



For activists and academics — and everyone in between

## Who Said This?

“This Gold Medal was historic, it opened and paved the road for Arab girls to rise to the coronation platforms and to participate heavily in the tournaments of the Olympic Games. It further encouraged the Arab states to increase their share of female participants in the Olympics tournaments.”<sup>1</sup>



**Nawal El-Mutawakel**  
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**Launch of a New Research Study**  
**Living with the Shadows of the Past:**  
**The Impact of Disappearance on**  
**the Wives of the Missing in Lebanon**

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## Opportunities

### Announcement

The *AMEWS E-Bulletin* is soliciting and encouraging excerpted contributions from PhD students who are writing or have already written their doctoral dissertations.

If you are interested in highlighting aspects of your research centered on gender, sexuality and feminist studies **OR** if you are advising a doctoral student whose dissertation work you would like to draw attention to, please contact Angie Abdelmonem at:

[angie.abdelmonem@asu.edu](mailto:angie.abdelmonem@asu.edu)

Check guidelines on *page 11*.

## **Dissertation: Anti-Sexual Harassment Activism in Egypt: Transnationalism and the Cultural Politics of Community Mobilization**

This dissertation project explores grassroots anti-sexual harassment activism in Egypt. It argues several points: 1) sexual harassment in Egypt is not only an expression of the prevailing heteronormative system of gender, but also reproduces this heteronormativity by reminding men and women of their place in the heteronormative order, 2) grassroots activism centered on sociocultural (re)negotiations of

gendered norms and societal responsibility, which eschew direct engagement with the state and does not advocate for political and legal changes, represent inherently political processes with political effects, 3) (re)defining sexual harassment as *taharrush ginsy* was a strategic move designed to facilitate the criminalization of sexual harassment, and is connected to transnational and national efforts focused on criminalizing violence against women, and that 4) public resistance to new notions of sexual harassment (*taharrush*) are linked to historic meanings tied with *taharrush* and the confusion

resulting from the use of *taharrush* to signify both everyday and more violent forms of assault and rape, which occurred in the post-Revolutionary period. Participant observation for this project was carried out between 2013-2014 with the social initiative, HarassMap. The following ethnographic account is excerpted and condensed from a larger discussion on the sexual politics of sexual harassment in Egypt.

### **EXCERPT:**

In the planning stages of a new campaign that HarassMap intended to launch, they held a series of focus group sessions with both men and women in Cairo, the upper Egyptian town of Mansoura, and the Delta city of Tanta. The campaign aimed to reshape values that prevented people from intervening when witnessing street sexual harassment and the focus groups were designed to build the specific features of campaign messaging. The purpose of these sessions was to gain a better understanding of the values Egyptians from various classes, ages, and contexts held dear, how they viewed the issue of sexual harassment, and what factors would encourage or prevent them from speaking up against cases of sexual harassment that they witnessed. Organized by a marketing research firm, the first of these sessions was held in Cairo with four unmarried, urban, middle class women between the ages of 20-22. The facilitator of the focus group was an upper-middle class, married woman in her mid-to-late forties, whom HarassMap

staff members were told was the best in the firm.

The two-hour discussion that unfolded, along with the post-session debrief between the facilitator and HarassMap staff, illuminates important aspects of gendered norms underlying street sexual harassment in Egypt. In part, this session focused on the forms of sexual harassment – initially referred to by the facilitator as *mu'ākṣa* (flirtation) and later as *taharrush ginsy* as the conversation wound through various themes – that the young girls and their friends faced on a daily basis. Comments/words received a great deal of attention, where compliments were viewed as acceptable and were distinguished from vulgar comments and “*shatīma*” (cursing). At one point, the moderator asked a participant, who spoke about her brother, if he harassed girls in the street, which the young girl immediately denied. Instead, she noted that her brother might comment on the beauty of a girl in a polite way, stating “*masha'allah aleyki*” (*masha'allah* being a term demonstrating appreciation or awe with respect to God's will/creation), which could never be construed as annoying or insulting. At a later point in the conversation, the moderator asked what sort of behaviors personally bothered (or not) the individual participants. Two of the four girls noted that they enjoyed the compliments or polite words and stares of young men, if those stares were not directed at their bodies but their faces. Some of the participants noted that men were free to stare

and that could not be stopped, but stares at the chest – common especially for girls whose chests were “full” - or other areas were discomforting.

