliness.  
"I died in this country; there is no need for AC where I  
am from."  
If they only knew, perhaps they would be satisfied with  
what they have.

Maryam Ismail 

## Roses to Cope

Color of beauty  
Field of hope  
Sight in mind  
Roses to cope  
Peace of mind  
Sets within  
Relaxation in deed  
Brings on a grin  
In the field as we sit  
The air takes our breath away  
As the beauty of the roses  
Conquers all eyes another day  
The touch of the hand leaves the rose  
As petals fall gracefully  
To the ground  
The smell of the roses brings sweet fragrance  
As the wind carries it swiftly  
Through the field

Sarah Farlow, March 2007 

## Jewel in the Sun

Driving, wondering, anticipating the glorious vision of you.

Waiting, wondering, expecting to see the glorious vision of you.

Resembling a flower, glistening in the morning dew  
A joy to behold for the moment the glorious vision of you.

Basking in freshness the day's labors will soon wear away.  
Inevitable. But that does not change the glorious vision of you.

Soon the moment of approach our meeting eminent;  
My happiness reflected in the glorious vision of you.

Language friendly greeted me but not your kin;  
Left out, she asked with a shout, where is the glorious vision of you?

Why was a stranger welcomed and the other ignored?  
No answer was forthcoming from the glorious vision of you.

Through the open door, we entered a marble tundra  
And were coldly unwelcome by the glorious vision of you.

Midas's touch lined every crevice of the edifice.  
Yet paucity everywhere surrounded the glorious vision of you.

Another door appeared; we entered and were warmed by words.  
We understood but was it really part of the glorious vision of you?

We fetched our fill of this treasure hidden deep within  
An embrace away from the false façade of the glorious vision of you.

Seeking, we found a precious jewel protected from plunder.  
By a door closed but not locked deep inside the glorious vision of you

Steadfast, a jewel in the crown of good conscience  
That grows and glows from within the glorious vision of you

Sincerity is the key to open this place of refuge and joy  
Venture in Zakia, and experience the vision of the glorious you!

Zakia Iman Shahbaz 

## Member News:

### ALHAMDULILLAH!!!

## Congratulations to *MWWWI* members:

J.O.Y. whose story, *Rak After the Rain* featured in last month's March *MWWWI* newsletter was published in *Time Out Dubai*, March 13 - 20, 2008, under 'Write for Us,' page 67.

Maryam Ismail, whose article, "Spinning a revolution in Ottoman Turkey," was featured in the Opinion page section of *Khaleej Times* Thursday March 27, 2008, under Issues: page 12.

## Calendar of Events

Important *MWWWI* Meeting Dates!

Day: First Tuesday and Saturday of the month.

Time: Tues.: 11:00 A.M. – 1:00 P.M.

Sat.: 12:00 A.M. – 2:00 P.M.

Dates: May 3 and 6; June 3 and 7; July 1 and 5.

### SPECIAL EVENTS: *MWWWI* APRIL MEETING

Date: Sat. April 5, 2008; Time: 12:00 to 2:00 P.M.

Venue: Luna Rossa Restaurant at Qanat Al Qasbah. Directions: [www.qaq.ae](http://www.qaq.ae)

**Workshop:** Moments of Reversal and Recognition; Presenter: J.O.Y. (Tues. Mar. 4, at Zakia's bayt; same topic as above.)

### *MWWWI* Annual Folio, 1429!

Don't forget our annual folio! The time has come for *MWWWI* members to begin writing or selecting from your writings what you want to submit to be published in the folio. All material, short stories, essays, poems, etc., are welcome!

### Contributions:

Contribute to *MWWWI* Newsletter:  
Submit to contact addresses or call:

*MWWWI* Editor: Zakia: 050 285 3808

