

For activists and academics—and everyone in between

Who said this?

"The feminist movement became consciously aware that women's freedom cannot be segregated from a country's freedom."

Widad Mitri

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Opportunities

Call for Papers

The editorial committee of Al-Raida invites submissions for the summer/Fall 2013 non-thematic, peer reviewed issue.

Deadline for complete manuscripts: 1 May, 2013.

For more information kindly contact al-raida: al-raida@lau.edu.lb

Call for Applications

"African Sexualities: Theories, Politics, Action" Organized by the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA) 17 June – 6 July, 2013.

Deadline for the submission of applications: 29 March, 2013.

For more information:

<http://www.codesria.org>

Rula Quawas Dismissed as Dean at University of Jordan for Helping Students with Sexual Harassment Video



www.whoisshe-women.jo

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To Be or Not to Be...a Muslim Feminist in the Arab (Islamic) Spring

Omaima Aboubakr

More than a decade ago, but especially in the aftermath of the Islamophobia and neo-orientalism sparked by 9/11 in the West, a number of Muslim women researchers and scholars felt the need to adopt the cause of 'Islamic feminism' as an indigenous and organic feminist call to be liberated from both traditional theological patriarchy and the colonial modernist discourse that essentialized and inferiorized Muslim women. It was also an invitation to consider an alternative approach to the fundamentalist secular position that shuns religious referencing altogether. From the beginning, the project of generating and developing a gender-sensitive Islamic knowledge from the perspective of Muslim women has been about negotiating this intermediate, oppositional space. Another challenge concerned output, meaning not merely applying a critical outlook, but also the production and construction of gender

justice and equality concepts within the Islamic body of knowledge itself, so as to reform religious and cultural discourses. Hence, while contesting religious justifications of gender hierarchy, Muslim feminist researchers have also been engaged in re-interpretations and alternative knowledge building. This endeavor naturally has raised the question of interpretive authority, and now politics.

In Egypt, this brand of feminist work, though based on religious arguments and study, has never been a part of political Islamism or the Muslim Brotherhood's project. Today it finds itself in a slightly shifting situation with the Islamic Freedom & Justice party in power. Using 'Islamic-based' arguments and emancipative concepts may have qualified as a form of resistance in the previous context, but now this orientation can be easily perceived as in alignment with the new

'state feminism' or rather the conservative Islamist gender ideology that has characterized MB thought. In addition, *Salafi* pressures on F&J and considerations of political gains and losses are moving MB further away from moderate conservatism to rigid extremism on gender and women. The current debate over including in the "men and women equality" article in the proposed constitution a phrase that conditions it by "not violating *shari'ah* rulings" is typical in our cultural history, in which women always bear the brunt of competing political groups and polarized camps. All this is making it harder on Muslim women feminists to find a stance of their own, distinct from the simplistic calls to apply the *shari'ah* and inferiorize women, on one hand, and throwing out the baby with the bathwater, on the other. If they continue with their project of re-constructing an

Muslim Feminist Arab Spring (from p.1)

Islamic knowledge based on gender justice and equality, are they also empowering the new ruling regime and their right-wing politics—islamizing even feminist activism and dragging the discussion of women’s citizenship rights on a religious ground? Conceding to playing by their rules? Or is this an opportunity to play a pertinent role and actively engage the current Islamic ruling government, shaming and challenging them not to solidify discrimination against women under their reign? And if they insist on their oppositional and resisting stance to patriarchal interpretations of Islam, will they be perceived as aligning themselves with dubious political actors who tend to use women’s issues and women feminists in their power struggles against the “forces of darkness?”

Perhaps more than ever, distinctions and re-defined positions need to be stated. To be an Islamic feminist researcher is not to subscribe to right-wing political projects, or to gender-biased interpretations of Islam, or to ‘superficializing’ *shari’ah*, or to the neo-orientalist and ‘modernist’ discourses, or to the Enlightenment-Dark Ages paradigm, or to the Islamic-civil polarization, or the ‘righteous *Salaf*’ versus the corrupt present. Perhaps more than ever, this is the time for an alternative self-conscious movement that bridges the gap between research and knowledge building, on one side, and activism and public engagement, on the other. In the present context of re-producing the ‘woman-

question’ as a subject of political struggle and contestation over cultural identity, maybe it’s time for Muslim women to shift the discussion back to the initial project of interpretive authority and knowledge production.

