For activists and academics — and everyone in between

Who Said This?

"My success is a consequence of many factors and human experiences which I passed through, and maybe it goes back to my strong and emancipated character more than my identity and gender. Yes, I have achieved success, but the road was not easy or planted with roses, it was a result of a very long struggle." [1]

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Zaha Hadid
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Opportunities

Call for Abstracts
The Middle East and North Africa Graduate Student Organization (MENA), the Center for Middle Eastern Studies (CMES) and the school of Middle Eastern and North African Studies (MENAS) at the University of Arizona invite you to participate in the *15th Annual Southwest Graduate Conference* in Middle Eastern and North African Studies in Tucson, Arizona, March 26-28, 2015.

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Women's Political Participation in Egypt: Beyond the Numbers

As the dust begins to settle down after three years of stormy debates regarding the outcomes of the Egyptian uprising, it is worthwhile to pause and take a nuanced look at the issue of women's political participation. This article presents a detailed picture of women's political situation in Egypt, looking beyond simplistic accounts of representative numbers. While certain reductive figures are often bandied about to indicate that women's situation has not improved a glance beyond the numbers reveals a very different story.

The full scope of women's political participation should be understood to include the very broad range of public activities that result in or intend to influence the work of government, the shape of political policy and the selection of decision makers (Al-Maaitah, Al-Maaitah, Olaimat, and Gharaeibeh, 2011). Using this broad definition, I will argue that the political visibility and participation of Egyptian women has undoubtedly improved after the uprising. These gains are reflected by women's increased voting turnout, by their presence as candidates in a wide range of electoral contests, and by their unprecedented

direct participation in the uprising. Women's political gains have also been solidified by formal stipulations such as the anti-discriminatory clauses included in the 2014 constitution.

A quick glance at Egyptian women's political participation prior to the uprising shows that in December 2010 women held 65 out of 512 seats in the parliament—a relatively high, albeit still dismal, rate of representation (12.7%). This unprecedented accomplishment was due to a quota system introduced by former President Mubarak as part of his presidential campaign, which guaranteed that female representatives would account for 12% of the people's assembly. However, reviewing the figures of women's representation in the 2010 parliament separately from previous election cycles provides a misleading impression about women's status in Egyptian politics prior to the uprising. In the 2000 elections, for example, eleven women constituted 2.4% of the parliament—seven were elected and four were appointed by the president. In the 2005 electoral round, nine women constituted 2.0% of the parliament, with four of the women elected and five appointed. The drastic increase in female representation that occurred in 2010 indicates the extent to which women's political participation was bolstered after the implementation of a quota system. Unfortunately, this increase in representation was largely the result of a political maneuver enacted by President Mubarak to improve his political legitimacy. When

Mubarak fell from power, the quota for female representatives fell with him. This is indicative of the way in which women's concerns were used as a bargaining chip by male-dominated political dynasties in the pre-uprising electoral system—female representatives were used as gateways to power, and when their participation was no longer needed, they were urged to return to the private sphere.

The pre-uprising period in Egyptian politics was thus characterized by a symbolic and state-sponsored political participation of women, an elitist and patronizing system that allowed the female representatives little independence or room to enhance their abilities to compete for elections. During this period, it was almost exclusively urban women from the elite strata of Egyptian society who participated as political representatives, either by being appointed or through electoral candidacies funded by non-governmental organizations. These political conditions were profoundly changed by the two consecutive revolutions that took place in Egypt in 2011 and 2013. This uprising introduced an alternative paradigm for women's political participation, one that was neither state-sponsored nor limited to a specific class. Women participated in the uprising, taking on a much more direct and independent role (often reviving memories of the active role that Egyptian women embraced during the 1919 revolution against British colonial rule).

During the uprising, women engaged in peaceful demonstrations and helped to organize strikes. They collected information and reported acts of brutality and torture through social media. A new gender-sensitive political climate emerged during these struggles, as a direct result of the uprising dynamics where women actively participated in the public sphere. It may be said that this paradigm shift formed a new chapter of women's political participation in contemporary Egyptian history.

