

For activists and academics—and everyone in between

## Who said this?

“She was not supposed to think or argue. And if she was allowed to think, then she had to take the decision of the majority as her own. The group was over the individual, the family over everybody, and the men were the ones who form the consciousness and values of the nation.”

(c.f. Samar Attar. *A novel. Lina: A portrait of a Damascene Girl*. Colorado: Three Continents Press, 1994, p.153)



**Samar Attar**



## *Anthropology of Men, Family and Parenting in the Contemporary Middle East.*

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## Opportunities

### Call for Papers

The editorial committee of *Al-Raida* invites submissions to a non-thematic, double-blind, peer reviewed issue.

For more information kindly contact al-raida: [al-raida@lau.edu.lb](mailto:al-raida@lau.edu.lb)

### Announcement

The Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World (IWSAW) at the Lebanese American University (LAU) invites applicants for a tenure-track faculty position in the field of Women & Gender Studies at the professorial rank.

**Vacancy date: Spring 2014.**

[Click here](#) for more information on application requirements.

### Call for Proposals

The Arab Council for the Social Sciences (ACSS) is pleased to announce the 2<sup>nd</sup> round of its Research Grants Program competition on the theme of “Inequality, Mobility and Development in the Arab Region”.

**Deadline for Application: March, 2014.**

[Click here](#) for more information on submission guidelines.

## Films and Sexual Violence in Egypt Nancy Gallagher\*

“**S**ix, Seven, Eight” by screenwriter Muhamed Diab opened in Cairo in December 2010. Through the lives of three women, the film depicted the daily experiences of many Egyptian women. One of the three is harassed going to work on an overcrowded bus. She joins a self-help group run by the second woman who was sexually assaulted after a soccer match. The second woman’s traumatized husband then abandoned her. A truck driver tried to grab the third woman as she tried to cross the street on her way home. Infuriated, she ran after him, and joined by her mother who had been watching from the balcony, caught up with him in Cairo’s legendary traffic.

The two women brought him to a police station where the policeman refused to take the complaint. This incident was based on a true story in which a woman took her assailant to court ultimately leading to new - though rarely enforced - legislation criminalizing harassment.

A month after the film came out, Egyptians gathered at Tahrir Square in Cairo and other cities in Egypt to call for “bread, freedom, and social justice.” For eighteen glorious days, people from diverse backgrounds stood together chanting peacefully, resisting state supported violence. Finally the military forced Hosni Mubarak, Egypt’s long-serving president, to resign. Many women later said it was the first time in

their lives they stood in public without fear of sexual harassment. But the night Mubarak resigned; women’s bodies became contested territory. Women journalists and activists, international and local, were viciously attacked.

Less than a month later, on International Women’s Day, March 8, 2011, where women were expected to celebrate the occasion, crowds of men shouted at and attacked women demonstrators at Tahrir Square. They told the women to “go home and make mahshi” (stuffed vegetables). The following day, the interim military government detained seventeen women demonstrators,

## Films and Sexual Violence in Egypt

held them first in the Egyptian Museum adjacent to Tahrir Square and later in a military prison where they were subjected to virginity tests. General Abdul Fatah al-Sisi, now Egypt's military ruler, claimed that, "the virginity-test procedure was done to protect the girls from rape as well as to protect the soldiers and officers from rape accusations." The novelist, Alaa al-Aswany, whose book *The Yacoubian Building*, later made into a movie provides excellent background to the uprising, wrote, "The real purpose of the virginity tests was to break the spirit of the demonstrators and to humiliate them until they could no longer continue with the revolution. ... When the news spread and the "virginity tests" became a big scandal, members of the Military Council initially denied they had taken place, and then changed track and admitted it. ... The problem is that the Military Council possesses the same instruments as Mubarak, with full control over the state apparatus, which it runs as it wishes. The virginity tests court hearings were under the military judicial system, which (with full respect to the staff) is not independent because the judge is an officer with superiors whose orders we cannot imagine him disobeying and, furthermore, because Field Marshal Tantawi has the right to overrule verdicts and reduce sentences as he wishes. This week a military court acquitted the officer accused of abusing Egyptian women in the "virginity tests" case. This verdict means that injustice still reigns in our country. The Mubarak regime is still in power and the law is still enforced according to who you are, your social status, and your political opinions.... The Military Council really does belong to the Mubarak regime, in the way it thinks and in what it says, and for a full year it has tried hard to turn the revolution into a mere coup. The revolutionaries considered deposing Mubarak to be the first step towards overthrowing the regime and building a new system. The Military Council saw pushing Mubarak aside as an inevitable step in the future

preservation of the Mubarak regime. The Military Council is responsible for all of the artificial crises that have been used to put pressure on Egyptians, to turn against the revolution and regret ever having brought it about. ..." ([Huff post, 2013](#)).

