NEWSLETTER OF THE ASSOCIATION FOR MIDDLE EAST WOMEN'S STUDIES

AMEWS Officers and Editorial Board 1987-90:

President: Julie Peteet, Center for Contemporary Arab Studies, Georgetown University Wash., D.C. 20057
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The editorial board of the AMEWS Newsletter:
Afaf Mahfouz, Julie Peteet, Suha Sabbagh and Judith Tucker

The editorial board encourages 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.

Please note *** All members should have received their annual dues-renewal letter. If you have not yet paid your dues, please be sure to do so as soon as possible in order not to be dropped from the mailing list.

Address changes should be sent to Mine Cinar, AMEWS Secretary-Treasurer (see address above).

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Minutes of the Meeting recorded and submitted by Mary Hegland:

In the absence of President Julie Peteet, Secretary/Treasurer Mine Cinar chaired the meeting. The following issues were discussed:

1. Panels for MESA 1989: (see Newsletter section on Mesa 1989 for a listing of the proposed panels).
   It was suggested that one person be responsible as a chair for each panel and provide their address and phone number so that others may call them to discuss the panel. If someone submits a proposal but there aren't enough papers for a panel, the chair should notify this person so that she may join another panel.

2. AMEWS Journal: A committee was elected last year to work on developing a journal.
   Discussion: The general topic of debate was whether or not it is a good idea to have a separate journal. Some voiced misgivings about the possible ghettoization of Middle East women's studies while others felt a journal would make the topic more visible and that in any case we should publish in both kinds of journals. Several members suggested trying to get special issues about Middle East women in journals such as IJMES or the MESA Bulletin. Other members felt it necessary to have a continuous forum for discussing research findings and theoretical concerns. It was noted that there had been problems, in the past, in having feminist articles published in IJMES.

3. AMEWS Panels: The membership voted to postpone the issue of which panels AMEWS should sponsor at MESA 1989.

4. Child Care: After much discussion about MESA's role in assisting with day care facilities and ruling out individually arranged facilities as too costly, it was proposed that the issue be submitted to the MESA business meeting. Val Moghadam and Susan Schaefer Davis volunteered to join Judith Tucker on the child care committee. There was a unanimous vote on the motion to bring up the issue at this year's annual meeting. It was further suggested that a study should be conducted as to cost and types of arrangements to be submitted to MESA to give them a better basis for their discussions. (see pp. 4-5 for an up-date by Susan Schaefer Davis).

5. Newsletter: Some members expressed concern about the AMEWS editorial committee, particularly the book review section, pointing out that some reviews really belong in the Critical Forum section. Previously, book reviews went through a review process by the editorial board. This year there were problems associated with the process itself.
Discussion was opened as to what should be done. Some members expressed concern about the tone and attitude of our reviews of each other's work and noted that there should be more cooperative efforts to gain recognition for one another. It was noted that it is very divisive for an emerging field such as ours to have destructive rather than constructive criticism. Some members noted the distinction between well-thought criticism versus vitriolic criticism with ugly overtones suggesting that one shouldn't write about the region unless born there, creating an us/them, or insider/outsider barrier. Others said they were disturbed but didn't want to tell colleagues how to write noting that it's a small field and discussion does tend to become personalized. Some mentioned that reviews in other disciplines aren't always so sweet either. Discussion continued and a member mentioned that there can be civil discourse even when a review is highly critical; there is no need to engage in character assassination.

It was suggested that the problem lay in the transition process from one editorial committee to another. It was suggested that no one person make a decision about what goes in the Newsletter, that a collective review process be instituted. It was brought up that the Critical Forum section is getting longer and longer and that perhaps a limit should be set and guidelines established for the review process. A motion was put forth that:

a) guidelines be set up similar to those used by Feminist Studies;
b) each review should be reviewed by a minimum of two people from the editorial committee and the committee should decide who those two are; and c) it should be reasserted that this is a collective body and all decisions are collective. The motion was seconded, voted on, and passed.

6. Scheduling Problems: A member brought a problem to the attention of the ANEWS membership. She had organized a workshop, which was accepted and scheduled at a popular hour. It was then cancelled by MESA because some members hadn't paid their dues. She failed to have the workshop reinstated after much effort and felt there was a divergence of understanding about the date for payment of dues. She asked what she could do about this. A member stated that sometimes fees can be waived; another member suggested submitting the issue to the board asking why this criterion had been applied. The high cost of registration and membership fees ($85.00) was noted.

7. Directory: This item was put on the shelf for the time being.

8. Speaker for MESA 1989: It was suggested that the speaker again follow the model of previous years - a person speaking on the convergence between personal and academic life. Several names were mentioned: Sohail Morsey, Janet Afari, Afsaneh Najmabadi, and Hamideh Sedghi.