Following the uprising, women constituted 2.2% of the lower parliament, which admittedly was a considerable drop compared to the 2010 assembly (though not when compared against earlier parliamentary elections). The lower number was due to a variety of factors—not only the abolishment of Mubarak's 2010 quota system, but also the flawed electoral law introduced by the new regime, which adopted a proportional system favoring party agendas over individual candidates' profiles. As a substitute for the previous quota system, the new arrangement required each political party to include at least one woman on its electoral list of candidates. However, this electoral law did not require that the female candidates be allocated a "winnable" seat. The result was that women were typically placed on the bottom of the parties' lists, and thus received minimal votes (Aziz, 2013). Nonetheless, the result of nine women winning elected (not

appointed) seats was still larger than the number of elected female parliamentarians throughout most of the 2000s. This indicates a reality that is very different from what one might perceive by merely comparing the immediate pre- and post-uprising representative totals (12.7% vs. 2.2%). Some degree of concern about the overall representative decline is justifiable, but the reality is that in the post-uprising era women were participating in the political decision-making process in an unprecedented fashion—as voters, as candidates, and in the administration of elections—and they were doing so independently, not as symbolic representatives of elite dynasties.

Adopting this broader understanding provides a better insight into the changes introduced by the popular uprising. The number of women who ran for office following the uprising was the highest that Egypt had seen since 1956. It included 984 female candidates for parliament—a much higher number even when compared against the pool of 404 candidates in 2010, and a nearly eight-fold increase over the 133 female candidates who ran in 2005. This degree of female political participation was greeted with outright alarm in conservative social circles in Egypt (Egyptian Center for Women's Rights, 2014). In their new engagement with popular electoral politics, women voters challenged deeply rooted gender constraints that had previously hindered their participation, such as traditional household and

childcare obligations, as well as an entrenched assumption that women could have no real effect on political results. A common scene in the post-uprising era was women holding their children and queuing for hours in order to vote. Many non-elite women overcame significant societal pressures and financial constraints in order to participate as candidates and voters.

In the post-uprising era, women occupied positions from which they were previously absent. For the first time in Egypt's history, a woman rose to become the head of a political party (Al Dustor). Initiatives such as "Women for Women," established in 2013, took root to endorse the momentum of political change. A group called Nazra for Feminist Studies established the "Women's Political Academy" to develop women's capacity to compete in national and local elections. And in a major turning point, the new Egyptian constitution of 2014 enshrined significant women-friendly clauses. This document explicitly recognized women's right to political participation and prohibited discrimination. The constitution guaranteed representation for women in both houses of parliament and ensured their participation in senior, managerial, judiciary, and public posts. These developments were soon followed by a new parliamentary law establishing a mixed electoral system that is supportive of women, Christians, farmers, youth, and the disabled.

These results indicate that the popular uprising initiated a sincere change in Egypt's civic society that many years of formal, elitist rhetoric and international pressure had failed to produce. Egypt, for example, has long been a signatory of binding international human-rights agreements concerned with gender equality and women's political participation. These include the Convention of the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Egypt did not raise any reservations regarding article seven of the CEDAW, which enshrines women's right to participate in political and public life, including the right to vote and to participate in the formulation of government policy. The Egyptian state had also indicated a commitment to implement UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women Peace and Security, as well as other non-binding international gender frameworks such as the Beijing Platform for Action and the Millennium Development Goals. Despite these commitments, the state's efforts to enhance women's political participation remained largely inconsequential and symbolic. It was not until the uprising of 2011 that women from all walks of Egyptian life began to participate independently and proactively in the political process.

The story of Egyptian women's political participation cannot be told by representative numbers alone. This does not mean that numerical

participation in elected bodies is unimportant. Instead, what it suggests is that a new paradigm of political participation has taken root in the country, one that relies on a systematic cultural shift rather than on symbolic and artificial representation. The new women-friendly constitution and anti-discriminatory laws that have already emerged from this cultural shift should set the stage for continuing changes that will eventually lead to an authentic rise in representative numbers. Looking at the cultural changes behind the numbers dispels the inaccurate idea that a drop in legislative representation after the uprising is indicative of a decline in women's status or political participation. The reality on the ground speaks of a very different trajectory.

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NGO Highlight

Sisterhood is Global Institute/Jordan SIGI/Jordan

SIGI/J is a non-governmental, non-profit organization established in 1998 by a group of human rights activists, lawyers and jurists. The aim of the organization is to promote women's issues, raise awareness on women's rights, and promote gender equality through educational programs, trainings and workshops.

