NEWSLETTER OF THE ASSOCIATION FOR THE MIDDLE EAST WOMEN'S STUDIES

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Also assisting with the Newsletter are: Rima Kamal, Julie
Peteet, Afaa Mahfouz, and Simin Royan.

The Events Section of the Newsletter is now being handled by
Afaa Mahfouz, Dept. of Political Science, Helwan Univ., on
If you have information on an event - conference, workshop,
symposium etc. - on women and/or gender, please send details
to Rima at: 4114 Davis Place N.W. Wash., D.C. 20007.

If you are interested in submitting book reviews to the
Newsletter please notify Mervat Hatem, Editor. Since she will
be compiling a list of potential reviewers she will need your
name, address, and areas of interests, both geographical and
topical.

The Editorial Board welcomes the participation of members in
the Newsletter. Please send us any news items that you feel
may be of interest to others in the Association as well as
your comments and suggestions for improving the contents of
the Newsletter. All correspondence should be sent to Mervat
Hatem.

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CALL FOR PAPERS FOR MESA 1988 - DEADLINE IS MARCH 15, 1988

Middle East Studies Association
Twenty-Second Annual Meeting
Los Angeles, Calif. Nov. 2-5, 1988

MESA will hold its twenty-second annual meeting at the Beverly Hilton Hotel, Beverly Hills, from Nov. 2-5, 1988. The Center for Near Eastern Studies at the UCLA will host the meeting. You may put your name on the mailing list for registration information by writing to MESA Secretariat, Dept. of Oriental Studies, Univ. of Arizona, Tuscon, AZ 85721 (Tel: 602 621-5850).

A number of panels on women have been proposed for MESA 1988. If you are interested in presenting a paper on one of the panels listed below, please contact the chairperson listed. You will need to fill out a presentation proposal form. These forms are printed in the Fall 1987 MESA Newsletter or can be obtained by writing to the MESA Secretariat: Dept. of Oriental Studies, Univ. of Arizona, Tuscon, AZ 85721. Tel.: (602) 621-5850.


Female Employment in the Middle East. Mine Cinar, Dept. of Economics, Loyola Univ. of Chicago. Mailing address: 104 Fifth St. Wilmette, IL. 60091. (312) 251-0282.

Impact of Foreign Language Schools on Women in the Middle East. Christine Sproul 2055 Mirtle Ave. N.E. Salem, Oregon 97303

AMEWS Panels:

1) Shifting Boundaries of Self and Other. Sherry Vatter 1114 Superba Ave. Venice, Calif. 90291
The relationship of object and subject in historical overview or current research, between researcher and subject, east and west or within Middle Eastern societies.
An examination of various disciplines' (sociology, pol. sc., history, economics, anthro., literature, psychology etc.) theories and methods for studying Middle Eastern women.

Elizabeth Fernea proposed to organize a joint evening session (MESA/AMEWS) on the Peforming Arts and Popular Culture. Such an event would feature Middle Eastern eulogists, musicians, dancers, Koran reciters, and story-tellers. Aida Bami and Jeanne Mrad join with Elizabeth Fernea in organizing this event.

Miriam Cooke proposed a plenary session on Women and Creativity that would bring together women writers and artists.

REPORT ON THE AMEWS ANNUAL MEETING
AT MESA, BALTIMORE

AMEWS 1987 General Meeting was held during the 21st annual Meeting of the Middle East Studies Association in Baltimore, November 14-17. The following information was summarized from the minutes recorded by Julie Peteet.

Guest Speaker Cynthia Nelson

Cynthia Nelson, Prof. of Anthropology at the American University of Cairo was scheduled to deliver a paper during the first part of the meeting. Unfortunately, she was unable to attend and her paper was read by Prof. Elaine Hagopian (Simmons College). Her paper was a reflection on being a feminist anthropologist in Egypt. Mervet Hatem and Leila Ahmad presented short commentaries on contemporary issues in the study of Middle Eastern women.

Business Meeting

Suad Joseph, president of AMEWS since its inception in 1983 at the annual MESA meeting held in San Francisco, chaired this session, her last as president.

