

For activists and academics—and everyone in between

Who said this?

"This determination of the new free woman to be responsible for her freedom and virtue is in the essence of the Islamic Conception on Women's emancipation, by virtue of Muslim Women's eligibility for religious obligation & responsibility."

Bint Al-Shati'

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Opportunities

Call for Papers

"Anthropology of the Middle East: Rethinking Paradigms"

Organized by the Association for Middle East Anthropology (AMEA) to attend the Middle East Studies Association Annual Meeting October 10-13, 2013 in New Orleans, LA.

Deadline for the submission of papers: February 15, 2013.

For further details kindly click [here](#)

Job Opportunity

New opening at California State University, Northridge

Department: Gender & Women's Studies

Rank: Assistant Professor, Tenure-Track

For more information check the following link:

<http://www.csun.edu/facultyaffairs/openings/position/1327.pdf>

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Rethinking Gender in the 'Arab Spring'

Nicola Pratt

In Western media and policy forums, discussions of gender in the 'Arab Spring' generally highlight what is considered to be a paradox: women have participated in large numbers in the uprisings across the Middle East but they face a rollback in their rights and under-representation in emerging political institutions. There are two intersecting discourses that construct this so-called paradox. First, a Euro-centric feminist framework, based on an idealised representation of the development of European women's movements, whereby women's public mobilization led directly to advancements in women's rights and representation. The second discursive frame is a neo-orientalist one in which Arab women are the

victims of eternal Arab-Islamic patriarchy. The two frames intersect to construct this paradox in Western media and policymaking circles. The consequences of creating this apparent paradox include: homogenizing the experiences of women across the region; erasing the (geo-)political and socio-economic reasons why challenges to women's rights exist in specific contexts; victimising Arab women and demonizing all Arab men; conflating all women's agency with 'feminist desires'; and revalidating the dictatorships that were deposed. I will consider these different consequences in more detail below.

Homogenizing the Experiences of Women across the Region

Both before and since the beginnings of the uprisings, mass

protests and resistance activities, different women have had different experiences. The overriding characteristic of the Arab Spring is a popular rejection of the political status quo. However, this has been experienced differently across the region. Tunisia, Egypt and Libya are representative of countries where mass protests and, in the case of Libya, armed struggle, led to regime change. In Morocco, Yemen and, to some degree, Jordan, mass protests have led to various reforms of the existing regime. Other Arab countries have all experienced mass protests to different degrees, as well as armed struggle in the case of Syria, but without leading to any significant political transformations (yet).

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Amongst these different groups of countries, it is very difficult to find a common pattern with regard to women's rights. In Egypt, there has certainly been a clear challenge posed to existing measures that support women's rights and equality by the lack of constitutional protection for equality in the revised constitution. Yet, various women's initiatives continue to flourish since Mubarak was deposed. In Tunisia, women activists worry about defending the rights they enjoyed since independence, particularly in light of the rise in Salafism. However, until now, Ennahda has guaranteed to respect women's existing gains. In Libya, women have achieved new levels of representation in government and parliament. However, continuing lawlessness threatens women's public participation. Women within countries have also had different experiences, based on their class, religion, place of residence (urban vs rural, capital vs province) as well as their attitudes towards the previous regime. What is perhaps clear from the series of elections that have taken place in Egypt since March 2011, is that there remains a significant number of men and women who continue to be disenfranchised from politics.

Erasing the (Geo-)Political and Socio-Economic Reasons why Challenges to Women's Rights Exist in Specific Contexts

A lot of excellent scholarship on gender in the Middle East demonstrates how gender roles, gender relations and gender ideologies have evolved in the relation to different (geo-)political and socio-economic processes, including colonialism, anti-colonial struggles, occupations, dispossessions, resistance, state-building and modernization strategies and the rise and fall of

secular ideologies. This scholarship debunks the idea of 'eternal Arab-Muslim patriarchy' as well as illustrating the particular historical relationship between states and women's movements. The current transformations, transitions and popular demands for change are occurring in historical contexts that are particular to each country, although there are some shared cross-regional dynamics that are significant: the weakening of secular political projects, within which women's rights projects were embedded, and the growth of Islamist movements, with different conceptions of 'ideal' gender relations, over the past 40 years; the intensification of neoliberal economic reforms, which have largely dismantled 'ideal' gender relations for working and lower middle class families but at the expense of the sustainability of social reproduction, thereby creating nostalgia for 'traditional' gender relations; the securitization of authoritarian regimes (that is, the increasing reliance by regimes upon coercion), often provoking feelings of emasculation amongst the victims of security forces. In addition, in Egypt and Tunisia, state feminism is associated with the deposed dictatorships, thereby tarnishing women's rights by association. Against this backdrop, we should not be surprised that women's rights are being challenged nor that conservative notions of gender relations resonate with large numbers of people.