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Call for Papers

The Organizing Committee of the 2015 AECSSR Graduate Student Annual Conference at Université du Québec à Montréal is pleased to welcome abstract submissions for the annual conference, which will take place March 13-14, 2015 at UQAM. In order to participate, students and researchers are invited to submit an abstract (250 words) in relation to one or many of the suggested sessions by **January 31st 2015**

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Women, Gender and Sexuality Panels at MESA 2014

Among the many sessions that took place at the Middle East Studies Association (MESA) annual conference this year, there were a number that revolved around women, gender, sexuality and feminist perspectives in a variety of contexts. AMEWS had the privilege of sponsoring three such panels and roundtables, yet there were others highlighting new project work and offering new insights and contributions to the study of such topics in the Middle East, North Africa and beyond. In this issue, AMEWS seeks to recognize these panels, the topics they covered and salient points of discussion that were raised in the session.

Online Space for Collective Dissent: Reconstructing Gender Discourses in Egypt

"Online Space for Collective Dissent: Reconstructing Gender Discourses in Egypt" was organized by Helen Rizzo (American University in Cairo), Nicole Khoury (Saint Xavier University), and Angie Abdelmonem (Arizona State University). It was chaired by Soraya Altorki (American University in Cairo) and discussed by Vickie Langohr (College of the Holy Cross). The departure point for panel papers was Aouragh and Alexander's (2011) notion of the Internet as both a tool to mobilize the public as well as a space for the collective articulation of dissent. Panelists explored how online spaces have been used to negotiate alternative constructions of gender, sexuality, and violence in Egyptian public discourse, with a focus on how these new notions have been operationalized in calls for social justice.

Helen Rizzo, in her paper titled "Media, Political Opportunity and the Anti-Sexual Harassment Campaign in Post-2011 Egypt", examined the innovative use of technology and social media by HarassMap, a social initiative, to raise awareness and mobilize on a nation-wide scale against sexual harassment. The author argues that by breaking the fear of engaging in protests and other political activities, the Egyptian Revolution has created opportunities for projects addressing gender violence, and HarassMap's use of online platforms generates a new form of collective action with feminist underpinnings.

Nicole Khoury, in "Religiously Gendered: Political Discourse in Asmaa Mahfouz's YouTube Call for the 2011 Egyptian Revolution", explores the construction of a Muslim, female, activist identity in the YouTube call for action credited with starting the Egyptian Revolution, disseminated by Asmaa Mahfouz, a leader in the April 6 movement. It argues that because online space is available to both local and international audiences, Mahfouz employs secular discourse and religious discourse to appeal to both simultaneously. However, the author further argues that Mahfouz articulates a rhetorical position independent from both,

exhibiting what Habermas calls 'postsecular', to articulate an alternative political identity.

Angie Abdelmonem's paper, "Understanding Taharush Al-Ginsy: Changing Conceptions of Sexual Harassment in Egypt", explored how discussion forums served as a space and tool for constructing an alternative, gendered conception of *taharush el-ginsy* (sexual harassment) focused on women. It argued that online forums provided safe spaces to debate norms on sexual harassment, which prior to the start of anti-sexual harassment activism in 2005 focused on child molestation, fears of molestation leading to homosexuality, and workplace sexual violence. Since civil society activism began in Egypt, activists have employed online sites to fashion new norms of *taharush el-ginsy* as the public assault of women in order to define the scope of the problem and advocate for social change.

Discussion points raised by Vickie Langohr included questioning whether some of the difficulties that Abdelmonem highlighted in Egyptian activists' campaign to get society to accept the phrase "*taharush el-ginsy*" as referring to women's sexual harassment arose from the fact that the phrase is translated from English. In response, Abdelmonem noted the longstanding use of the term *taharush el-ginsy* in Arabic news reporting and in discussion forums/social media, arguing that the term had localized origins going

as far back the infamous Attaba Girl case of the early 1990's, when a young girl was raped on a public bus. The term *taharush el-ginsy* was already inhered with certain meanings of sexual violence. However, as was noted by Altorki, there have been transnational influences surrounding the use of *taharush el-ginsy* and anti-sexual harassment activism.