The abuse continued. The world was shocked when on December 11, 2011 soldiers dragged a woman activist through the square, and stripped her abaya revealing her blue bra. A nearby woman who rushed to aid her was herself brutally beaten. In the following days, thousands of women marched in protest, often joined by women bystanders.

The attacks took on a systematic pattern. Men would separate their prey from their companions, systematically surround women demonstrators and proceed to rape them with their fingers and sometimes with blades or other implements: "Finger-rapes appear to be common during attacks on women protesters in Cairo. They are part of a recurrent pattern the Egyptian news site called the "circle of hell". A mob of 200 or more men advances in two lines through the square, in search of one or two isolated women. Once the "preys" have been singled out, the group surrounds them, and locks them inside a three-line human circle. The men in the circle immediately surrounding the woman begin to strip the girl, the second circle includes men who claim that they are helping the girl (while) the third circle tries to distract the people in the square from what is happening" (Hatem Tallima, an activist and member of the Revolutionary Socialists organization, [Ahram Online](#)). As the mob gets bigger and messier, the assailants mingle with men who are genuinely trying to rescue the woman. This is meant to confuse the victim so that she can't distinguish between who is trying to harm her and who is trying to help her. The owner of an apartment above Tahrir opened it to victims of

assault who would be taken there for treatment and safety. Assailants pounded on ambulances rushing women away. In one instance a young man entered an ambulance with the woman who had been assaulted claiming that he was helping her. When the doctor asked to see his ID the man fled.

For the first time, women began to testify publically about their horrific experiences, in newspapers, journals, and talk shows. NGOs such as Nazra for Feminist Studies posted the testimonies on their websites. Women and men formed organizations to confront the harassers.

In spring 2013, Waleed Hammad, an actor, starred in a TV program on sexual harassment. The program was part of a series on political, social, and economic realities in Egypt. Hammad dressed as a woman first unveiled and then veiled went about the city. He was followed by a prosperous man in an expensive car, who tried to lure him into it, then by a man seemingly talking on his mobile but who quietly invited him to a paid rendezvous with another man in a hotel. He was harassed by men whether he was wearing a veil or not. He later commented, "I realized that simply walking on the street, for a woman, is such a huge effort, a psychological effort and a bodily effort. It's like women are besieged." ([Yahoo News, 2013](#))

While more women are speaking out and organizations are being formed to combat it, there have been few police investigations or prosecutions. Many, including Salafi members of the Shura Council, blamed the women for dressing provocatively, or for simply being at the demonstrations.

Reasons given for rape acts include unemployment, poverty, delayed marriage, Internet pornography, etc... But a Harassmap study found that prepubescent boys, middle aged men, and wealthy senior men harassed women. Women were harassed whether or not they wore a veil or niqab. Ramita Navai in her 2012 film "Egypt: Sex Mobs and Revolution" interviewed men from a low-income Cairo neighborhood who claimed to be paid to disrupt protests and harass women. They would not say who pays them ([Channel 4, 2012](#)).

Activist women continue to struggle on all fronts. In September, the current military government under General Sisi asked fifty leading Egyptians, among Hoda Elsadda, professor of English at Cairo University and past-president of the Association of Middle East Women's Studies, to serve on a committee to revise Egypt's 2012 constitution that had been hastily written and rushed through by the Muslim Brothers government. The revised constitution, with amendments that are projected to be more progressive toward women and minorities than the previous one, will soon be ready for public debate.

**\*Dr. Nancy Gallagher is research professor at the department of history at the University of California, Santa Barbara.**

\*The article is part of a keynote speech delivered at MESA conference, New Orleans, October 10, 2013.

## NGO Highlight

### Iraqi Al-Amal Association

The **Iraqi Al-Amal Association** is a non-profit, non-governmental association established in 1992.

The association projects and programs target all Iraqi population regardless of race, gender, political or religious affiliations. The association aims to foster a culture of respect for human rights to combat all forms of violence and discrimination and to promote gender equality in the local community.