By-Laws Approved: The by-laws were printed in the last AMEWS newsletter. No amendments or suggestions for changes in the by-laws were presented and a motion to pass the by-laws was carried unanimously.
Treasurer's Report: Kathleen Howard-Merriam, secretary-treasurer of AMEWS, reported that we have a membership of 206. 98 are fully paid. 20 members have only paid $5.00 unaware of the new membership fee of $10.00. We have spent $311.25 on xeroring and expenses for the newsletter and are now running into financial troubles. The treasurer proposed raising membership fees to $15.00, in line with other associated organizations. It was noted that it would be helpful if those delinquent on their dues were to pay. A motion to raise fees to $15.00 was passed unanimously.

The treasurer also reported that the cost of each Banquet ticket included $1.50 for room rental fee, but, as it turned out, AMEWS did not have to pay it. A motion to allow AMEWS to keep the extra money was passed unanimously.

Papers for 1988 MESA: Panel topics were again a subject of discussion. By discussing proposed topics/panels for next year's MESA during the business meetings, we are assured that some panels will be devoted to the topic of women/feminism. A number of people proposed topics for next years panels. (See separate notice for a listing).

It was suggested that if a proposed panel chair was subsequently unable to continue in that capacity she/he should notify the panelists so they can make alternative arrangements.

It was also suggested that individual proposals (i.e., those submitted by an individual with no knowledge/contacts of an appropriate panel) be sent to AMEWS for placement on a panel. Mine Cinar will handle these proposals.

AMEWS 1988: Mine Cinar and Val Moghaddam volunteered to organize next year's AMEWS workshop and business meeting.

AMEWS Panels: Every MESA associated organization can have two panels in their name at the annual meeting. An open discussion for the two panels ensued. It was agreed that one panel would address the issue of theory and methodology of the various social science disciplines on gender studies in the Middle East. The second panel will be on the issue of Self/Other in Middle East feminist studies. A number of suggestions were put forth concerning other panels such as a plenary session on Women and Creativity or an evening program of Popular Culture with entertainers coming from the Middle East. (see panels section for details).

AMEWS Journal: Volunteers to form a committee to study the feasibility of publishing a journal are: Suad Joseph, Munira Charrad, Leila Ahmad, Margot Badran and Judith Tucker.
Sale of the Mailing List: There was a lively discussion over whether or not AMEWS' mailing list should be sold to advertisers in order to raise funds for the organization. A motion to sell the mailing list was defeated. The vote was 14-4 in favor of not selling the list.

Child-Care Proposal: The proposal for child-care at MESA meetings prepared by Judith Tucker was turned down by the MESA Board. However, few details of the proceedings were available. A proposal will be presented again next year and Barbara Aswad will join Judith Tucker on this project.

Elections: After a brief description of the duties of the president and the secretary-treasurer elections were held. The President serves for a two-year term and one year ex-officio. Motions to elect Julie Peteet as President and Mine Cinar as Secretary-treasurer were passed. Suad Joseph, after serving two years as President is now an ex-officio.

Newsletter: A call for volunteers to form a new editorial board for AMEWS News was made. Mervet Hatem, Afaf Mahfouz, and Beth Baron agreed to write and produce the newsletter.

Banquet After the business meeting, AMEWS members gathered for dinner. Leila Ahmed thanked Suad Joseph, outgoing president, for making it all possible. Suad received a warm round of applause.

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*** * * * DUES * * * ***

Please note that dues have been raised to $15.00. Make checks payable to AMEWS and send to Mine Cinar Secretary-Treasurer, Dept. of Economics, Loyola University of Chicago, 320 Michigan Ave. Chicago, Ill. 60611. The Secretary-Treasurer has checked the mailing list against dues paid and noted with dismay that many members have not paid their dues. It is very important for those who are delinquent with their dues to please pay, if we are to continue as an association and publish the newsletter.

If you have changed your address please notify the Editor, Mervat Hatem.

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It was suggested to the editorial board to consider a section in the newsletter devoted to research grants, fellowships, study tours, academic programs etc. designed for Middle East women's studies. We would be delighted to have such a section and our readers' assistance would be most helpful. If you have any knowledge of pertinent items please send them to the editor, Nervat Hatem.