With respect to Asma Mahfouz, Langohr pondered Mahfouz's positioning of herself as a "bint," an unmarried girl calling for her countrymen and women to stand with her in Tahrir and protect her honor. Here, she questioned whether Mahfouz's positioning of self as "bint" was a signal to the populace to take a stand against despotism and corruption, or if this positioning was somehow an inevitable limitation of linguistic use? How else would Mahfouz have referred to herself, given that the term "bint" is commonly used to refer to an unmarried girl, and how it is that meaning can be read into individual statements? Here, Khoury noted that Mahfouz was not limited in how she could have referred to herself linguistically, arguing that Mahfouz could have utilized other terms. More importantly, however, Khoury argued that the context of Mahfouz's call was critical. The larger context within which Mahfouz placed herself demonstrated a conscious rhetorical choice. Not only did she identify herself as a young, unmarried girl, but she also positioned

Who is She?

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Zaha Hadid, an Iraqi born in Baghdad (born 1950) and residing in London, is considered one of the great architects of our times. She was influenced by Oscar Niemeyer (d. Dec. 2012) whose projects encouraged Hadid to shape her own innovative style, following his research on streaming (*al-insiyābiya*) in all forms. During her early childhood, Hadid used to travel by small boat to al-Ahwar in South Iraq where she was astounded by nature, where the sand, water, wild life, buildings and people flow together.[2]

Zaha Hadid grew up in Baghdad, and studied at The Nuns High school (*madrasat al-rāhibat al-ahliya*). She earned a B.S. in mathematics and studied architecture for two years at the American University in Beirut (1972-1975).

Then she moved to the Architectural Association School of Architecture in London, where she met Rem Koolhaas, Elia Zenghelis, and Bernard Tschumi. She worked for her former professors, Koolhaas and Zenghelis, at the Office for Metropolitan Architecture, in Rotterdam, the Netherlands, where she became a partner in 1977. Through her association with Koolhaas, she met Peter Rice, the engineer who gave her support and encouragement early on at a time when her work seemed at a standstill. In 1980, she established her own London-based practice. During the 1980s, she also taught at the Gap Association and was a visiting professor at many universities worldwide. She is currently professor at the University of Applied Arts in Vienna, Austria.

Her buildings are distinctively neofuturistic, characterized by the idea of elasticity (*fikrat al-muruna*) "powerful, curving forms of her elongated structures" (*al-tamaddud wa-l tamattut*) with "multiple perspective points and fragmented geometry to evoke the chaos of modern life". As a person who comes from the rich culture of the near east, Zaha Hadid's monuments, in terms of size and concept, remind me of the temples in upper Egypt (Queen Hatshepsut temple) or of the Palaces in Iraq ('Ishtar Gate, now in Berlin Museum). In her work there is a strong feeling of the return to nature and the power of the feminine.

Zaha Hadid Architects creates landmark projects for all types of purposeful programs.[3] The latest projects include the Vienna University of Economics Library and Learning Centre in Austria (Sept. 8, 2014, cultural and educational); Dongdaemun Design Plaza in Seoul, South Korea (April 23, 2014, cultural and mixed use); Heydar Aliyev Centre in Baku, Azerbaijan (Feb. 12, 2014, cultural); Serpentine Sackler Gallery in London, United Kingdom (Sept. 26, 2013, cultural, extension, redesign); Antwerp Port Authority Headquarters in Antwerp, Belgium (Feb. 18, 2013, commercial); Galaxy Soho in Beijing, China (Jan, 07, 2013, commercial); Eli and Edythe Broad Art Museum in East Lansing, Michigan, USA (Nov. 27, 2012, cultural); Pierresvives in Montpellier, France (Oct. 22, 2012, educational);[4] Riverside Museum in Glasgow, Scotland (June 13, 2011, cultural); Guangzhou Opera House in China (Feb. 28, 2011); Evelyn Grace Academy in London, England (Nov. 22, 2010, educational); MAXI Museum in Rome Italy (Dec. 14, 2009) and more.

In the Arab world, Zaha Hadid Architects left a mark on the campus of the American University of Beirut, in 2014 (Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs); the King Abdullah II House of Culture and Art in Amman, Jordan (March 8, 2010); the Cairo Expo City (Sept. 28, 2009), a unique facility for state of the art exhibitions and conferences. Zaha Hadid Architects are involved now in designing the most distinctive stadium for the 2022 FIFA WORLD CUP in Qatar.