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The following item was submitted for inclusion in the Newsletter by a group of AMEWS members:

AMEWS is now three years old and the newsletter is growing in scope and size. Last year, the transition from one editorial committee to another caused some confusion. In order to avoid confusion in the future, and to regularize the actions of the editorial collective, which voluntarily produces the Newsletter, the group at its November 2, 1988 meeting, passed three important motions:
1) Adopted the guidelines used by Feminist Studies as a model for the book reviews and the critical forum.
2) Agreed to have article or book reviews read by at least two members before publication.
3) Reaffirmed the collective nature of the Newsletter and the organization in general.

We would also like to express our appreciation to all the members of the editorial committee who edited and produced the Newsletter this year: Mervet Hatem, Afaf Mahfouz, Julie Peteet, Suha Sabbagh, and Judith Tucker.

PROGRESS REPORT ON CHILDCARE
submitted by Susan Schaefer Davis, AMEWS Childcare Committee

We are pleased to report that the atmosphere around childcare provisions at the next MESA meeting (Nov. 15-18 in Toronto) has improved considerably since the discussion in your last AMEWS Newsletter. Several steps have been taken to make childcare available for next fall.

The first step was a discussion at the AMEWS business meeting, where several members expressed deep dissatisfaction with the Board's vote not to pursue providing childcare for this year's meetings, although Judith Tucker had given them information on the mechanics of how several other professional associations do so. While the MESA Newsletter before the meeting said childcare would be available via hotel sitters for $5-7 an hour, and people assumed that could cover 2-4 children, a member said that rates were actually $9-11 an hour, per child... which none of us considered affordable. This led AMEWS to form a committee of Judith Tucker, Val Moghadam and Susan Schaefer Davis, with Suad Joseph participating ex-officio, to pursue the issue for the next year.

After encouraging discussions with outgoing President Bill Quandt, we decided to raise the issue at MESA's Annual Business Meeting on Friday. Elizabeth Fernea opened the matter for discussion. Several members commented on the need for childcare (including somewhat incomprehensible but much-appreciated gurglings from a future beneficiary while he was conspicuously changed), and Paul Walker closed by noting that childcare is not only a woman's issue.
Suad Joseph then proposed a sense-of-the-meeting motion, the text of which was:

I propose:

That the Executive Secretary and the Board of Directors of the Middle East Studies Association make a commitment to work with the Association for Middle East Women's Studies to try to provide affordable childcare for the 1989 MESA meetings in Toronto.

Towards that end, that the childcare models already developed by other professional associations such as the American Anthropological Association, the American Political Science Association and others, be investigated.

The motion was accepted unanimously by voice vote, making many AMEWS members feel like accepted and powerful members of MESA.

Our next step was to prepare a questionnaire on the need for childcare next year, which MESA included in their December membership renewal mailing. Depending on the results of this, we will prepare a proposal for MESA on what kind of childcare facilities should be provided. So PLEASE fill out and send in your questionnaire if you think you might use childcare. If for any reason you did not receive one, please call the MESA office (602/621-5850) NOW and report your needs.

Meanwhile, Judith, Val and I are collecting data on how other organizations deal with childcare. Barbara Pillsbury has volunteered to report on the American Anthropological Association, and we have also covered the American Sociological Association, the American Political Science Association, the Berkshire Conference on Women's History, and the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC). If any AMEWS readers have information on childcare provisions by other associations, please send it to me (791 College Ave, Haverford, PA. 19041) or call (215/649-7717). We are also pursuing whether Canada has special provisions or regulations for childcare; information on that is also welcome. We plan to collate all our data into a report for the MESA Board's Spring meeting, and to have them act at that time.

In the process of our work so far, we have received encouraging letters from both outgoing President Bill Quandt and new President John Esposito, and the MESA Office has been helpful in mailing out and offering to tabulate the questionnaire. We are encouraged by this cooperation and hope to have even more positive results of our efforts to report in the next issue.

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The following panels have been proposed for MESA 1989. If you would like to present a paper on one of these panels be sure to contact the Panel Chair as soon as possible. Please note that the MESA Secretariat requires that they receive the panel/abstract package by March 15, 1989.


2. "Comparative Perspectives on Women and Education in the Middle East." Chair: Nagat El-Sanabary 131 Norwood Court, Kensington, Calif. 94707.


