

# THE FLYING CAMEL STUDY GUIDE

## Migration

1. What are some of the countries that *The Flying Camel* women migrated to and from, and what were reasons for the women's migrations?
2. What are some of the lands these women's ancestors migrated to and from, and what were reasons for the ancestral migrations?
3. In what ways are the women's relationships to these countries and lands grounded in the physical world - ie, growing up there or sharing common physical features?
4. In what ways are the women's relationships to these countries and lands grounded in the metaphysical world - ie, spiritual connection or identity consciousness?
5. What are some themes of migration struggles in *The Flying Camel* - whether related to leaving one place or arriving at another?
6. In what ways are the migration narratives of women in this book similar to, or different from, those you have encountered before - whether in your personal life or in your studies?

7. The original word for *Yehudim* (Jews) was *Ivrim* (Hebrews), the latter of which means “border crossers.” In what ways do women in *The Flying Camel* embody the spirit of their ancestors, the *Ivrim*?

8. These are the lyrics of A-WA’s “Ya Watani,” from their 2019 album, *Bayti Fi Rasi*:

*I will take my daughter/My loneliness/My mother’s language/My father’s weaving/My humble homeland/My sun-drenched homeland/Show me your smile for the last time/Before I leave*

How does this song reflect themes of migration, loss, and diaspora present in *The Flying Camel*?

9. Consider the many possible causes, experiences, and consequences of exile - such as national, political, religious, intellectual, and personal.

a. How do these variables play out in *The Flying Camel*?

b. How have they played out in your life?

c. How have they played out in other exile narratives that are familiar to you - whether those you know personally or those you have studied?

10. Do we lose one of the aspects in question 9, when we pursue or release another?

11. Reflect on the different aspects of being exiled from one land and starting over in a new one. With those reflections in mind, what are your thoughts about the interplay between the following:

- a. Trauma
- b. Memory
- c. Identity
- d. Freedom
- e. Health

12. What insights have you received from the women in *The Flying Camel*, regarding the experience of exile?

- a. How to honor it?
- b. How to respond to it?
- c. How to heal from it?
- d. How to transmute it?

13. Where is the balance between the following?

- a. Honoring loss and embracing a fresh start?

b. Honoring tradition and embracing change?

## Identity

14. What are some of the intersections of identity, for women in *The Flying Camel*?

15. The women in *The Flying Camel* are diverse in numerous ways yet share similar threads of experience. What are some examples?

16. How have women in *The Flying Camel* experienced anxiety about their authenticity, or felt they were performing their identity?

a. What were some takeaway insights or lessons for your own life?

17. How has *The Flying Camel* impacted your understanding of diversity?

18. How does *The Flying Camel* challenge common narratives among the following groups?

a. Jews

b. Mizrahim and Sephardim

c. Arabs and Persians

d. LGBTQIA+

e. People of color

f. Women

19. Based on *The Flying Camel*, how do you see Mizrahi and Sephardi assimilation into Ashkenazi paradigms as being similar to or different from other forms of assimilation?
- a. Eastern assimilation into Western paradigms?
  - b. Jewish assimilation into non-Jewish paradigms?
  - c. Anything else?
20. How has *The Flying Camel* impacted your understanding of North African and Middle Eastern women?
21. What are examples of how women in *The Flying Camel* were asked to subsume one aspect of their identity in deference to another, and what are examples of how they refused?
22. In what ways were women in *The Flying Camel* made to feel that feminism, or women's liberation, was at odds with their ethnic and/or religious identity?
- a. How did they respond to that belief?
23. In what ways is the erasure of identity connected to the experience of exile, in *The Flying Camel*?

- a. In the women's personal lives?
  - b. In the women's collective memories?
  - c. In others' perceptions of the women in *The Flying Camel*?
24. What are your thoughts about how to stay rooted in ancient tradition while allowing that tradition, and the people who practice it, to change?
- a. In what ways do your thoughts relate to the experiences of women in *The Flying Camel*?
25. What are some ways you see women in *The Flying Camel* honoring their identity and making their heritage a living, breathing part of their everyday lives?
26. In what ways have you grappled with identity, and how does your experience relate to the experiences of women in *The Flying Camel*?

## **Culture**

27. In what ways are preservation of culture and preservation of self at odds with each other, in *The Flying Camel*?
28. What are some ways culture clash plays out in *The Flying Camel*?
- a. Generational attitudes?

- b. Attitudes about self-discovery?
  - c. Gender and sexual politics?
  - d. Anything else?
29. How do themes of loss and grief play out in *The Flying Camel*, with regards to cultural struggles?
- a. How are these themes resolved or not resolved?
30. How do women's relationships with community develop over the course of their lives?
31. Which expectations do women in *The Flying Camel* defy?
- a. Their own?
  - b. Those of their families?
  - c. Those of their surrounding cultures?
32. How are women in *The Flying Camel* agents of change?
33. In what ways does *The Flying Camel* challenge ideas of "exceptional women"?
34. In what ways do women in *The Flying Camel* draw from precedent, and in what ways do they set precedent?