Zaha Hadid won awards and international recognition. In 2004, Zaha became the first female and first Arab recipient of the *Pritzker Architecture Prize,* architecture's equivalent of the Nobel Prize.[5] In 2006, she was honored with a retrospective spanning her entire work at the Guggenheim Museum in New York; that year, she also received an Honorary Degree from the American University of Beirut. Hadid was appointed Commander of the Order of the British Empire (CBE) in 2002 and Dame Commander of the Order of the British Empire (DBE) in the 2012 Birthday Honours for services to architecture.

An Iraqi Canadian architect, Nadia Tobia, Principle of Tobia Archtiecture, Toronto Canada, gave the following opinion: "Zaha Hadid is an intelligent woman and architect. I am very fond of her architectural work and her approach to work and business. I also admire her courage and struggle to be where she is. The architectural profession needs creativity and talent in a very competitive environment especially for women from the Arab World. She has succeeded tremendously in every aspect."[6]

I think, it is also ironic that at a time when the cities of Iraq, the cradle of civilization, from Basra to Mosul and Baghdad, are being destroyed, an Iraqi woman architect is adorning world cities with landmark monuments, and artistic and sumptuous forms of buildings.

Hosn Abboud, Ph.D.
Author and lecturer on gender issues in Islam and literature

[1] Quoted from an Interview with Zaha Hadid by Jamila Halfish, "Najahi yaʿud 'ila shakhsiyati al-qawiya wa-laysa 'ila kawni 'imra'a," *al-Sharq al-awsat newspaper*," April 24, (2008).
[2] *Ibid*.
[3] See Zaha Hadid Architects: http://www.arcspace.com/features/zaha-hadid-architects/
[4] Pierresvives in Montpellier unifies an archive, a library and a sports department within a single unit.
[5] http://www.pritzkerprize.com/2004/bio
[6] Quoted from a personal conversation with Nadia Tobia.

herself as alone in Tahrir, calling on other Egyptians to protect her.

Langohr also raised the issue of agency and how online activism impacts offline perceptions and behaviors. With respect to anti-sexual harassment activism, the question focused on how online activism impacted the behaviors, specifically, of harassers. Rizzo's response highlighted that online activism alone cannot effect social change and that the interplay of online and offline strategies is necessary. From the audience, salient questions and points of discussion that arose included how acceptable Western or universalizing terminologies were in local contexts to help establish women's agency; how the "opportunity" in political opportunity was understood by movement activists, that what a scholar might see as an opportunity is not necessarily seen as such in the moment by activists; and how the Revolution and the post-Morsi period has impacted how violence is understood and how mobilization and online activism has unfolded.

Iron Women Resisting Being Left Behind Democracy

"Iron Women: From Revolutions to Reforms" and "Left Behind Democracy" are two of the Middle Eastern Studies Association (MESA) panels that highlighted women's struggle for political and social change in Arab countries. Bringing together scholars from the United States, Lebanon, Japan,

and Australia, the panels featured some of the contributions to Rita Stephan and Mounira Charrad's forthcoming edited volume on Arab women's activism in the Arab Spring. The panels focused on how Arab women have resisted victimization and marginalization and continue to struggle to be accepted as full citizens with equal rights.

The presentations varied in the type of discourse in which they engaged, the type of data they used, and the type of subjects they raised. Panelists offered the audience firsthand accounts of those who participated in national struggles for liberty, rights, and equality; and are still struggling to extend social, economic and political rights to women. Analysis of political advocacy included papers like Maro Youssef's interviews with Algerian feminists who chose to align themselves with the government in fear of the growing influence of the Islamists; while Namie Tsujigami's interviewed Saudi activists who engaged in the fight for the right to drive.

Three presentations focused on the emergence of social media as a tool for activism. Nelia Hyndman-Rizk's survey analyzed the online campaigns for women's citizenship rights, civil marriage and secularism and their contribution to transforming Lebanese feminism. Likewise, Samaa Gemei revealed how an Egyptian activist used Islamist discourse to promote the revolution online while

Theresa Hunt documented activists' application of social media as a proactive tool to report and alert women to avoid dangerous areas of Egypt after the revolution.