During one segment of the conversation on comments as a form of sexual harassment, the discussion flowed into a debate about women’s rights when it came to how to dress in public. The below dialogue took place between the most dominant participant in the focus group and the facilitator (translated from Arabic):

Participant: I always hear comments, always when I’m walking – I get a lot...

Facilitator: Why do you think you hear comments? Is it, for example, that your pants are too tight?

Participant: Ah

Facilitator: You know this?

Participant: Ah

Facilitator: Then why do you wear them?

Participant: I won’t change it

Facilitator: But why?

Participant: I’m going to do what I want, not for your sake or because you are weak [reference to a masculine you]. I won’t change myself, I’m not your business. Also, I know I’m passing through my time and later the way I dress will change, naturally.

Facilitator: So you’ll pass through your time, you mean you’ll get married and grow older...

Participant: I’m taking my rights. I won’t have my rights effected because of you [masculine you]

Here the facilitator linked the participant’s experience of sexual harassment to the way she dressed, despite the fact that earlier in the conversation the girls noted that all women in

Egypt, regardless of how they dressed, experienced sexual harassment. Following this, the participant continued to argue that all individuals had the personal freedom to choose what they wore and how to dress. She questioned why it was forbidden/shameful (*ḥarām*) for her to wear what she wanted, to have to change her choice of clothing, but it was not forbidden/shameful for men to sexually harass.

Throughout this conversation, a number of dynamics were at work that helped to shape the focus group session in particular ways. While the participants and the facilitator appeared to be of commensurate class backgrounds, the age differences between them was fairly significant, likely at least twenty years. They all dressed in similar Western-style clothing (jeans/slacks and long tops), though the young girls all wore headscarves (*ḥijāb*) while the facilitator was unveiled. The facilitator’s gregarious nature helped to keep the conversation flowing, but her line of questioning often demonstrated an underlying conservatism, as well as inherent assumptions about the nature of sexual harassment and gendered norms. For instance, in the beginning when the participants had not yet warmed to each other, the facilitator attempted to goad them into discussing their personal experiences of sexual harassment by stating, “Come on, you’re all young and beautiful. Of course, you have been harassed.” This statement underscores a widespread

stereotype in Egypt that public sexual harassment is a phenomenon experienced by younger women, and that, as a corollary, it is a transitional stage linked to immaturity and the lack of sexual awareness or appropriate sexual outlets.

HarassMap staff members, for their part, observed the focus group session from the next room, separated by a one-way mirror. In the post-session debrief, held in this room, the facilitator's conservative views on sexuality became more apparent. She ridiculed statements made by the dominant participant in the group, and appeared put-off by the participant's comportment. The participant often laughed while relating certain events. An example was when the participant discussed how her "*sāhib*" (boyfriend) would not defend her when she was sexually harassed in public, with him often claiming that he was unaware of her being harassed. She did so in laughing terms, while also making claims that such men did not demonstrate valued qualities associated with "*rigūlla*" (manhood or masculinity). The facilitator indicated her belief that the girl was "*mabsūta*" (happy or self-satisfied) and that she, as well as all of the girls in the session, enjoyed sexual harassment. For instance, that the dominant participant willfully refused to change her style of clothing, despite believing that it contributed to sexual harassment, bolstered the facilitator's assumption that the girl "*nazla tit 'ākis*" (went out to be sexually harassed).

For the facilitator, the girl chose to dress in particular ways to deliberately attract male attention. She argued that the girl's statement of being free (*hurra*) to dress as she wanted was problematic – "*mafīsh ḥāga ismahā intī ḥurra, ihnā fi balad islāmiyya*" (there is no such thing as you are free, we're in an Islamic country) – and that a "*bint ḥurra*" (a free girl) was "*āib*" (shameful) in this society. Moreover she continued to mock the participant by stating that her boyfriend would never marry her, nor would any other man, for that matter.

