

For activists and academics—and everyone in between

Who said this?

“I focused in my talk on the Egyptian Women’s awareness that the main reason for her oppression and regression was colonization and the rulers who are in compliance with them, and how the question of women’s emancipation is closely linked to the emancipation of the Nation” (c.f. Inji Aflatun, Muthakkarat Inji Aflatun, edited and introduced by Sa’id Khayal (Kuwait: Dar Su’ad al-Sabbah, 1993)59)



Inji Aflatun



No Woman, No Spring: Arab Women, Gender Equality and Political Participation

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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

Call for Abstract

From Ideas to Markets: Excellence in mainstreaming gender into research, innovation, and policy

The Gender Summit 4- Europe 2014 invites the contributions of researchers, innovation leaders and other R&I stakeholders on strategies, methodologies and best practice on putting gender equally into action.

Deadline for abstracts submission is March 30, 2014.

For more information on abstract submission and registrations you can contact: submissions@gender-summit.com or [click here](#) to check the website.

Selling my Bangles: Activism as Identity

Annie C. Higgins*

In the first and second centuries Hijri/seventh and eighth centuries A.D., women of the Shurat (Kharijites) participated in opposing the Umayyad regime. Their opposition began with their self-identification as Exchangers/*Shurāt*,¹ i.e., those willing to exchange their lives “for God’s pleasure” as described in Qur’an 2:207² and other *ayas*. This group, often called the first Islamic sect, had opposed ‘Alī’s arbitration with Mu‘āwiya and the resulting Umayyad dynastic rule which contradicted their view of Islam as an egalitarian, participatory system based on a kinship of religious ideas, rather than family alliances.

Women and men poets from this group present women as “Exchangers” from the Arabic root

“*sh-r-y*,” and demonstrate women’s active participation in political choices as well as armed defense of the community. Then as now, politics, religious convictions, and family obligations coalesced in effecting individual approaches to the activism of dissent. The following exploration is part of a larger project where I seek to return to this early group of Muslims the name they gave themselves, Shurat/Exchangers, rather than the term “Kharijites/Exiters” that fourteen centuries of scholarship have placed on them.

Maryam

At an historical moment marking the end of organized, armed Shurat opposition to the Umayyads, Maryam echoes the identification practice of the first extant Shurat voice. In 38/658,

‘Abdullāh b. Wahb al-Rāsibī had declared his Exchanger identification forthrightly at the cusp of the Shurat movement, when he conjoined his ideological identification with his family name:³

1) I am Ibn Wahb al-Rāsibī the Exchanger/al-shārī.

(1) أنا ابن وهب الراسبيّ الشاري

Maryam may not have theorized the power of naming, but she demonstrates it when she evokes the Exchanger/Shurat identity by narrating her own action in this piece.⁴

1) I am the daughter of the noble, wise elder

(1) أنا ابنة الشيخ الكريم الأعم

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2) If someone asks my name, my name is Maryam

(2) من سال عن إسمي فإسمي مريم

3) I sold my bangles for a well-serving sword

(3) بعثتُ سوارِي بسيفٍ مخدّم

Her ordering of identifiers closely parallels that of Ibn Wahb, noting first her father's description if not his name, then her own name, and finally her action of exchange. An exchange stated in the first person is necessarily a commitment to future action, whereas a third-person declaration of "he exchanged/*sharā*" would indicate another's death in battle. Maryam's commitment expresses her identity as surely as her name and heritage. Her choice of an analogous exchange verb, "I sold/*bi'tu*" rather than "*sharaytu*" causes the listener to make the connection between the words, and thus participate, in a way, in bringing Shurat goals into the discourse.

"I sold my bangles for a sword." The similarity of metallic substances contrasts with the opposition of these two items' uses. While bangles adorn the feminine arm, a sword extends the masculine arm. Each has a function of surety: bangles are insurance against dire economic circumstances, while a sword is an assurance of defense. Maryam's choice crosses expected gender boundaries but does not cross out the home. She is the ultimate home economist. Men and women had been quiescent for some time, but were now taking up arms in a final attempt to defeat the Umayyad authority in Mecca and Medina.