[Click here](#) to know more about *Iraqi Al-Amal Association*

## WHO IS SHE? Profiling: Samar Attar



Samar Attar is a pioneer scholar, poet, literary critic, and intellectual who wrote in two literary traditions and cultures - Arabic and English - with pride and courage. She published extensively in both English and Arabic in the fields of literary criticism, translation, teaching language and creative writing. Her books include *The Vital Roots of European Enlightenment: Ibn Tufayl's Influence on Modern Western Thought* (2007; 2010), *Debunking the Myths of Colonization* (2010), and *The Intruder in Modern Drama* (1981), *A Journey at Night: Poems by Salah Abd al-Sabur* (Cairo, 1970), *Modern Arabic for Foreign Students*, 4 volumes plus Teachers Manual and 17 cassettes (Beirut, 1988 & 1991).

Her novels: *Lina: A Portrait of a Damascene Girl* (Arabic, 1982; English, 1994) and *The House on Arnus Square* (Arabic, 1988; English, 1998); a hybrid of fiction and memoir, are a good testimony of the tragic history of the socio-political changes in Damascus of the 1950-60 and of the challenges that girls and women faced. Her poems have appeared in various anthologies including: *The Return of the Dead* in Magdalena Lopes Pérez, Ed. (Cordoba, 2008), *Women of the Fertile Crescent* (Washington, 1981), and *The Penguin Book of Women Poets* (London, 1978).

Her radio play *Australia Day* appeared in *Australian Writing* (Penguin, 1988). Samar Attar gave a fascinating lecture, which I attended in 1995 at the University of Toronto, Canada, on "Sexuality, Emancipation, and Submission: The Civilizing Process and the establishment of a Female Role Model in the Frame Story of the '1,001 Arabian Nights'".

Samar Attar was born in Damascus, Syria in 1940. She Studied at Damascus University (two Honours degrees/Licences Letters, English, Arabic), Dalhousie University, Canada (M.A. English Literature) and State University of New York at Binghamton (Ph.D. Comparative Literature: English, French, German). She taught English, Arabic and Comparative literature in Canada, USA, Algeria, Germany and Australia. She is now still resident in Sidney, Australia. Recently she published three works, *Oral History: The Third generation Lebanese in Australis* (Sidney, 2013), *Writings in Exile* (Sidney, 2013), and *In Search of Fanon's Algeria* (Sidney, 2010). Her book entitled, *Borrowed Imagination: The British Romantic Poets and their Arabic-Islamic Sources*, is due to appear in the United States in April 2014.

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## **Anthropology of Men, Family and Parenting in the Contemporary Middle East**

Thinking about the "man question" in anthropology and masculinities in the Middle East has recently provided important changes in our understanding of male aspirations and practices, emphasizing the hierarchy and plurality of masculinities and their collective and dynamic character. Global forces such as urbanization, migration, financial crises, political upheavals, expanded educational and employment opportunities, as well as old and new media and information technologies, are all challenging and expanding the boundaries of what it means to be a family man, as well as relationships between children and fathers.

I organized a panel for the Middle East Studies Association's annual meeting in New Orleans (2013) entitled "Anthropology of Men, Family and Parenting in the Contemporary Middle East" where we discussed the conceptual character of the "man question." The papers viewed contemporary trajectories of concrete male practices through the lenses of family and parenting. A core underlying theme was how life's ambiguities can be combined with local, intensely ethnographic considerations of male fulfillment and interaction.

Participants drew on their empirical studies to raise critical questions regarding assumptions about the nature of the "Arab man." Johannes Becker (University of Goettingen) began the panel by addressing the ways in which the roles of fathers are carried out under political oppression in the Old City of Jerusalem. Drawing on this fieldwork, Becker described how fathers experience their parenting roles and what ideals of manhood they have for their sons. He showed how fathers compare their sons' everyday reality with their own childhood and youth. Becker suggested "historical generation" as a way of approaching male self-reflexivity.

With the "coming out" of men's fertility and sexuality secrets in vitro fertilization clinics, Marcia C. Inhorn (Yale University) drew on her extensive research in the Middle East to question assumptions about Arab men in an era of emerging science and technology. Inhorn explained how new technological developments designed to overcome male infertility are changing Arab men's lives and moral subjectivities. She explained how, in today's Middle East, men are rethinking their "emergent masculinities" as they undertake masturbation for the purpose of assisted conception out of devotion to their wives. Now accepted as a routine part of assisted reproduction, masturbation is one of many practices signifying men's emergent masculinities, or newly embodied ways of being men.

Food, like sexuality, resonates with attitudes and emotions relating to men's and women's understanding of self and others and their underlying interactions. In my paper I gave an account of food in its social and material dimensions as seen through the narratives of Egyptian men. I raised questions about the link between men's struggles to feed their families well and often their anticipations and everyday practices. I suggested that anthropological and ethnographic aspects, like food, which turn up during our fieldwork, offer edifying ways of thinking about men's daily lives and relationships.