Middle East Studies Association
Malcolm H. Kerr Dissertation Award Competition
in the Humanities and the Social Sciences

An award in the amount of $500 in each category (Humanities and Social Sciences) will be given for the best dissertation on a topic in medieval or modern Middle East studies. All students completing their dissertations between July 1, 1987 and July 1, 1988 are eligible to apply for the 1988 prizes. Dissertations must be nominated by the author's sponsor or advisor, with a letter of acceptance for the degree accompanying the dissertation. The applicant must specify the category for which he or she is applying: humanities or social science. Applicants need submit only one copy of the dissertation, although two or three copies will facilitate reading by the committees. The copy (or copies) will be returned. Winners will be announced at the annual meeting in Los Angeles. Applicants for the 1988 awards should submit the dissertation copies to: MESA Secretariat, Dept. of Oriental Studies, Franklin Bldg. Room 308, University of Arizona, Tuscon, AZ 85721. The deadline for submission is August 1, 1988.

BOOK REVIEWS

In the transition from the previous editorial group to the new one, communication has been temporarily disrupted between the new book review editor and current reviewers, who were in contact with the previous editor. For this issue we had only one review available. We look forward to receiving the reviews in progress which we hope to publish in our next issue.
BOOK REVIEW

Feminist Analysis and the Subjective World of Women


During the last days of the rule of Anwar Sadat, many of Egypt's intellectual and political elite (young, old, men, women, leftists, rightists, Muslims and Copts) were rounded up and imprisoned for having dared to criticize the policies of his regime. El-Saadawi provides a vivid and terrifying description of how the police broke down the door to her apartment, arrested her, and took her to prison with little explanation of her crime. This experience led her to argue that the liberation of society is essential for the liberation of women.

In prison she meets friends, other intellectuals and women of other classes. Her interactions with them give us a close glimpse of El-Saadawi, the person, the organizer, and the intellectual. It makes the book useful for our understanding of this venerable figure of Egyptian feminism. Despite her persistent assumption of solidarity among women of all classes, El-Saadawi's account of her prison experience shows her to be a genuine child of the middle class. The deplorable prison conditions make her longings for clean sheets, a firm bed, good food, and writing paper a constant refrain. She compared exposure to the noise, the cursing, and the obscenities of working class prisoners, who inhabited a neighboring cell, to being driven to madness and to "hell on earth." Her group's first demand to the prison authorities is to block up the wall between the two cells. She tries to preach to the friendly prison guard about democracy and having the same enemy, but all she is able to offer are slogans and cliches which fall flat and end this particular attempt for good (pp.69,96). The most she is capable of in terms of organizing women in prison is to lead them in exercise classes! She exaggerates, however, the importance of this activity by arguing that it "establishes a rythem in the mind and body which resembles the pattern of revolution or revolt" (p.97).

What is also clear from this book is that El-Saadawi lacks a political analysis of why democracy failed under the Sadat regime. She does not go beyond asking naively why the expression of one's opinion is a crime (p.117) or stating
that every individual has a right to express her/his views (p.69). In answer to the question of why a creative writer got caught up in high stakes politics, she volunteers that she abhors all rulers and authority (p.117). This is an important key to understanding El-Saadawi's personality. It is El-Saadawi, the rebel, not the theorist or the political organizer, that appeals to most of us. Her irreverant attitude to what others view as serious issues is refreshing to us, but it is clearly offensive to officials with whom she comes in contact. In the National Conference of Popular Forces (1962), which was seriously debating the question of who is a peasant, she told the Conference: "A peasant is the one whose urine is red", (referring to the deadly health effects of Bilharzia) (p.11).

The translation by Marilyn Booth adheres closely to the text and is on the whole good. There are, however, some significant failures. For instance, Booth tells us that the prison doctor converted to Christianity to marry his girlfriend while the Arabic version reads that he converted to Islam. Sometimes niqab is translated as a veil (p.124) which is very inaccurate and does not alert the Western reader to the differences between the veil and the niqab. Finally, when El-Saadawi describes how she was about to administer her mother an overdose of painkillers, Booth's translation fails to convey this particular piece of information depriving the incident of its dramatic effect (p.121).

In Harem Years, Margo Badran defines her role as translator more aggressively than Booth. A respected scholar, Badran has devoted much of her professional work to the study of Huda Sha'rawi and her role in Egyptian feminism in the 1920s and 1930s. This particular translation was to represent the culmination of her commitment to render Huda Sha'rawi's life and thought more accessible to a wider Western audience. This labor of love backfires, however, for a number of methodological reasons.