History tells us that Maryam's commitment reached its full extent when she was killed with her husband, the leader Abū Ḥamza Mukhtār b. 'Awf al-Azdī, in the bloodbath at Wādī al-Qurā as they opposed Marwan II's forces in 130/748.

Umm Ḥakīm

Umm Ḥakīm is a quintessential warrior woman cited in historical and contemporary "Kharijite" lore.

Wife of Azraqī leader Qaṭarī b. al-Fujā'a, she declaimed a brief passage quoted frequently to epitomize a Shurat woman's radical practice in the years before her husband "exchanged his mortal self," i.e., was killed in 79/694.

1) I carry a head whose burden tires me

(1) أحملُ رأساً قد سئمْتُ حملة

2) And I have gotten bored of washing and oiling it

(2) وقد مللتُ دهنه و غسّله

3) Isn't there a young man who can carry its heaviness away from me?

(3) ألا فتى يحمل عني ثقله

She marks her composition as indelibly feminine by playing with notions of private and public, domesticity and war, hygiene and life, Shurat and Umayyad gender opportunities, and most significantly, objectification and agency. Plunging her willingness for self-sacrifice into the waters of hair care with startling incongruity, she posits the vitality of existence at the trivial expense of personal grooming. Her blunt humor derives from the extremity of decapitation as a solution to the problem of shampooing. Just as sacrifice and hygiene seem to be opposites on the spectrum of human concern, so are the sites of their performance. Most poets do not bring the battlefield and the bath into the same poetic picture, as Umm Ḥakīm does here.

Twisting the concept of the weaker sex needing protection, her spoken desire for fatal male attention mocks the Umayyad army by taunting their bravest to attack a woman. A slain Shurat fighter is never the object of the enemy's deed; as subject, his death is rather his chosen exchange. Here, Umm Ḥakīm seems to make her opponent the agent severing her head, whereas the agent defining this proposed outcome is actually her own attitude. Her sarcasm, when turned inside out, can suggest that one ask

oneself what one is willing to sacrifice to defend the comfort and sanctity of one's home. Her listeners surely took in the humor mixed with weightier questions.

Anonymous man and warrior woman

In another case, however, a brave woman might elicit her partner's reluctance. One man, whose wife was eager to join in battle, was remembered only by his words to her, but neither by his own exploits nor even his name.⁵

1) When they mount their war horses, the free Ḥarūrīs (Shurat)

Cannot match your example in your quest.

(1) إنّ الحرورية الحرى إذا ركبوا لا يستطيع لهم أمثالك الطلّيا

2) If they mount their horses, don't mount a horse yourself

And don't join the men in surrounding the melees.

(2) إنّ يركبوا فرساً لا تركبي فرسا ولا تطيقي مع الرجالة الخبيأ

In spite of shared aims and fervor, and examples of gender equality on the field of battle, the poet is still a man who wants to protect his beloved. Further, this protective instinct may be one of the reasons impelling him to the front line. Nonetheless, it is only this nameless woman's activism that the corpus has preserved in the form of the man's poetic reaction.

Anonymous as in this case, well-known like Umm Ḥakīm, or self-named like Maryam, these three women are most aptly identified by their acts of dissent.

In Conclusion

These poems demonstrate concepts and choices associated with women's active support of and participation in Shurat activities in dissent against

Umayyad rule. In all of these, exchange equates to commitment, as opposed to actually dying which is found in the elegies. I have included poems from women and a man which have the common goal of engaging women. In light of the fact that poems by Shurat women and men, for women and men, contribute to and complicate the whole, I offer these glimpses of women's actions as well as their influence on men's actions, especially within the contexts of private family relations and public political progress. Both Shurat women and men were navigating issues of commitment and activism, with a range of solutions according to personal and social expectations as well as transgressions of them, just as we find in our own time.

* **Annie C. Higgins, Ph.D**
Assistant Professor, Arabic
Department of International and
Intercultural Studies
College of Charleston, SC

Notes:

¹ From the verb *sharā/yashrī* and active participle *shā rin/shurā t*, following the pattern of *qā ḍ in/quḍ ā t*.

² "And among the people is he who exchanges/*yashrī* his mortal self, seeking God's pleasure, and God is tender-hearted to his servants." Qur'an 2:207.