This exchange between the facilitator and participants, as well as the facilitator and HarassMap staff, underscores a number of facets of gender, sexuality, and sexual violence in Egypt that are linked to patriarchal control of the female body. These are that women are required to comport or present themselves in particular ways in public, and that they must also demonstrate their lack of sexual desire. In the above vignette, the dominant girls in the focus group were verbally assured and were seemingly amused or unabashed by their experiences of sexual harassment and their appearance in public space. The girls' inability to perform their victimhood in acceptable ways left them vulnerable to ridicule and attack by the facilitator. In the protected setting of a market research firm where the facilitator and participants, while possibly of the same social class, were not of the same

neighborhood locale, such disparagement had little effect on their social standing and respectability. However, in most neighborhoods of Cairo, the circulation of such sentiments among neighbors, friends and kin can have a detrimental effect on women's respectability and, ultimately, their marriageability. A number of scholars have examined the issue of female respectability and marriageability, noting that marriage, and parenthood, are highly valued practices that most Egyptians strive to attain in order to become adults and complete/full individuals in society (El Kholy 2002; Hoodfar 1997; Singerman 1989). Therefore, how women and girls present their experiences of sexual harassment, and likely any form of sexual violence, impacts how the community at large perceives them, and what their options will be after the event.

Additionally, while women's bodies are sexualized and are seen as inciting men to sexually harass, women themselves must demonstrate asexuality in public in order to maintain their respectability. When the participants noted that they enjoyed comments and sometimes the stares of young men, this ignited the ire of the facilitator, who argued that the girls enjoyed being harassed. The combination of dressing in inappropriate clothing, along with the admission of enjoying polite comments and stares, were signals to the facilitator that the girls were themselves

## NGO Highlight

### The Arab Foundation for Freedoms and Equality (AFE)

The Arab Foundation for Freedoms and Equality (AFE) is a non-governmental organization based in Beirut, Lebanon.

The foundation aims to encourage and support body, gender and sexual rights activists in the Middle East and North Africa in their work by building their capacities, funding the activists to organize and providing emergency support to activists when needed.

Click [here](#) to know more about AFE.

displaying inappropriate sexual inclinations and were of loose respectability and morality, hence the caution that no man would marry them. For HarassMap staff, on the other hand, there was some degree of belief in the naiveté of the young girls. Accordingly, the young girls accepted the compliments of young men, falsely thinking that such compliments demonstrated a more sincere and genuine interest. In this case, the girls were failing to see how they were being objectified and inappropriately sexualized. In a conversation following the debrief, the HarassMap Director of Marketing and Communications further noted, though, that much of the sexual harassment that occurred in the street was not complimentary and that it was an expression of male mistrust of female sexuality and the need to control this sexuality through the act of shaming women.

Underlying the sentiment of impropriety, and even naiveté, however, is the lack of discourse on how respectable women can (and should, perhaps, be free to) express their sexuality in public space. Feminist theory notes the gendered nature of public and private, where sexuality, particularly that of women and homosexuals, is limited to private spaces and the public is controlled and orderly, with properly behaved individuals (Duncan 1996: 130). Patriarchal, heterosexual norms are infused in public practice and legal code, thus making the public a site of heterosexual normativity (Duncan 1996; Valentine 1996). The heteronormative public in the Middle East is a space for men to express their perceived sexual frustration through acts widely deemed complimentary, flirtatious, or playful with women; acts often excused as “boys will be boys” by Egyptian society. Women, on the other hand, are expected to cover their bodies, not turn the attentions of libidinous men, and not display any flirtatious or sexual inclinations of their own. In other words, the public space provides no room for female sexuality and there has not yet been a discourse that public female sexuality is not transgressive (Donnan & Magowan 2012).

This is not to suggest that women enjoy being sexually harassed, that sexual harassment might be a form of sexual interplay between men and women, or that sexual harassment doesn't carry with it very serious and negative impacts on those who experience it.

