

Discussion Questions:

- Does this book help or harm the West's perspective of the Middle East? How does this book's portrayal of the treatment of women affect one's view point of the "Middle East"? Or does it?
- How does the narration style influence the reader of both *Midaq Alley* and woman at point zero to sympathize with one character over the other?
- Throughout the novel, Firdhaus attempts to obtain power and control through the appropriation of the masculine symbol of power—money—but fails. When she finally gains a symbolic form of control by murdering a man who is the last in a long line of those who have controlled her, she lays down her life willingly. This makes her powerful and so charismatic that the narrator writes, "At that moment, I realized that Firdhaus had more courage than I" (114, bookstore edition). The narrator then has a profound sense of disorientation, almost to the point of losing touch with her sense of self. Is this a true victory, or yet another frustration of Firdhaus' will? Why did she refuse an appeal or a pardon?
- What is the "truth" that Firdaus discovers and what are its implications? Did this truth drive her to kill? Allow her to kill? If so how and why?
- How do pleasure and pain correlate throughout the novel? How does Firdaus's genital mutilation affect her perception of pleasure? How does the dichotomy of pleasure and pain evolve throughout the novel?

(Other) general topics of interest identified by this week's Moodle forum participants:

Eleanor: relationship between gentleness & murder

Chris: connotations of marriage & prostitution (with respect to power)

Kat: stereotypes of Middle Eastern oppression of women

Gabe & Erin: repeated/recurring lines/motifs

Laura: Hamida compared with Firdaus in re: "Point Zero" (Jack, too)

Ashley: repeated *dialogue*...cycles, lack of progress, nothing new

Jack: Firdaus's psychological depths

Nick: Money and/as power (and "the system")—value, worth, respect

Kylie: crying: why Miss I & Ibrahim?

Sebastian: how Firdaus envisions/constructs social roles

Mara: Uncle's Wife: suffering woman; initial wounding (mother); unreliable *narrator*