The "decline" of the classical Palestinian image of masculinity was the topic of Laila Prager's (University of Hamburg) presentation. She analyzed the changing forms of masculinity among Palestinian men living in the lower-middle-class district of Jabal al-Akhadar in Jordan. Prager focused on how equal opportunities to pursue education among the young men and women, especially within the domain of religious studies, has had a profound impact on the way in which gender relations and hierarchies are debated among family members. Through her cases, she offered insights into how consanguineal and affinal relations are changing.

Finally, the panel and the discussion that followed benefited greatly from Suad Joseph's (University of California, Davis) questions, suggestions, and comments. While Joseph discussed each paper and provided advice on how to take our work forward, the space does not permit me to reproduce her brilliant discussion in full. Perhaps I will emphasize that she urged us to analyze the changes in masculinity in relation to changes in femininity on the ground. I want to take this opportunity to warmly thank the panel participants, Suad Joseph, and all our colleagues who found their way to our panel at 8:30 in the morning and who raised questions and offered invaluable suggestions.

**Nefissa Naguib, Ph.D.**  
**Research Professor**  
**Chr. Michelsen Institute, Bergen, Norway**

**Call for Papers:****Conference: Arab Countries in Transition: Gender Rights and Constitutional Reforms  
June 23-25, 2014**

Arab women have been active participants in the uprisings/revolutions that swept the Arab world calling for democracy, social justice, and reform. They took to the streets, organized and lead protests, and played a central role in the fight for change. Arab women played a major role in the uprisings/revolutions; however, the recent political changes in the region have raised questions related to their marginalization/empowerment. The rise to power of Islamist movements, with their conservative agendas, in several Arab countries was cause for alarm given that they pushed for constitutions that reflect their conservative beliefs and restrictive ways of thinking. This created a rift between the liberals and the conservatives. In order to avoid further backlash, Arab countries were forced to revise their constitutions or change them entirely by drafting new constitutions to avoid further discord. Even countries that did not witness any real revolution were put under enormous pressure to introduce reforms and adopt constitutional changes. The question remains: Will the revised constitutions safeguard previous gains that women had achieved? Is there a real commitment to women's equality?

In light of all the above, and given that women's rights are at the heart of human rights, the Institute for Women Studies in the Arab World in partnership with the Women and Memory Forum is organizing a conference that addresses gender rights and constitutional reforms in the MENA region. The conference will be held in Beirut from June 23 until June 25, 2014 at the Lebanese American University. The two guest speakers of the conference are Dr. Suad Joseph, Distinguished Professor of Anthropology and Women and Gender Studies at the University of California, Davis (day one) and Dr. Hoda Elsadda, Professor of English and Comparative Literature, Faculty of Arts, Cairo University and head of the Freedoms and Rights Committee in the Constituent Assembly, Egypt (day two).

Scholars are invited to submit papers that address the following themes:

- Islamic law (*sharia*), constitutions, and women's rights
- Gender and the Arab uprisings/revolutions (Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, Syria, Bahrain and Yemen)
- Constitutional debates and gender equality in the revised/new constitutions (Egypt, Tunisia, Libya, Morocco, Jordan)
- Feminist concerns during and after the Arab uprisings/revolutions
- Human rights violations during and after the Arab uprisings/revolutions
- Women's political participation during and after the Arab uprisings/revolutions
- Testimonies: Women tell their stories
- Legal reforms and changes impacting women in the MENA region
- Audio-visual: Documentaries and films related to the struggle for democracy and constitutional rights

Proposals should consist of a 250-word abstract that includes the paper's title and a short bio data with the author's affiliation and contact information. Participants will be notified if their abstract is accepted three weeks after the deadline. Full papers should be sent not later than June 10, 2014. Any questions about the conference or the program should be directed to [iwsaw@lau.edu.lb](mailto:iwsaw@lau.edu.lb)

The languages of the conference will be: English, Arabic, and French

**Deadline: Abstracts are due by January 25, 2014.**

**Deadline: Papers are due by June 10, 2014.**

**Name of panelist:**

**Title:**

**Affiliation:**

**Category: (Individual paper/audiovisual material/testimonies)**

**Abstract:**

**\*Please note that once your abstract is accepted, IWSAW will cover your travel expenses and your hotel accommodation (4 days). IWSAW will consider the possibility of publishing the conference proceedings in a book.**