Papers also discussed the power struggle between secular and Islamist forces in the new societies and the enormous challenge they present to advancing or restricting women's rights. Rita Stephan, Asaad Saleh and Manal Al-Natour's presentations discussed this matter within the context of the Syrian conflict. The positions and activism of Syrian women who support the regime and those who support the revolution were presented to reveal the complexity of issues such human, citizenship and women's rights. Finally, panelists stressed the significance of preserving social and political rights in the post-Arab spring societies through the lens of women. Mounira Charrad's examined the debate between secularist and Islamist women about the wording concerning gender in the new Tunisian Constitution following the Arab Spring.

Presentations addressed transformations in women's ability to make their voices heard. However diverse their geographies and societies might have been, women developed various forms of agency to respond to existing and new challenges. Women's participation in the Arab Spring has elevated their ability to influence the decision-making process. Since women are

situated at the center of the secular-Islamist conflict in the new Arab states, they are also facing the enormous challenge of inclusivity. While they are still underrepresented and sometimes unrepresented in the new states, they are refusing to go back to silence. The panels delivered the voices of these "iron Arab women" who refused to be left behind and are fighting to be included in the formation of their new nations.

Between Militarism and Islamism: Feminism in the Crossfire?
Engaging Feminisms in Claustrophobic Discursive Spaces

This AMEWS-sponsored panel brought together participants from a myriad of disciplinary backgrounds (gender studies, politics, Arabic literature, development studies and anthropology) who spoke from different standpoints: scholars, scholar-activists, scholar-practitioners. However, they all had one common underlying concern: the need for a fundamental shift in our existing paradigmatic framings for discussing gender matters, because in Deniz Kandiyoti's words, they represent "claustrophobic discursive spaces".

Professor Kandiyoti spoke of ways in which discussions of gender equality issues in the Middle East have been influenced by polarizations between militarisms and feminisms, political projects informed by masculinist restoration and new modalities of instrumentalizing gender for different ends. Participants at the panel drew on a

number of problematics to show how they are experiencing circumscribing spaces and politics.

Professor Sondra Hale spoke of how the authoritarian regime in Sudan was being contested not through formal associations but through informal forms of organizing, that represent new modalities of mobilization in Sudan.

Professor Nicola Pratt spoke of how binaries between "Islamisms" and "feminisms" were undermining opportunities for more cross-cutting engagements.

Professor Nadje Al Ali spoke of the disconnect that sometimes emerges within a political standpoint that may be disconnected from a volatile reality. For example, in Iraq, the existential threats facing the Iraqi people provide no alternatives for external military intervention, yet a long term view recognizes the havoc that militarisms wreak on people's lives and its deeply disconcerting implications for human rights, including women's rights.

Hoda El-Sadda spoke of how in the midst of a deeply polarized context of Egypt in 2013 (between those in favour or against the ousting of Morsi), women activists sought to leverage the change in ideological orientation as well as the spaces carved in international and national contexts in order to make the new Egyptian constitution more gender friendly.

Mariz Tadros, also talking on Egypt, engaged with how a central preoccupation with battling orientalism has led to a muting, displacement and negation of ways in which power configurations were influencing women's realities on the ground.

The discussions that followed dug deeper into the kind of changes that are needed in order to release us from these claustrophobic discursive spaces. Some ideas included reflecting on language (i.e. avoiding essentialist binaries), capitalizing on feminist approaches that allow for nuanced analysis (i.e. intersectionality) and the avoidance of a teleological lens (recognizing the unintended consequences and outcomes of agendas and projects) at this critical historical juncture for feminisms and the region as a whole.

Liminal Bad Girls of the Arab World

The panel "Liminal Bad Girls of the Arab World" was organized by Nadia G. Yaqub (University of North Carolina Chapel Hill) (along with Elizabeth Bishop of Texas State University), and chaired by Florence Martin (Goucher College). It follows a sister panel at MESA 2013, which explored "badness," based on the book *Bad Girls of Japan* (2005), edited by Laura Miller and Jane Bardsley. "Madness-ism in Pillars of Salt: Speaking from the Place of Revisionary Badness" was presented by Rula Quawas of the University of Jordan and is based on Fadia Faqir's representation of madness in her 1997 novel. Quawas began with "Inti

majnounah?", as in a typical diatribe against a "bad" woman. This is madness, but not insanity; rather it is a way to confine the financially capable and independent Bedouin Maha who is a threat to her brother Daffash, who declares her mad. Maha must reside in the madhouse, but she destabilizes it, according to Quawas, by questioning social control, oppression and reigning political norms. Quawas, ended her very poetically-written paper by again asking "Inti majnounah?"