The above example is, in part, meant to demonstrate how sexuality politics around sexual harassment in Egypt reproduces notions of what it means to be a woman/female/feminine (and even man/male/masculine), where there is no appropriate expression of female sexuality in public. Also, there is an incomplete gender analysis among anti-sexual harassment activists who are attempting to highlight the nature of patriarchal control over women's bodies, disrupt gender binaries, challenge victim-blaming proclivities in Egypt, and force accountability on (male) perpetrators and not (female) victims of sexual harassment. Anti-sexual harassment discourses have not broached the larger issue of female sexuality outside of its control by patriarchal society. In this way, activist challenges to patriarchy have not fully delinked women's sexuality strictly from the private sphere, thus leaving women in public as asexual entities fighting off the inappropriate sexualization ascribed to their bodies by patriarchal society. (*References are available on page 7*).

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## Living with the Shadows of the Past: The Impact of Disappearance on Wives of the Missing in Lebanon



On April 20, 2015, the [Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World](#) (IWSAW) in collaboration with the [International Center for Transitional Justice](#) launched a study entitled *Living with the Shadows of the Past: The Impact of Disappearance on Wives of the Missing in Lebanon* to highlight the continuous hardship faced by the wives of the missing and disappeared in Lebanon.

The launch showcased a six-person panel that presented data, research and personal testimonies about the families followed by the screening of the movie *Badna Naaref* [We want to know] directed by Carol Mansour.

The 46-page report, is based on extensive interviews with 23 wives of diverse backgrounds. It reveals that they continue to search for answers

and relief from the government decades after their husbands went missing during the war. The report also makes important recommendations to Lebanese policy makers and civil society on how to address the rights and needs of the families of the disappeared.

The report, funded by the European Union and UN Women, also calls for an independent investigatory body to be established to gather and share information about the fate of the missing. Check [IWSAW publications](#) to download the full report in English and Arabic.

### Anti-Sexual Harassment Activism in Egypt: Transnationalism and the Cultural Politics of Community Mobilization

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## Who is She?



Nawal el-Mutawakel is the first Moroccan athlete, and the first Arab and African female athlete, to become an Olympic champion. She won the Olympic title for the 400 meters hurdles event in the 1984 Los Angeles Summer Games.

By winning the 400 metres hurdles gold medal at the 1984 Los Angeles Olympic Summer Games, Nawal el-Mutawakel became the first Moroccan athlete, either male or female, as well as the first Arab and African female athlete to win an Olympic gold medal. As Maury White describes the moment, "that was where the tiny 5-foot 2-inch Iowa State sophomore, a veritable hummingbird pitted against a field of tall, sturdy 400-meter hurdle specialists, churned her

short legs so furiously that she ran a career-best 54.61 seconds and became the first Moroccan athlete and first Arabic woman to win Olympic gold."<sup>2</sup> Her defining performance was followed live in her hometown of Casablanca during the early hours of the morning and locals poured onto the streets to celebrate.<sup>3</sup> Her Olympic success earned her instant national recognition and the King of Morocco decreed that all girls born on the date of her victory were to be named in her honor. Today, a street is named "Nawal".

An amazing accomplishment, it was not a surprising result. Trained at Iowa State University in the United States, el-Mutawakel was running with considerable success on the intensely competitive American collegiate scene for over two years prior to the Olympic Games of 1984.<sup>4</sup>

El-Mutawakel's Olympic achievement gave Moroccan women much-needed belief in themselves and the courage to seriously take up sports, which were previously regarded as the exclusive domain of men. The generation that grew up around the time of her Los Angeles success has since emerged remarkably on the international scene. In 1997, Nezha Bidouane was the 400 metres hurdles World Champion, while Zohra Ouaziz took the silver medal in the 1999 World Championships for the 5,000 metres hurdles. Nawal el-Mutawakel is proud of her people and regards the new opportunities that her Olympic victory offered young women in Morocco as her most telling achievement in athletics. Nawal el-Mutawakel remains active in Moroccan athletics and was appointed the Minister of Sport and Youth in 1997.

Her influence internationally also increased significantly in the years following her victory. In 1995, she became a council member of the International Association of Athletics Federations and two years later became the first Arab woman elected to the International Olympic Committee (IOC). Also a member of the IOC Women and Sports Commission and the IOC Marketing Commission, she was appointed Chairperson of the IOC Evaluation Commission for the 2012 Summer Olympic Games in 2004. She is currently Vice-Chair of the Laureus World Sports Academy and a winner of the Laureus World Sports Award for Lifetime Achievement. **More on page 9**

## Who is She?

Nawal el-Mutawakel was born on April 15, 1962, Casablanca, Morocco. She studied at local schools and later continued her education at Iowa State University. Upon marrying Mounir Bennis, she defied tradition once more by opting for a hyphenated married name and then by becoming one of the glamour stars in an Italian movie called "Ricatto due."