35. What are some of the tensions compelling women in *The Flying Camel* to 1) protect, 2) challenge, and 3) reject their cultures?
36. In what ways are women in *The Flying Camel* actively keeping their cultures alive?
37. How do you define cultural (co-)creation and cultural preservation?
- a. Where do you see these two forces at odds with each other?
  - b. Where do you see harmonious integration of the two?
38. How does the theme of permission play out in *The Flying Camel*, with regards to cultural (co-)creation and preservation?
39. How do themes of loss and grief play out in the women's stories of cultural struggle?
40. How does *The Flying Camel* invite readers to make culture a dialogue?
41. After reading *The Flying Camel*, what are your thoughts about the tensions between participating in and co-opting a culture?
- a. How do these tensions play out with regards to creating an inclusive community?
42. How do women in *The Flying Camel* serve as a bridge between different worlds?

43. How can personal stories, like those in *The Flying Camel*, help cultivate an environment where diverse cultures are honored, respected as equally-valid, and treated with kindness?
44. What steps need to be taken, individually or collectively, to fully include North African and Middle Eastern Jewish women in the various groups to which they inherently may belong, but currently may not be accepted or reflected?
45. What other literature does *The Flying Camel* remind you of, and why?
46. Reflect on your own “dance” with culture:
- a. Where has culture shaped you, and where have you shaped culture?
  - b. In what ways do you feel in harmony with your surrounding culture; in what ways do you feel at odds with it; and in what ways do you feel threatened by it?
  - c. In what ways do you feel welcome or unwelcome to lead or influence culture, and why?
  - d. In what ways is being a cultural outcast alienating and harmful, and in what ways is it liberating and empowering?
  - e. How do you relate your experience of culture to the experiences of women in *The Flying Camel*?

## Struggle

47. What are some of the worlds in which these women both belong and don't belong, and how does this paradox play out in their lives?
48. What are some ways displacement plays out in each woman's story?
49. What are some of the forms of prejudice these women face, and how do they respond - internally? externally?
  - a. Do their experiences remind you of an experience in your own life?
50. What are some of the hard choices, and accompanying experiences of loss and grief, that weave throughout *The Flying Camel*?
51. What are some ways these women have been encouraged and uplifted, or disappointed and failed, by individuals or communities?
  - a. Who or what appears responsible for how things played out?
  - b. What needed to change, so as to play out differently?
52. What are the various kinds of trauma addressed in *The Flying Camel*?
  - a. What are your thoughts about how to process and heal from trauma like that, individually and collectively?

53. What are some of *The Flying Camel* themes of struggle that are common to LGBTQIA+ from traditional backgrounds and/or minority groups?
54. How do the stories in *The Flying Camel* deepen conversations about power, oppression, and privilege?
55. In what ways was the creation of *The Flying Camel* an act of healing and transformation?
- a. What transformative experience do you relate it to, in your own life?
56. Which essays and poems challenge thinking about racism, and how?
- a. What are your thoughts about these critiques?
  - b. Do they relate to anything in your own life?
57. How do the individual and collective memories of *The Flying Camel* women challenge political camps and accepted timelines in today's public discourse?
58. How did mass intimidation and ethnic cleansing play out in the lives of women in *The Flying Camel*?
59. What do the women's stories reveal about the demographic upheaval in North Africa and the Middle East, and its impact on today's politics?

60. How do these stories complicate ideas of and relationships to colonialism?
61. How do these stories deepen your understanding of the Holocaust?
62. How do these stories complicate ideas about the relationship between Jews and Arabs?
  - a. Between Israel and Arab governments?
63. Do the complexities of these women's struggles resonate with those in your own life, and if so, how?
64. What are some ways that women in *The Flying Camel* resolved their struggles?
  - a. Do you find takeaway lessons for your own life?
65. How have these women's struggles paradoxically served as opportunities for healing, growth, and transformation?

### **Additional Perspectives and Thoughts**

66. Which stories and poems did you most resonate with, and why?
67. How has *The Flying Camel* affected your thinking or process around these general ideas?

- a. Personal and communal healing
  - b. Rethinking, reclaiming, or redefining identity
  - c. Cultural engagement and ownership
  - d. Artistic self-expression
68. How has *The Flying Camel* affected your thinking or process around these specific ideas?
- a. What it means to be Jewish
  - b. American ideas of race and racism
  - c. Ownership and statehood in the Middle East
  - d. Identity politics of North African and Middle Eastern women
69. What other ideologies or paradigms has this book challenged for you, and how?
70. In what ways does *The Flying Camel* challenge spaces that have been organized to prevent feeling marginalized - for example, spaces created for Jewish women, LGBTQIA+ Jews, Middle Eastern women, etc?
71. What are some issues you did not see addressed at all, or as frequently or deeply as you would have liked, in *The Flying Camel*?

- a. Why do you think these issues may not have come forth at all, or as strongly as you would have liked?
  - b. How do you think the women's perspectives on these issues may have helped your thinking or process?
72. Are there any additional questions you feel are important to ask, to catalyze introspection and conversation about this book?
73. What do you see as the next step for the work pioneered by *The Flying Camel*, and how - if at all - do you see yourself contributing to that next step, now or down the line?

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