ANNOUNCEMENTS

*** ISLAMIC AND MEDITERRANEAN WOMEN'S HISTORY NETWORK NEWSLETTER ***

Growing out of the 1987 Berkshire Conference on Women's History at Wellesley College, the Islamic and Mediterranean Women's History Network formed as a means of breaking through divisions created, in part, by the way area studies were institutionalized. At the same time, it expressed the desire of scholars of Islamic and Mediterranean women's studies to work within related frames of reference. The Network has a Newsletter appearing twice a year that focuses on sources, methodology, and theory. The editors are Margot Badran and Ayesha Jalal, University of Wisconsin, Madison. Membership dues are $5.00 and can be sent to Margot Badran, Islamic and Mediterranean Women's History Network, P.O.B. 6707, Syracuse, New York 13217. It is very important that Mediterranean Women's History Network appears on the envelope so the dues can be directed straight to the account.
SYMPOSIUM
"The Politics of Feminism: New Perspectives on the Middle East"

Date: Saturday, March 4, 1989
Place: Columbia University
Law School, Room A
116th & Amsterdam Ave.
New York, New York

The purpose of the symposium is to examine critically the theoretical approaches currently used in the study of women in the Middle East and to develop new perspectives on feminist scholarship.

Agenda:

9-9:30 Registration and Coffee
9:30-11:00 Panel 1: "Feminism, Politics, and Resistance"
   Keynote Speaker: Nawal Saadawi
   Chair: Peter Awn, Columbia University
11-11:15 Break
11-11:15 Panel 2: "Theory and Method"
   Chair: Anne McClintock, Columbia University
   Panelists: Marnia Lazreg, Hunter College
   Gunseli Berik, New School for Social Research
1-2:30 Lunch
2:30-4:15 Panel 3: "Formation of Feminist Consciousness"
   Panelists: Barbara Harlow, University of Texas
   Judith Tucker, Georgetown University
4:15-4:30 Break
4:30-5:30 Panel 4: Roundtable Discussion
   Chair: Lisa Anderson, Columbia University
5:30-7:00 Reception

Sponsors: Institute for Research on Women and Gender, Col. U.
School of International Affairs, Col. U.
Arab Association at Columbia
Middle East Institute, Col. U.

Cost: $5.00 (more if you can afford it, less if you can't)
Pre-Registration is by February 24, 1989
For further information please contact:
Institute for Research on Women and Gender (212) 854-3275/77

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The Rutgers University Institute for Research on Women is pleased to announce its seventh annual conference on research issues relating to women and gender "Celebration of Our Work." The conference will be held at Douglass College on May 23, 1989. This year's theme will be "Mosaics of Inclusion." For more information, please contact: Institute for Research on Women, Voorhees Chapel, Douglass College, P.O. Box 270, New Brunswick, New Jersey 08901-0270.

Nov. 9-12, 1989 - The 22nd annual Macmillan Conference "The Archeology of Gender", Calgary Alberta, Canada. The Conference will generate discussion and stimulate new research on the roles and interactions of men and women in prehistory. Titles and abstracts for symposia and contributed papers are due April 1, 1989. Contact: Program Committee, Dept. of Arch. University of Calgary, Alberta, Canada T2N 1N4.

**CRITICAL FORUM**

I was reminded in looking over the latest installment sent by Margot Badran and Marilyn Booth (and published in the last issue of AIEWS) of an Egyptian proverb that describes the frustration of a Muslim mu'azin who calls to prayers in Malta. In realizing the foolishness/utility of this thankless task, one can take solace in the Islamic attitude summarized by the popular refrain: "Let God be my witness, I have delivered my message." As for our Maltese sisters and their salvation, they need to begin to worry about that themselves instead of presenting new explanations about why they should not.

Hermet Hatem
Cairo, Egypt

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BOOK REVIEWS


Reviewed by Mary Harper, Princeton, New Jersey

The publication of the letters Florence Nightingale wrote to her family during her five-month journey through Egypt in 1849-50 offers yet another illustration of the current market for narratives of travel and, more particularly, for travels to the East. Previously collected by Florence Nightingale's sister in 1854 and circulated in a private edition, the letters are published here for the first time and have been lavishly "illustrated" by the editor with a large selection of nineteenth-century European paintings and sketches of Egypt. Rather than addressing the problems of representation posed by these cross-cultural images and texts, however, the strategies adopted by the editor tend to reiterate them. Neither the paintings nor the sketches have been given dates, and the sketches lack any attribution at all beyond their titles ("Cairo," "Young Arab girl," "Obelisk"), as if their images offered a timeless and objective documentary "truth." No reference is made to the very different cultural contexts and conventions which inform these paintings, despite the fact that they range from the highly impressionistic landscapes of Frere to the ethnographic "realism" of Lewis' interiors and the monumental architectural ruins of David Roberts. Furthermore, each letter and painting has been "framed" on the page with a collection of decorative Oriental motifs which visually highlight this presentation of the Orient as an exotic artifact.