Reproducing Orientalist Tropes

In line with Orientalist tropes, the discourse of paradox victimizes Arab women, demonizes Arab men and opens the way for the West to 'rescue' the Arab world from its 'uncivilized' status. Since 9/11, women's rights as an issue has become instrumentalised in Western foreign policy, particularly in the US,

NGO Highlight



ABAAD (Dimensions)- Resource Center for Gender Equality

In July 2012, Abaad officially opened a Center for Men, where men who are prone to violent behavior, in all its forms, voluntarily sign up for psychotherapy, behavioral therapy, group therapy and anger management workshops. So far, they've had 30 men in attendance.

To know more about ABAAD check the following link:
www.abaadmena.org

to demarcate 'them' from 'us' in the 'war on terror'. It has become part of a racializing discourse that justifies wars, invasions and violence against Muslim men. Discussion of the fate of 'women's rights' in the 'Arab Spring' cannot be separated from this geopolitical context. Yet, the 'Arab Spring' has demonstrated that women are not passive victims of Arab-Muslim patriarchy. Not only have women been present in large numbers in the mass protests and uprisings across the region and also played diverse roles, including feeding fighters on the frontlines, working in field hospitals, smuggling medicines and monitoring human rights violations. In many cases, the 'Arab Spring' is an accumulation of years of protest and dissent, in which women were also present. Women have been struggling for the same freedoms and social justice as men and they recognise that this is an ongoing struggle that has not ended

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with the fall of particular dictators or the introduction of new constitutions. Despite the challenges presented by the current transitions and upheavals, women are continuing to mobilize and to resist. The case of Samira Ibrahim, who was subjected to sexual abuse at the hands of the Egyptian military police, and thousands of Egyptian women who have protested against violence against women, illustrate women's perseverance, commitment and courage. I am not denying that some women have been victims of violence and abuse since the uprisings began, and, that violence against women has been a strategy used by Mubarak's security forces and police, the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces and, more recently, by the Muslim Brotherhood to undermine the opposition. Rather, I want to highlight how women have reinscribed their victimisation as agency, in order to continue to resist political repression.

Conflating Women's Agency with Feminist Desires

Discourses about women's rights after the 'Arab Spring' assume that there is a consensus over what constitutes 'women's rights' in the Arab World. Here, I do not wish to invoke cultural relativist arguments about the significance of women's rights to different cultures. I recognise that debates over women's rights have a long history in the region and that women's movements have not imported a foreign ideology but have rooted their demands in the needs of their societies. Despite this history, women's rights has become an increasingly contested term in light of the growth of Islamist movements, on the one hand, and the NGO-ization of Arab women's movements, to use Islah Jad's term, on the other hand, which has led to the depoliticization of women's rights and its de-linking from national politics. This enables the Islamist discourse on gender to present itself as the only 'authentic' discourse. The flourishing of political

parties and social movements since the onset of the 'Arab Spring' presents a new opportunity to articulate an alternative discourse about women's rights that is progressive and rooted in local context. Yet, simultaneously, it is necessary to recognize and to directly address the obstacles to feminist/women's rights projects in the current moment (i.e. the (geo-) political and socio-economic processes noted above). A narrow focus on women's constitutional and legal rights alone will not be sufficient to reinvigorate Arab feminism.

Revalidating the Deposed Dictatorships

Possibly the worst consequence of the discourse of paradox is to implicitly revalidate the dictatorships that so many women and men struggled to overturn. There are several reasons why some dictators supported reforms that purported to be in the interests of women. In reality, they were nothing to do with the welfare and dignity of women but were rather part of regime strategies to provide legitimacy at home and abroad. For example, the women's quota in parliament, introduced by Mubarak in 2009, merely added extra seats rather than allocating a percentage of existing seats to elected women. Moreover, given that elections were rigged in favour of the ruling party, the quota operated to increase the number of MPs for the ruling party in parliament whilst providing a 'democratic' façade to the international community. The changes to divorce legislation in 2000 (khul') (advocated by a coalition of women's groups) were criticised not only by conservatives, who believed that they would undermine the patriarchal family, but also by some women activists/human rights defenders who saw the reforms as only applicable to those women who are sufficiently wealthy to be able to give up their economic rights in marriage. Moreover, the reforms did nothing to change the situation of

Coptic Christian women, who are unable to seek a divorce. In Tunisia, the introduction of a relatively progressive Personal Status Code by Bourguiba was directly tied to his state-building and modernization strategy. Unsurprisingly, those who have not benefitted from the modernization of the Tunisian economy, have not benefitted from these rights bestowed upon women by the Tunisian state.