Badran is working with an unpublished version of Sha'rawi's memoirs which she proceeds not only to translate, but also to reorganize. Specifically, Badran decided to place a section written by Sha'rawi to defend the nationalist credentials of her father (Muhammad Sultan Pasha), whom she lost when she was five years old, in an appendix in order "to preserve the natural flow of the chronology", (p.3). Given what she describes as the fragmentary character of Sha'rawi's discussion of the 1919 Revolution, Badran also decided to weave those fragments into an epilogue she writes on this important period of Sha'rawi's life.

Despite all the good intentions that Badran might have had in making these decisions, they have serious implications for the work as a whole. First, these decisions violate the integrity of a very special type of text, i.e., one that is
focused on the personal memories of a specific individual. Even if the text needed some editing, the order and content of the text should have been preserved as a key to understanding its now deceased author. In the preface to the Memoirs, Badran tells us that she "hopes that the English version of the memoirs will echo, as much as possible, Huda's own voice" (p.2). The organization of the material - what is included, what is left out, as well as where certain events and figures appear - are a part of a person's voice. Sha'rawi's ardent defense of a father she lost at a young age, which appears at the beginning of the published Arabic version, offers a significant clue as to the importance of that absent father who was very much present in her consciousness as an adult. My point here is a very straightforward one - by preserving the integrity of a text, one is also likely to preserve its anomalies and the keys to resolving the important questions it raises.

This brings me to Badran's decision to focus on the harem years, which were more complete than the section on the nationalist events and feminist activities that followed the 1919 Revolution. Badran's decision unwittingly contributes to making Sha'rawi's memoirs into one of the many books catering to the West's insatiable appetite to know about the life of women in the harem. This is not to deny that life in the harem is part of Sha'rawi's history, but her life also shatters Western ideas of what harem women were like. Had Badran used the more detailed and complete accounts of the 1919 Revolution, which constituted the bulk of the published Arabic version, the English version would have been a substantively different kind of book. (Issues dealing with the connection and questions surrounding the published and the unpublished versions of the memoirs are addressed by Margot Badran and Leila Ahmed in the February 1988 issue of the Women's Review of Books).

One final point concerns Badran's decision to write an epilogue in which her voice and Sha'rawi's become one. The collapsing of boundaries between Badran and Sha'rawi in this chapter is unsettling. It is not possible for Badran, or any other researcher, to tell us how Sha'rawi experienced the events described or how she felt about them. Unfortunately, Badran, with the support of Hawa Idris, Sha'rawi's young cousin, attempts to tell us precisely that. For that reason, the last chapter is problematic. It makes claims which the fragmentary pieces, which appear in that chapter, do not substantiate. The only way out of this problem is to read the Arabic version on this terribly crucial period of Sha'rawi's life.

Mervat Hatem

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MEMBERSHIP/SUBSCRIPTION FORM

I would like to become a member of AMEWS and receive the Newsletter.
Enclosed is my check for $15.00 (Checks should be made out to AMEWS.)

I would like to participate in AMEWS activities, e.g., contribute to the
Newsletter, or become a Regional Representative.

I would like to make a financial contribution to AMEWS' efforts. Enclosed
is a check in the amount of $____.

Name ________________________________

Address ______________________________

City __________________ State __________ Zip Code ________

***** If a check is enclosed, please mail along with form, to the AMEWS
Treasurer. Mine Cinar, Dept. of Economics, Loyola Univ. of Chicago 820 N.
Michigan Ave. Chicago, Ill. 60611

***** If you would like to write for the Newsletter, please communicate your area of interest, suggestions and/or
submission to the relevant editor (see names and addresses on first page).

PROJECT ANNOUNCEMENT: AMEWS DIRECTORY

AMEWS plans to compile a directory of women (and men) engaged in the study of
Middle East women. This is provisionally called The Middle East Women's
Studies Project. To initiate what will eventually be an international
scholars' directory, we would like to compile data on our own membership, and
would appreciate your cooperation. Please fill out the form below and mail to

Mine Cinar

MEMBERSHIP INFORMATION SHEET

Name ________________________________

Address ______________________________

Telephone Number(s) ________________________________

Area/Discipline ________________________________

Current Research (title and/or brief description)____________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

Site and Duration of Project ________________________________

Funding ________________________________

Do you want your name included on any circulating list? Yes ___ No ___

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