Today, Nawal el-Mutawakel-Bennis is a mother of two young children.<sup>5</sup> On a recent interview with el-Mutawakel in the "Massar" program (Canal 11, Moroccan TV), Mubarak Husni writes: "The interview with el-Mutawakel recalls a beautiful time (al-zaman al-jamil) that made a difference by highlighting the personal path of the hero as an example and as a distinguished sign of the love of a deserved life, after so much effort is made to break physical, social and athletic barriers."<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See Athletic Archive Games, 08/22/2006:

<http://forum.kooora.com/?t=2286778>

<sup>2</sup> See Maury White, "Nawal El-Moutawakel:

<http://data.desmoinesregister.com/hall-of-fame/single.php?id=434>

<sup>3</sup> See the performance alive, "16 days of Glory- Nawal El-Moutawakel-YouTube" at

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=xvd6Jcvaw6M](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xvd6Jcvaw6M) and "A history making victory from Nawal El-Moutawakel-YouTube" at

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=GIwWfMS3axg](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GIwWfMS3axg)

<sup>4</sup> See <http://www.laureus.com/academy/members/nawal-el-moutawakel>

<sup>5</sup> Maury White, <http://data.desmoinesregister.com/hall-of-fame/single.php?id=434>

<sup>6</sup> See Mubarak Husni, "Massirat al-batala al-'alamiya Nawal El-Moutawakel fi sahra telefizyoniya," in *al-Hayat*, February 9 (2015) 20.

Dear Members,

**AMEWS will be sponsoring three panels at the MESA conference this year. If you have an accepted panel and would like to have it reviewed for AMEWS sponsorship, please send the following information to Angie Abdelmonem:**

**-Panel Title**

**-Panel Description**

**-Panel Paper Titles/Authors**

**Please note that in order for AMEWS to sponsor your panel, there are a few criteria that must be met. Your panel must be focused on some aspect of gender, sexuality, or feminist inquiry in the Middle East and North Africa, or among diasporic communities.**

**Moreover, panelists must be current AMEWS members. If there are individuals on your panel that are not currently members and you would like to encourage them to join, kindly find below the membership link:**

**<http://memberships.dukeupress.edu/collections/memberships/products/association-for-middle-east-women-studies-membership>**

**The deadline to submit your panel information is June 1, 2015.**

**For questions or concerns contact:**  
**[angie.abdelmonem@asu.edu](mailto:angie.abdelmonem@asu.edu)**

## Conference: Divided Societies / Volatile States



### THE POLITICS OF IDENTITY POST-ARAB SPRING

On Tuesday March 10<sup>th</sup> 2015, The Center for the Middle East/ Rice University's Baker Institute for Public Policy held a one day conference on the topic of: Divided Societies/ Volatile States. The major thrust of the meeting was to probe into and expose the repercussions and impacts of events in the post Arab Spring. The politics of identity was explicitly the broad theme that all the panels tackled, from the keynote lecture on identity in a changing Middle East, to the panels on sectarianism as well as on gender identity in times of conflict. The meeting aimed at highlighting the conditions of fragmentation and insecurity the region is undergoing and to engage scholars in debating and analyzing these transforming conditions. The conference produced animated and fruitful discussions and debates.

The Middle East is indeed in turmoil, undergoing dramatic changes, which were spelled out in the lead keynote lecture on perceptions of identity as

revealed through recent polls of the region. This was further confirmed and detailed in Panel I "Sectarianism in the Region" with papers on the Islamic State (the Caliphate) and on the Saudi and Kuwaiti politics of sectarianism. These papers probed into the politicization of sectarian differentiation in the region and provided a sharp and clear sense of fragmentation as promoted in the current political atmosphere.