As recently as November 1st, 2012 on the Nahar’s TV channel evening program (*akhir al-nahar*), the respectable and renowned politician Dr. Muhammad Mahsoub who belongs to the moderate Islamic *Wasat* party and a member of the Constitutional Committee was explaining the “understandable” viewpoint of those opposing the controversial “men-women equality” article by invoking a certain understanding of the concept of *qiwamah*. Dr. Mahsoub differentiated between gender equality in the Western legal system and in the Islamic tradition where it is mitigated by the necessary arbitrating factor of male decision-making and settling issues within the family circle. According to his explanation, this male leadership (*qiwamah*) is only within the family not in the public sphere, so while women can exercise authority in their public roles, full domestic equality is not practical or possible. Though an excellent first-rate legal expert with a centrist non-exclusionary Islamic position, Dr. Mahsoub does not see that this still sanctions gender-hierarchy and the marginalization of women in the family, turning the concept from an originally specific Qur’anic injunction of financial responsibility to a generalized leadership and superior status. Based on my research in the exegetical tradition of *tafsir* Commentaries, “men are *qawwamun* towards women” in verse 34 of *surah* 4 (*al-Nisa*) explains that men’s earnings or profit are meant to provide for women, a divine

NGO Highlight



Harassmap uses crowd-sourcing technology to provide a mechanism for victims of sexual harassment by reporting incidents through SMS in Egypt. Harassmap is working to “end the social acceptability of sexual harassment.” Learn more about the organization [here](#).

assignment that signals humility before the riches God provided, rather than false pride. It was consecutive interpreters who widened its scope to include moral authority and leading privileges, disconnecting it from the context of the preceding verses 32 and 33 (as well as 11) that are meant to organize the distribution and expenditure of diverse earnings and inheritances. Notions of divine preference and gender inequality were constructed and embedded in the verse throughout centuries of exegesis. Such intricate religious discussions are now becoming part of current political discussions over women’s rights and status at home and in society. Do we dismiss and boycott or engage and resist?



IKEA Removes Women from Catalogues

In the IKEA catalogues that were distributed in Saudi Arabia, the women were removed from the pictures. On October 2, 2012 IKEA issued an apology stating, “The mistake happened during the work process occurring before presenting the draft catalogue for IKEA Saudi Arabia.” IKEA took the blame, however it is not the first incident in which women have been omitted or edited in advertisements for other companies. [Click here](#) to watch separate advertisements made for Saudi Arabia and other Arab countries. – Anum Khan

Dr. Rula Quawas Dismissed as Dean at University of Jordan for Helping Students with Sexual Harassment Video

Dr. Rula Quawas was fired as Dean of the Faculty of Foreign Languages on September 2012 after teaching a feminist theory class in Fall 2011 at the University of Jordan. As part of classwork, students were required to complete a project, and a group of four students decided to make a video highlighting the sexual harassment they experienced on campus. The video shows the students holding up signs on which some of the vulgar words were displayed, and included such lines as “‘Ride for 50’, ‘Where’d you get

that pair?’, ‘Ridden like a pillow.’”

Uploaded this past June, the video apparently gave the University negative attention and Dr. Quawas was fired without justification.

The Committee on Academic Freedom of the Middle East Students Association has since then published a letter protesting Dr. Quawas’s removal. The letter states the response by the Vice President of the University after the video was posted online;

“[T]he Vice President of the University of Jordan called Dean Quawas, reportedly furious, demanding an explanation regarding the students’ project. His concern was that the film harmed the university’s reputation. No concern was expressed about the degradation of the learning environment at the university caused by widespread sexual harassment.” You may watch the video that was created by the students [here](#). -Anum Khan

MESA Conference: Rethinking Gender in the 'Arab Spring'

The revolutions and mass protests experienced across the Arab world since the end of 2010 have led to a renewed focus on the perennial 'gender question' in the Middle East. Western media, as well as many activists on the ground, have highlighted the large presence of women and the roles that they have played in the 'Arab Spring'. On the other hand, some activists as well as scholars have highlighted the threat posed to women's legal rights by the transitions away from nominally secular dictatorships towards Islamist-dominated elected governments.

The aim of this roundtable which was held last November 2012, was to go beyond this polarised debate of women's agency vs. women's rights in the so-called Arab Spring and to discuss the multiple and often contradictory ways in which gender (not only women/femininities but also men/masculinities) is being constructed through shifting social and

political processes and in relation to other significant axes of social difference, and with what implications for women and for men in the Arab world.

Some of the questions discussed included: How are gender and sexuality (re)constructed through revolutionary processes and in intersection with class, age, nation, religion and other significant markers of social difference? What is the significance of gender and sexual norms, identities and ideologies in mobilising resistance to authoritarianism? How do these intersect with other markers of social difference? Alternatively, how are gender and sexuality mobilised by counter-revolutionary forces? How are gender and sexual roles, relations and norms contested, to what degree, by who and in which spaces in the aftermath of the toppling of dictators? What are the opportunities for and challenges to projects of women's rights and gender

equality in the aftermath of the toppling of dictators? What new spaces and new types of agency are produced by revolutionary and resistance processes? How are these gendered? And with what implications for men and for women? To what degree do previous historical moments of radical political transformation in the Middle East (such as, anti-colonial struggles, the Iranian and Algerian revolutions, the fall of the Ba'th regime) help us to think about gender in the 'Arab Spring'?