³ 'Abbās, 43-44, no. 5; Ma'rūf, 87, no. 114; Ibn A'tham, 4:132. After 'Alī set the arbitration/*taḥ kī m* in motion, some of the Khawārij met at Ibn Wahb's home, where he reluctantly accepted their oath of allegiance. Tabari, *History*, 17:114-115.

⁴ Mar'ūf, no. 40, p.37

⁵ This poet uses one of the early descriptive names of the group, geographically derived from the village, Ḥarūrā', where the proto-Shurat struck camp upon their history-defining choice to leave the ranks of 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib in 37/657.

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NGO Highlight

Home of Tenderness

Home of Tenderness or Beit el-Hanane is a Lebanese non-profit, non-governmental and non-sectarian organization. It aims to protect abused women to break the circle of domestic violence by providing them a safe environment, as well as other forms of support through professionals to help them rebuild a new life.

[Click here](#) to know more about **Home of Tenderness**



On the Occasion of International Women's Day the Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World (IWSAW) at the Lebanese American University (LAU) will launch jointly with the National Commission for Lebanese Women the national campaign to **"Protect Underage Girls from Early Marriages"**

March 4, 2014 @ 12:00 noon
 LAU, Beirut Campus

No Woman, No Spring: Arab Women, Gender Equality and Political Participation



The Henriette van Lynden Lecture was organized around the Arab Spring and its impact on women in the region on January 22, 2014 in Amsterdam. Henriette van Lynden was a Dutch diplomat who studied social sciences and specialized in philosophy and Arabic. She was head of the North Africa and Middle East section of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs. After her death in 2010 the Ministry of Foreign Affairs decided to organize regular events in her name. The focus of the evening was gender equality in the Middle East, particularly zooming in on the political participation of Arab women. Egyptian human rights lawyer and women's rights activist Ragia Omran (recipient of the

Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights Award in 2013) started the lecture, elaborating on the topic from her experience at the frontline of Egyptian women's rights activism. Yemeni journalist and activist Nadia al-Saqqaf, chief editor of the Yemen Times and women's representative in the National Dialogue Conference, elaborated on the participation of women in the Yemeni uprisings and the changes that have taken place in Yemeni society. Moroccan-Dutch journalist, writer and television producer Hassnae Bouazza responded to the two speakers. The lecture was moderated by Ernesto Braam, strategic policy advisor at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Marina de Regt

WHO IS SHE? Profiling: Inji Aflatun



Inji Aflatun (1924-1989) is a political activist and one of the most important women artists in the history of the Fine Arts Movement in modern Egypt. She contributed to the Jama'at al-Fann wa-l Huriyya art group (1939-1945).

In 1948, she wrote *Thamanuna Imra'a Ma'ana (Eighty Million Women With Us)*, a strong condemnation of imperialism for which the Egyptian man of letters Taha Hussayn, wrote a preface. In 1949, she published: *Nahnu al-nisa' al-misriyyat (We Egyptian Women)*, a study of women and national oppression. After the revolution of July 1952, she continued writing for the Liberal Wafdist paper, al-Misri, and also wrote for al-Masa' paper.

Inji Aflatun's Memoir was published in 1993 (*Mudhakkarat Inji Aflatun*) based on the recording of her thoughts on cassettes. This memoir is a good testimony of Aflatun's early feminist consciousness and political activism: She co-founded the University of Cairo and Institutes Youth League, and became a member of the National Executive of Workers and Students and the National Women's Committee. She later joined the youth group of the Egyptian Feminist Union working with poor women in Cairo.

Inji Aflatun was imprisoned for four years in al-Qanater Prison (1959-1963) for her political leftist party activities. The national government, quoting Aflatun, was "infected with a chronic disease which is lack of confidence in the people and fear of any sort of independence within mass organizations and in the career syndicates." In prison, Inji Aflatun secured the permission to paint, managed to hide her art works and send them secretly to be evaluated by art critics in Cairo; she left a legacy of paintings, some on the prison (as a place), the women prisoners behind prison bars, their standing in line to eat, and the view she was able to see from prison: the tree in the middle of the prison courtyard and the Nile, contrasting the static world of the prison with the energetic flow of the Nile.