Moreover, women are not only defined by their gender. Class, religious affiliation, place of residence and/or ethnicity all play a role in shaping women's experiences, such as, access to the workplace, access to justice, living environment, and access to services. For many women, their rights are linked to their dignity as human beings as well as the dignity of their families. This dignity has been actively undermined by dictatorial regimes. Which is why so many women have participated in the 'Arab Spring' and why the discourse of paradox does not ring true.

Conference

The ninth biennial meeting of the International Association for the Study of Sexuality, Culture and Society (IASSCS) entitled "***Sex and the Marketplace: What's Love got to do with it?***" will take place from 28th to 31st August 2013 in Buenos Aires-Argentina.

Conference themes will explore how the reasoning behind capitalist production can colonize not only sexual exchanges, but also even sexual politics and academic production.

For abstract submission, scholarships application and more check the following link:

<http://iasscs.org/2013conference/>

Nasawiya Café



The Nasawiya Café is a non-profit, smoke-free, volunteer-run activist space now officially open in Beirut! The Café opens daily and offers home-cooked meals, coffee and drinks, a fast internet connection, and a terrific library.

How it all started?

The Café opened in January 2012 when Nasawiya organization, decided to move out of office into a beautiful new location on the ground level in one of Beirut's burgeoning neighborhoods. The enthusiastic activists fixed the space up by raising funds from events and donations from their members to create a common space for members, friends, activist and artist communities, as well as anyone interested in social change.

Where does the money go?

The Café is completely non-profit and all money raised goes to financing important social justice initiatives in and around Nasawiya. There are no fixed prices; contributions are accepted in return for food and drinks on a sliding scale.

Whatever the client can afford is welcomed. Every penny spent goes back to Nasawiya community projects. Nasawiya strongly believes in mobilizing resources locally for social justice and aims to have all of Nasawiya's work 100% funded by the members and the Café by the end of 2013.

How to use the space?

The space is also available for using – especially for activists and artists – and can host meetings, film screenings, events, photography exhibits, book signings, parties, fundraisers, performances, and whatever creative idea one might have that will help advance Nasawiya causes and campaigns.

For more information follow [the Facebook page](#)

WHO IS SHE?

Profiling: Bint Al-Shati'

Aisha Abdul Rahman, best known as Bint al-Shati', was a leading Egyptian female Islamic writer and a Professor of Arabic language and literature at the University of 'Ayn Shams in Cairo, Egypt.

Her publications include studies of Abu 'l-'Ala' al-Ma'ary, al-Khansa and other women poets; biographies of the women of the household of Prophet Muhammad, lectures on the Islamic Conception of Women's Liberation; She has also written on contemporary issues in the Arab world such as Zionism and Orientalism, and on other religions such as Baha'ism.

Her book on Qur'an Exegesis, *al-Tafsir al-Bayani lil-Qur'an al-Karim*, (Volume 1 and 11) has been received with great enthusiasm due to the methodology she applied which is considered a renewal in the field of Qur'anic sciences ('Ulum al-Qur'an).

Her writing and lectures in support of equality between the sexes enlightened many young Egyptian and Arab women in their struggle for gender equality, and gave them the confidence to increase their knowledge on religion and Arabic language and literature.



Prepared by Dr. Hosn Abboud

Joint Statement: *The President, his Group, and the Government Must Cease their Policy of Targeting Female Activists and Excluding Women from the Public Sphere*



Repetition of Black Wednesday Events with Different Players and Offenders

The undersigned feminist and human rights organizations express deep concern due to the escalation of state policies that reinforce the state of impunity and which refrain from protecting citizens and securing peaceful assemblies. The organizations also condemn the perpetuation of the approach of groups that support the regime in targeting female activists and excluding women from the public sphere through direct incitement and aggression.

The attacks that took place in the vicinity of Itihadeya Palace (the presidential palace) in Heliopolis district on Wednesday, 5 December 2012, brought to mind the events of Black Wednesday, 25 May 2005, which unfolded during similar situations and complicity. The events of Black Tuesday, like those of Itihadeya, also took place during a national

referendum on constitutional articles when thugs belonging to the, now dissolved, National Democratic Party were deployed to beat protestors, with the help of police forces, in front of the Press Syndicate, and sexually assaulting female protestors and journalists.