Panel II "Gender, Identity and conflict Post-Arab Spring", was moderated by Marwa Shalaby Director of Women's Rights in the Middle East Program at the Baker Institute and offered three papers on the subject. Maria Holt from University of Westminster presented a paper on the narrative of sacrifice among Palestinian women in their struggle to frame their identity as experienced in their role of repaying those who died for the Homeland – the Nation. Sherene Hafez from UC Riverside, presented a paper based on her fieldwork on Egyptian village women where Islamic social reform goes beyond the secular-religious divide. And the third was my own (May Seikaly) paper on the challenges that sectarianism pose to women's rights in the Gulf . In the current atmosphere Gulf women are experiencing conditions, if not regressive, but inhibiting and interrupting the trend of accumulated achievements socially and formally accepted rights.

The last paper, based on oral interviews and

Published data exposed the role of the political system in determining the parameters of women's developments generally. Prior to 2011, Gulf women had been engaged in a process inching towards substantial recognition of their role and rights, a recognized positive step in the right direction, while in the current political setting this process had been ignored and marginalized in the realm of national priorities. The paper traced and contextualized the features of this process that have guided gender empowerment, recognition and fulfillment. At the outbreak of the Arab Spring, Gulf women had acquired phenomenal feats in education, in employment, in political participation, though confined to prescribed context, but they have also acquired global exposure as well as mastery of modern communication and their outlets.

This paper used Bahrain as the most potent example of applied sectarian politics, which since 2011/12 has pervaded all aspects of life and impacted women as well as men. Women like many gulf citizens and from all strata, participated and sympathized with the Arab Spring. These events galvanized gulf leaders to stem all signs of dissent resulting in the application of draconic and harsh measures that still persist in some parts. Many women activists paid a price for their roles and sympathies and many more were cowed and kept low profiles. The situation seemed to impose a moratorium on the spirit of activism for gender

rights, although there are hesitant signs of a return by women activists to supersede the sectarian divide and reassume the struggle for equality and permanent legal rights for all women.

**May Seikaly, Ph.D.**  
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### **Guidelines for Submitting Contributions from Ph.D. Students**

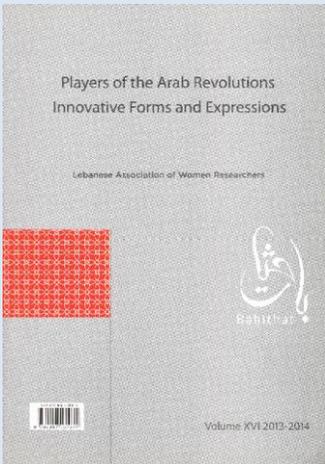
- The excerpt should highlight a topic relevant to women, gender, or sexuality studies in the Middle East, North Africa, and among transnational and diasporic communities.
- The excerpt should be between 1000-1500 words.
- Endnotes and references/bibliography should not exceed 8 and should follow the APA style.
- Authors who wish to include photos in the article/opinion piece must secure or hold the copyrights to the photos.

### **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@lau.edu.lb](mailto:al-raida@lau.edu.lb)

## Highlights



### Players of the Arab Revolutions Innovative Forms and Expressions -Volume XVI 2013-2014

**Editors:** Dr. Hosn Abboud, Dr. Amal Habib, Dr. Ridwan al-Sayyid and Dr. Amel Grami

**Year of Publication:** 2014

**Publisher:** Lebanese Association of Women Researchers (Bahithat)

The Bahithat Book, “Players of the Arab Revolutions: Innovative Forms and Expressions”, presents Book 16 of The Lebanese Association of Women Researchers (Bahithat).

An outcome of team-work, book proposals are discussed and agreed upon by the majority. Beyond the proposal, funds are raised from various sources and a call is launched to researchers from around the region to contribute to the book.

Book 16 (2013-2014) is an academic work based on the collaboration of researchers under the supervision and coordination of the editing committee including Dr. Hosn Abboud, Dr. Amal Habib, Dr. Ridwan al-Sayyid and Dr. Amel Grami. It covers the anthropological and cultural aspects with an emphasis on the innovative forms and expressions in Arab revolutions.

**For more information or to purchase this book, click [here](#).**

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The *AMEWS E-Bulletin* is published in cooperation with the Women and Memory Forum and the Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World at the Lebanese American University.