The selected quote is taken from the speech she gave as representative of the Egyptian women delegation in the first international women conference held after the end of World War II in France (November 26, 1945). Inji gave this speech in front of prominent political activists such as the Spanish leader Passionaria, Romanian Ana Pauker, French Marie-Claude Vaillant-Couturier, Indira Gandhi, the Soviet hero Popova as well as other great national women activists.

Dr. Hosn Abboud
hosnabboud@gmail.com

In November 2013, Aziza Ouguir defended her PhD dissertation “Female Religious Agents in Morocco: Old Practices and New Perspectives” at the University of Amsterdam. The following piece summarizes her main findings.

My doctoral thesis focuses on female religious agents in Morocco's in the past and in the present. More specifically, it investigates historical women saints and their reception today by Moroccan women in general and by Moroccan feminist activists in particular.

Cupolas and shrines of female saints still stand throughout the Maghreb, especially Morocco. Little is known about these female saints. Practically the only sources about them are hagiographies and oral stories. Based on these sources, my thesis discusses women's constructions of sainthood through a study of the self-techniques they used in this context. The research thus approaches them as agents, analyzing the way they actively sought sainthood, and questioning whether they transgressed the social limits that were imposed on them. It does so in the context of current discourses on Moroccan women and feminism, especially by studying how the narratives of these female saints are received by Moroccan women today, by their venerators, by women preachers and their attendants, and by activists in Islamic women's organizations.

Theoretical debates about agency, such as they currently take place among anthropologists, often refer to the works of Judith Butler (1990), Michel Foucault (2007) and Saba Mahmood. In her *Politics of Piety* (2005) Mahmood based her study of an Egyptian mosque movement on Michel Foucault's final works on ethics. According to Mahmood the women she worked with are active agents who do not challenge patriarchy. Instead their actions conform to the dominant order. Egyptian women employed certain self-techniques to transform themselves to active religious women but their self-transformation reveals their submission to the conventional norms. Like Mahmood's study (2005), my thesis builds on Foucault's final works on ethics especially those written after 1980 (see Foucault 2007). He contends that in every society we find self-techniques that the individual performs

to reach a situation of perfection and cultivates ethical self-improvement (Foucault 2007:154). His concepts of 'ethical self-formation' and 'ethical self-technique' refer to embodied ethical ways of life. But unlike Mahmood's work, this thesis also employs Foucault's concept of 'freedom practices'. Freedom practices are ethical self-practices that involve ethical self-formation, which create new ethical ways of life in opposition to existing forms of domination. Through his concept of 'freedom practices', Foucault emphasizes that individuals can activate their abilities to practice techniques of their own choice that enable them to create their own free state of being that challenge patriarchy. Thus Mahmood here reads Foucault selectively with regards to the concept of ethical self-formation, completely overlooking Foucault's preference for 'ethical freedom practices'. More specifically, Mahmood dismisses his articulation of this concept of individual freedom. Do we deal here with the type of agency i.e. of ethical self-formation Mahmood describes in her study? Do the religious women as agents merely conform to the dominant moral system, or do we find here agents that transgress patriarchal patterns by opposing patterns of domination?

The answer to these questions makes us turn to the nature of Sufism. The Sufi path is open to men and women equally and it is characterized by gender neutrality on several levels. Both men and women used similar self-techniques such as *Mujāhada* (hard spiritual work), *al-jadhb* (divine distraction) and search of knowledge. Lalla Aziza Saksāwiyya (14th century) and Mu'mina Tilimsāniya (14th Century) are *'ālimāt* whose scholarly and saintly personality empowered them to play important religious and socio-political roles. Moroccan women saints' ways of life thus entail equality effects, which sometimes even spill over into egalitarian effects. The gender-neutral self-techniques we found often implied the breaking of conventional rules and values.

Most of the venerators in the north and

the south of Morocco received women saints in different ways. The venerators visit women saints for their *baraka* to meet the hardships of their lives. *Murshidat* (women preachers) and their attendants also stressed that women saints are *qudwā's* (examples) in religion and role models.