The undersigned organizations ascertain that an array of evidence point to the responsibility of the Freedom and Justice Party (FJP), which president Mohammed Morsi belongs to, in motivating its supporters through statements that contextually and literally incited hatred against peaceful protestors and promoted the use of violence against them. The violence resulted in the injury of 748 protestors and the death of 10, according to Ministry of Health. Amongst the aforementioned statements of Party leaders is that of Essam El-Erian, vice-chairman of the FJP, who announced in the night of 5 December 2012, that: “the president will not back down and if the state structures are weakened by the injuries of the previous period, then the people can force its will and protect the legitimacy [of the president]”.

It is noteworthy to shed light on the violence used on December 5 2012, seeing that it represented a continuation of the policy of attacking women with physical and sexual violence by non-state actors supportive of the President. The latter is a policy they embarked upon since January 31 2012, dubbed ‘Determination Tuesday’, in the wake of marches to parliament that protested continuation of the rule of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces. The supporters of the FJP and the Muslim Brotherhood resorted to creating a human shield to prevent protestors from approaching the Parliament, clashed with the marches, and attacked female protestors. The attack passed without accountability, in a clear sign of the perpetuation of the state of impunity enjoyed by the ruling majority and their immunity from accountability and the application of the law.

The trend of targeting female activists, to punish them for participating in the public sphere and to exclude them from political life, becomes evident through the testimonies given by female activists. One such testimony was given by Ola Shahba, who recounted in a talk show, the way in which she was attacked and dragged through the streets by supporters of the president. In the same talk show, Lina Megahed also spoke of the details of the attack she witnessed. The details they recounted speak of a manner of treating WHRDs that does not differ from the ways in which security officers, whether civilian or military, dealt with WHRDs.

It becomes clear through the statements of government officials the trend taken by the state to abandon its responsibility in protecting citizens, generally, and protecting peaceful assemblies specifically. In 4 December, Prime Minister Hisham

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Qandil stated that protesters at Itihadeya Palace are responsible for “protecting themselves”. In the same vein was a previous statement made by Presidential spokesperson Yasser Ali, who announced, during the protests that took place on 12 October that it is best that security officers stay away from the scene for the interest of the protests.

It is noteworthy that since President Morsi came to power on 30 June 2012, he has failed to deal with the demands and issues pertaining to rights, freedoms, and justice over a span of more than five months without taking any positive steps. With the continuation of his failure and that of his government, this regime is losing its legitimacy, especially with every drop of blood shed by Egyptian citizens and peaceful protesters. We also ascertain that the use of female voices from the FJP to speak about the peaceful nature of the dispute is only to be considered as a tool to resuscitate the state’s understanding of women’s rights and the ruling party’s support for that understanding, and the attempt to pass a constitution that undermines women’s rights and treats them as second-class citizens, which we utterly refuse.

Signing Organizations:

Nazra for Feminist Studies.

Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies.

Center for Egyptian Women’s Legal Assistance.

Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights.

El Nadeem Center for Rehabilitation of Victims of Violence.

New Woman Foundation.

Women and Memory Forum.



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Highlights

Milestone Moments in the History of Arab Women

Published by the Arab Women's Organization, 2008.

Type: Hardcover

The book gives a timeline of prominent historical moments in the history of women from the Middle East and North Africa. Dating chronologically from 1832 to 2006, the index marks such events as the opening of the first medical institution specialised in 'midwifery' for women in Egypt in 1832, the first protest against settlement expansion organised by Palestinian women in 1893, and the appointment of the first woman governor of a major administrative division in Jordan in 2005. The book makes a useful reference tool in what it documents and highlights of the usually neglected, lost or overwritten manifestations of women's organised activity, and often, the individuals and groups who helped make such moments possible.

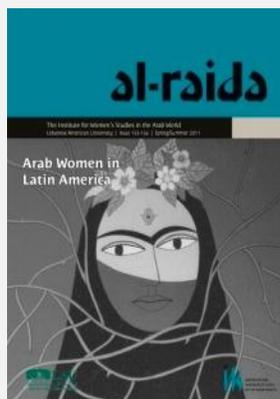
2013 Book Award

The Journal of Middle East Women's Studies (JMEWS) Book Award has been established by the Association for Middle East Women's Studies (AMEWS) to recognize and promote excellence in the fields of Middle East women's or gender studies, broadly defined. The JMEWS Book Award is offered annually to a scholar within these fields for a solo-authored book. Books published (copyrighted) in 2012 will be considered for the 2013 award. The competition is open only to books published in English.

The JMEWS Book Award Committee strongly encourages submission of nominations for the competition, **NO LATER THAN MAY 1, 2013.**

Click [here](#) for more information.

New Release



A new issue of Al-Raida entitled "**Arab Women in Latin America**" is now available at the Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World at the Lebanese American University.

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

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

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