This roundtable brought together scholars at different stages of their careers and from different disciplines to generate discussion and debate in order to inform new and ongoing research into gender in the Middle East and in the currently fluid political context.

The panel was organized by Dr. Nicola Pratt.

WHO IS SHE?

Profiling: Widad Mitri

Widad Mitri was a prominent figure in the Egyptian national leftist movement and a pioneer women's activist and social worker. She obtained a BA in Philosophy from the University of Fou'ad I in 1952 (now Cairo University), worked as a teacher for seven years and was the first person to initiate a course in school journalism. She was politically active during the years from 1956 to 1967 and joined the Egyptian Communist movement at the age of twenty-three. She was an ardent supporter of the Palestinian cause, joining the Women's Committee for the People's Resistance in 1956. Widad Mitri was also the first founder of a women's organization in the village of Baragel in Giza. She was honored by Cairo University at its 90th anniversary and the Faculty of Media's 60th anniversary for her “distinctive contribution in the development of Egyptian media throughout the rich years of her work and her genuine efforts in the service of our beloved country”.



Book Highlights

Book Launch

Public Service Broadcasting in the MENA Region: Potential for Reform, Regional Report.

Published by Panos Paris Institute and Observatori Mediterrani de la Comunicació, 2012.

** This book length-study designed and authored by Dr. Dima Dabbous-Sensenig includes a comparative study on public service broadcasting in 8 Arab countries and utilizes a gender perspective in its qualitative and quantitative analysis of content.

Date: January 25, 2013 at 12:30 p.m. at the Lebanese American University, Beirut, Lebanon.

New Release

"Women and Knowledge in the Mediterranean"

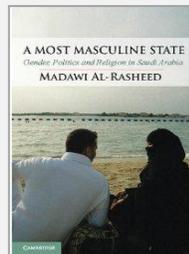
Editor: Pr. Fatima Sadiqi
Date of Publication: November 26, 2012
Routledge (Great Britain)

The volume addresses the ancestral but poorly understood relationship between women and knowledge in the Mediterranean and argues that women have not only contributed to the production of conventional knowledge but have also produced knowledges of their own.

The chapters of the volume address four themes: women and written knowledge; women and oral knowledge; women, legal, religious, and economic knowledge; and women and media knowledge.

New Release

A Most Masculine State: Gender, Politics and Religion in Saudi Arabia



By: Madawi Al-Rasheed

Release Date: Jan 31, 2013,
Cambridge Middle East Studies

Women in Saudi Arabia are often described as either victims of patriarchal religion and society or successful survivors of discrimination imposed on them by others. Madawi Al-Rasheed's new book goes beyond these conventional tropes to probe the historical, political, and religious forces that have, across the years, delayed and thwarted their emancipation. The book demonstrates how, under the patronage of the state and its religious nationalism, women have become hostage to contradictory political projects that on the one hand demand female piety, and on the other hand encourage modernity. Drawing on state documents, media sources, and interviews with women from across Saudi society, the book examines the intersection between gender, religion, and politics to explain these contradictions and to show that, despite these restraints, vibrant debates on the question of women are opening up as the struggle for recognition and equality finally gets under way. - Amazon

Arabic Publication

Egyptian Women

Editor(s): Balsam Abd El-Malik,
Huda Shaarawi

Date of Publication: Various (1920-1935)

Type: Bound Journal

One of the many women's periodicals that flourished at the beginning of the twentieth century, *Egyptian Women* was founded and published by Balsam Abd El-Malik with the help of Huda Shaarawi in Cairo in 1920, and it quickly became one of the foremost periodicals of the time. Such journals appeared in different urban centres across North Africa and the Levant, most notably in Cairo, Alexandria and Beirut, and proved to be important platforms for the women's movement. Serving as forums for debate and calls to action, they voiced the daily struggle of women's liberation in its early phases and discussed issues that are still very much part of the global feminist movement today, from constitutional reform to equal employment opportunities. In its local perspective *Egyptian Women* brings to the fore the prime issues of debate among prominent intellectuals of the period, from national independence to philanthropic endeavours for community development. *Egyptian Women* is the type of social document that can be useful for scholars of women's studies, historians and those interested in the history of community development in the region. WMFLDC owns various issues from the first year of publication (1920) and the complete issues from year 8 (1927) till year 16 (1935).

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

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