Hanadi al-Samman (University of Virginia) presented a paper entitled "Surviving Multiple Wa'd: Samar Yazbek's 'A Woman in the Crossfire'". Al-Samman first described the ancient Arab tradition of wa'd, in which women, such as the daughter of Qays bin Amr al-Tamimi, were taken as spoils of war and who refused to return to their tribe. Consequently, her father decided to bury alive all his subsequent daughters to avoid being dishonored as is referenced in the Qur'an (81:8-9). Al-Samman linked this ancient custom to contemporary Syria's imprisoned political dissidents. Yazbek is a non-conforming Alawi who had committed treason against Bashar al-Assad's sect by siding with the opposition, and so she was defamed. Her transgressiveness brought about threats by the regime, but she responded in writing and in giving voice to those "buried alive".

Al-Samman also pointed to the many slogans and images of the revolution in which Syrians refer to

themselves as the forgotten, the dead, and the ghosts of executed prisoners.

Sherifa Zuhur (Director of the Institute of Middle Eastern, Islamic & Strategic Studies) presented her paper entitled "Breaking Bad: Sama al-Masry, Subversive Mu`allima of the June 30th, 2013 Movement." Sama al-Masry, dancer and actress, played Hurriya (Freedom) in the film ʿAla Wahda wa Nuss, which incited great anger by the journalist syndicate and al-Azhar. She secretly married a Salafist politician, and noisily denounced him when he had cosmetic surgery on his nose and lied about it. She then staged a series of online videos mocking the Muslim Brotherhood, salafist Hazem Abu Ismaʿil, the al-Jazeerah Channel, Muhammad al-Baradei and Mortada Mansour. One video castigated President Obama (because of U.S. support for the Muslim Brotherhood) using extremely profane language. As a satirist, she adopted a strong language and the nationalism of bint al-balad and used her transgressiveness as a belly dancer to highlight the hypocrisies of her comedic targets. Al-Masry faithfully expressed the views of a large majority of Egyptians who saw various conspiracies in the events following Egypt's January 25th revolution and inspired other similar comments (against Obama by Mona al-Bahairy, and against ISIS, Qatar and the U.S by Shaaban Abd al-Rahim).

Randa Kayyali (American University) presented a paper entitled "Jihad Jane as 'Good' American and 'Bad' Arab Girl: Navigating Feminisms, Citizenship and Gendered Strategies of Acceptance," which focused on the case of Nada Prouty who worked for the FBI and CIA and was accused of being a Hezbollah spy, stripped of her U.S. citizenship and dubbed as "Jihad Jane' on the website of Debbie Schlussel. Prouty appeared on "60 Minutes," emphasizing her patriotism and service to the U.S. In her autobiography, *Uncompromised: The Rise, Fall and Redemption of an Arab American Patriot in the CIA* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), she engages in gender patriotism, telling how abuse by male family members and the fear of an arranged marriage caused her to emigrate. Kayyali explained that her immigration is the 'liberation moment' of the book. She was sacrificed as an Arab-American for the careerism of Detroit's Department of Justice, but doesn't dwell on that aspect in the book where Americans stand for all the "good" that redeems her.

Anita Hausermann Fabos (Clark University) presented a paper entitled "New Bad Girls of Sudan: Women Singers in the Sudanese Diaspora." Fabos described three Sudanese singers who come from a tradition of aghani banat (girl's songs) of northern and central Sudan. Such *ghannanat* are marginalized as their profession is associated with former slaves. However, these singers, Sitona and Alsara and Rasha Shaykh al-Din have, to different degrees, used world music as a vehicle to popularize their work in the diaspora.