Similarly, feminist activists highlighted women saints and their legacy in their discourses. My interviews show that the Islamist and secularist associations consider women saints as role models whose self-formation challenged their patriarchal ideologies. They also stress that women saints are an important reference to draw on their debate on the question of women today.

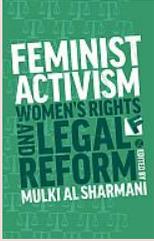
The findings of my research show that there is continuity in Moroccan female spiritual agency throughout Moroccan history that can inspire Muslim women today. The thesis also challenges the conventional image of passive Moroccan Muslim women. Instead, it draws alternative discourses that present Moroccan women either in the past or the present as active agents both in the religious public and private spheres.

***For more information about Aziza Ouguir's research and findings you can contact her on the following address: ouguiraziza@yahoo.fr**

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Highlights



Feminist Activism, Women's Rights, and Legal Reform

Author: Mulki Al-Sharmani
Publisher: Zed Books
Year of Publication: 2013
Language: English

This ground-breaking collection investigates the relationship between feminist activism and legal reform as a pathway to gender justice and social change.

Since the advent of feminist movements legal reform has been a popular and yet contentious vehicle for seeking women's rights and empowerment. This important book looks at comparative insights drawn from field-based research on the processes, the challenges, and the outcomes of legal reform and feminist activism. Feminist activism, Women's Rights, and Legal Reform brings together cases from Middle East, Latin America, and Asia of the successes and failures of reform efforts concerning the promulgation and implementation of new family laws and domestic violence codes.

Call for Applications

The Humphrey School of Public Affairs at the University of Minnesota announces the availability of a limited number of fellowships for social scientists from Arab universities to spend a semester in residence at the Humphrey School in the Fall semester of 2014.

The fellowships are funded by Andrew Carnegie Centennial Fellowship, a program of the Carnegie Corporation of New York. The visiting scholars will work closely with Professor Ragui Assaad, Professor James Ron, Professor Sarah Parkinson and other faculty members at the Humphrey School and the University of Minnesota on research relating to youth and gender, human rights, and mobilization in the context of the Arab Spring. Sub-themes include, but are not limited to:

- Youth unemployment and school-to-work transitions
- Transitions to adulthood, including transitions through schooling, work, marriage and sexuality
- Inequality of opportunity in education and labor markets
- Obstacles to youth and women's employment and ways to overcome them
- Informality, poverty, social protection, and job quality
- Migration, displacement, and refugees
- Youth social movements and mobilization
- Multi- and cross-generational political activism
- Participation in high-risk mobilization and militant organizations
- Trends in and consequences of political violence
- Youth civic and political engagement
- Role of youth and youth groups in transitions to democracy
- Participation in local movements and organizations for human rights, broadly construed
- Popular attitudes towards human rights
- Analysis of public opinion and household surveys

Eligibility Requirements

Visiting scholars must be a member of the staff of a university situated in the Arab World and be in a social science or related discipline and is working in areas relating to the above research theme and sub-themes. The ideal candidate is a junior faculty member who has obtained his/her PhD in the past five years, but pre-doctoral candidates (ABD status) and those with more than five years since the PhD will also be considered.

Logistical Arrangements

The fellowship will cover economy class round-trip air fare and will provide the visiting scholar with a monthly stipend to cover expenses while in residence in Minnesota. The duration of the fellowship is negotiable, but is not to be inferior to three months or exceed six months. The visiting scholar will be provided with a university ID, access to university libraries and to the internet, and a place to work.

Application Procedure

Interested candidates should send the following:

- A cover letter detailing:
 - *The research project the candidate would undertake during the fellowship;
 - *A description of previous research and academic preparation; and
 - *A statement of why and how a fellowship at the University of Minnesota may benefit, deepen, or extend his/her own research.
- A detailed curriculum vitae
- A sample of written work (published paper, conference paper, book chapter, etc..)

These materials should be sent by e-mail to Professor Ragui Assaad (assaad@umn.edu)
The application deadline for fellowships during the Fall semester of 2014 is **March 31st, 2014**

To contribute announcements or articles to this newsletter or to subscribe, please email:
amewsbulletin@gmail.com

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