## Highlights



***Feminist & Islamic Perspectives: New Horizons of Knowledge & Reform***

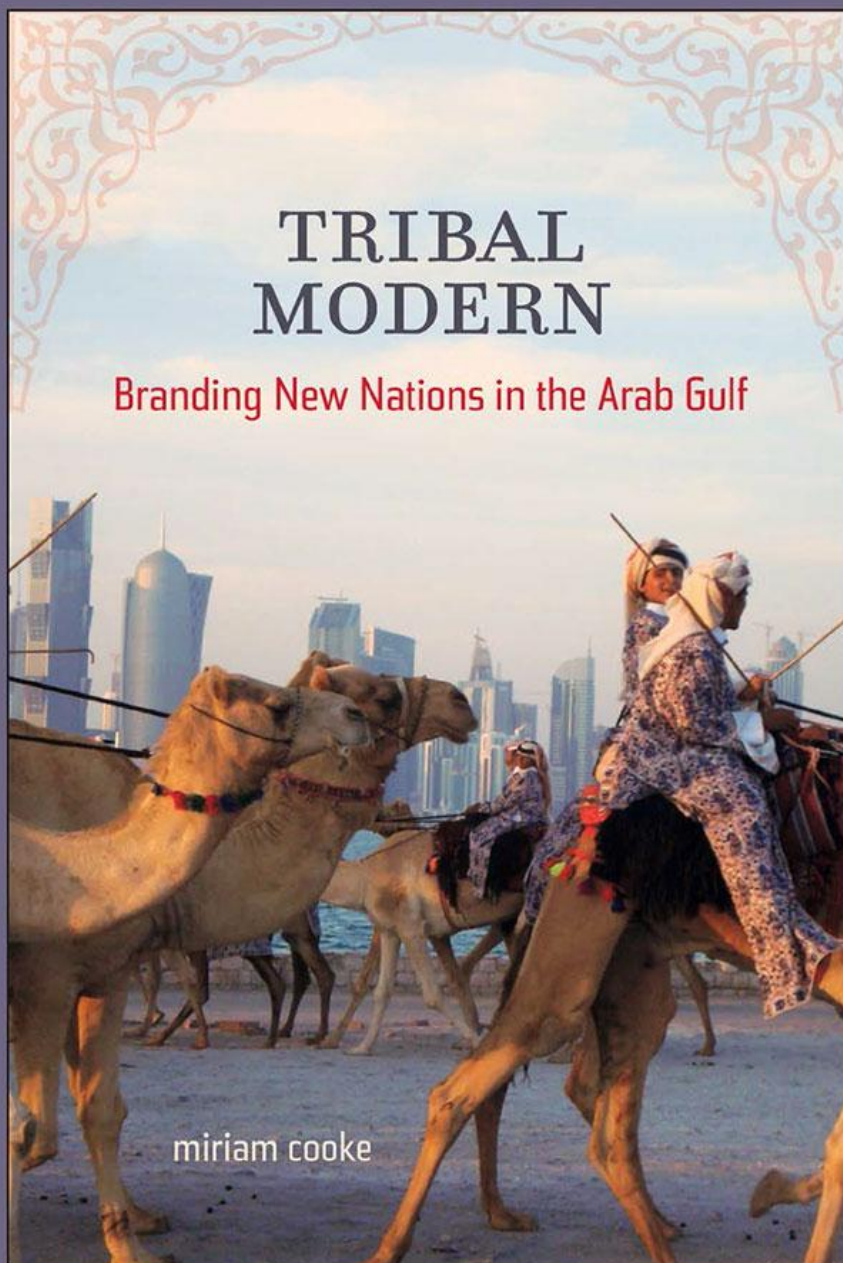
**Editor:** Omaila Abou-Bakr

**Publisher:** DEDI-KVINFO & the Women and Memory Forum

**Year of Publication:** 2013

**Available in English and Arabic**

This book contains presentations on a range of diverse issues related to the meeting ground of Islamic and feminist perspectives. It is the outcome of a two-day conference that was held in Cairo, March 17-18, 2012 with participants from the Arab region and Europe, providing a forum of exchange between Muslim feminists in both Arab and European societies. The issues discussed in the chapters also demonstrate the importance of internal dialogues between European Muslims and their own mainstream societies and communities, on one hand, and between Muslim women feminists and their Arab societies and cultures, on the other hand. Lastly, bridging the gap, or estrangement, between feminist consciousness and Islamic research is a major goal, both on a conceptual and an applied level.



To contribute announcements or articles to this newsletter or to subscribe, please email:  
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