Changes in the criminal code and state rules imposed on private weddings disallowing mixed gender dancing have meanwhile occurred in the Sudan. Treated as "bad girls" by the supporters of the regime, they were forced to perform in exile. Sitona has been very successful in Egypt where she was known as the queen of henna, but her traditional style and Kordofani origins limit her exposure. Alsara and the Nubatones have a more modern sound and a larger audience; and Rasha Shaykh al-Din, more traditional, yet expanded through her recordings.

Nadia Yaqub reflected on the "efficacy of transgression" in allowing women to cross borders and then asked each presenter to comment on the liminality of her subject matter.

We would like to thank Dr. Rita Stephan, Dr. Mariz Tadros, Dr. Sherifa Zuhur and Dr. Angie Abdelmonem for providing brief insights into the MESA panels, keeping in mind that it does not do justice either to the interventions or the discussions that followed.

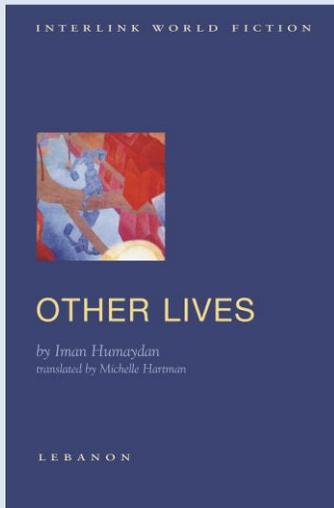**Click here to learn more about the 2014 MESA annual conference.**
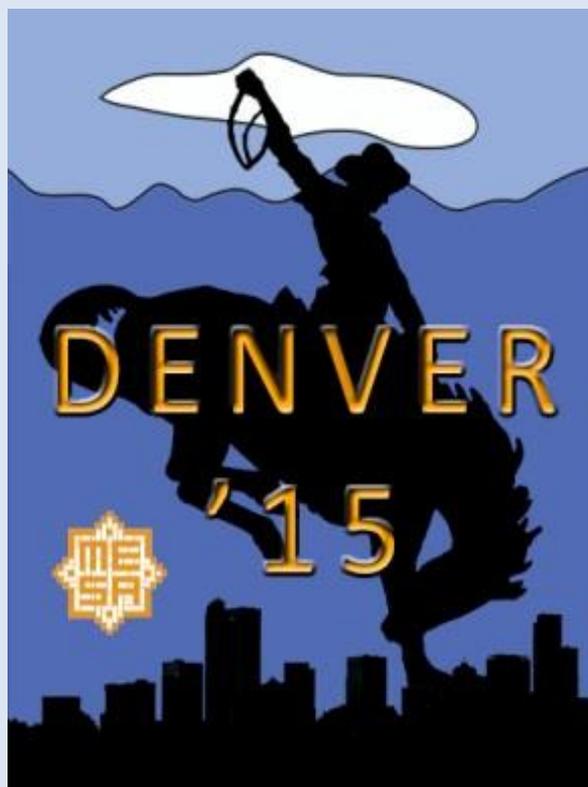
November 21-24, 2015

Sheraton Denver Downtown Hotel

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Highlights

INTERLINK WORLD FICTION

OTHER LIVES

by Iman Humaydan
translated by Michelle Hartman

LEBANON

Other Lives

Author: Iman Humaydan
Translated by: Michelle Hartman
Year of Publication: 2014
Publisher: Interlink Publishing

A new novel from award-winning Lebanese writer Iman Humaydan. "Did I live many lives or only one life enough for many women?" asks Miriyam in *Other Lives*. This third novel by Lebanese writer, Iman Humaydan, starkly and poignantly demonstrates how war, violence and dislocation have an impact not only on the lives of people who live through them but what life itself means, particularly for women. In *Other Lives*, Miriyam's travels take her from her Shouf mountain village to Beirut, Melbourne and Paradise, to Nairobi, Mombasa and Cape Town. Unwilling to be tied down by geography, language or men, Miriyam forges a path through the world that is at once hers uniquely and also deeply informed by her life's experiences. Again and again, she is drawn back to the Lebanon of her birth and childhood, only to find it no longer there. She is forced to confront the ghosts of the civil war—her dead brother, her disappeared lover, and the life that she left behind when she immigrated to Australia. Humaydan deftly explores one women's negotiation of love and war, intimacy and loss, migration and home in a way that speaks beyond individual but to a collective experience.

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