This edition is part of the publishers' literary-art travel series and is evidently intended to appeal to the widest possible market. The painting by R.W. Cooke reproduced on the cover (sunrise over palm trees on the Nile) and the dust-jacket notes reprinted inside ("A journey to the fabled land of the Arabian Nights was a fantastic adventure at that time") underscore the well-established Western stereotypes of the East as a source of exoticism, picturesque colour, and nostalgia for its own lost past. In his brief introduction, the editor retraces the now familiar outlines of nineteenth-century travel in Egypt, noting the appeal of the East to the English imagination after Napoleon's campaign and Nelson's victory at Aboukir, and the growing number of studies and "collection" of Egypt's antiquities. The particular interest of Florence Nightingale's letters, the editor suggests, lies in their "sensitive and authoritative" descriptions which serve as a guide to the sites on the Nile, their "amusing and valuable" record of early nineteenth-century travel in Egypt, and their testimony to the private life of Florence Nightingale at age 29, before she began her public nursing career. On each of these three points, however, it is important to situate Florence
Nightingale's letters more carefully than the editor suggests within, or outside, the conventions and assumptions of nineteenth-century European writing on Egypt.

The letters record what Florence Nightingale describes as her "real and individual impressions" of a visit to the sites of the Nile which she undertook in the company of Charles and Selina Bracebridge, wealthy family friends and well-known travellers of the period. They spent two weeks in Alexandria and Cairo, and the remaining four months on the Nile, travelling by dahabieh from Cairo to Ipsamboul to visit the sites of ancient Egypt, some of which had only recently been excavated. As in many nineteenth-century travels to Egypt, it is the art, customs, and religious life of the past, of Pharaonic Egypt, that almost exclusively engages Florence Nightingale's interest and sympathy during her journey ("What do people come to Egypt for? Without the past, I conceive Egypt to be utterly uninhabitable."). Her account offers not so much a "guide to the sites" as the editor suggests, as a highly personal evocation of the impressions which the "death of a world" has left her with. Her descriptions are always more revealing of her own concerns than those of Egypt. Her fascination with "eastern colouring and atmosphere" transforms the landscape into a timeless, picturesque backdrop for her meditations on the past, drawing on the West's paradigmatic imagery of the Bible and the Arabian Nights.

In sharp contrast to this poetics of Pharaonic ruins is Florence Nightingale's condemnation of the misery of life in contemporary and Islamic Egypt. As the editor notes, she decries the degradation of the land and its people in her critique of both Mehemet Ali's and Abbas' repressive policies of conscription, corvee, and taxation. On the other hand, however, she also collapses this political and social critique back on to a personal indictment of Islam in the Orientalist mode of other nineteenth-century travellers. If the editor calls attention to the revealing contradictions of Florence Nightingale's commentary, he also glosses over the racism and religious bigotry which inform some of her remarks. On the subject of Islam, she cites its sensualism, fanaticism, and oppression of women exemplified in women's lack of education, in the practice of polygamy, and in the "hell," the "ennui," and the intrigues of the harem, though she also comments with surprise on the favourable laws of inheritance for women under Islam. In contrast she admires the "Christian position" given to women in Pharaonic Egypt: "always the one wife, nowhere the face veiled, often the regent..." In comparison to the preoccupation of other travellers of this period, both men and women, with the subject of women, Florence Nightingale's comments are surprisingly sparse and superficial, always secondary to her interest in religion.

The question really at issue here is not so much Islam as Christianity and Florence Nightingale's interpretation of it, a question which needs to be set in the context of missionary and reform movements in England during this period, and Victorian women reformers such as Harriet Martineau whose own journey to Egypt, published in 1848, certainly influenced that of Florence Nightingale. Although the editor makes no reference to such issues, the most valuable of his introductory comments concerns
the autobiographical significance of the letters. Drawing on her
diary written during the same period, the editor notes the
personal crisis—"a call from God" and "her duty to her family"—
which Florence Nightingale confronted during this journey. Indeed,
it is in their contribution to studies of Florence Nightingale and
nineteenth-century England rather than Egypt that the interest of
these letters seems to lie. It is, therefore, all the more
disturbing to note the editor's omission, with no textual
annotation, of several "longer passages" from these letters which
included her discussions of "philosophical and theosophical"
issues and a final "meditation" entitled "Vision of Temples." Such
omissions are symptomatic of the problems this edition raises, and
serve to call attention to the pressing need for careful editing
and reading of early narratives of travel as they continue to be
republished. It is to be hoped that such editions will begin to
draw on the considerable body of critical work now published which
has taken as its focus the images and discourses of cross-cultural
representation.

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Le harem politique: Le Prophète et les femmes. Fatima Mernissi.

Reviewed by Afaa Mahfouz

This delightful book is a breath of fresh air and an original
reflection on three years (625-628) of Prophet Mohammed's life in
Medina. It is well-written, intelligent, lively and witty. The
topic is sexual equality. The goal is to challenge the legitimacy
of sources of current Muslim legislation related to women. The
tool is "to ride alone in the memory, without guardians, without
guides" (p. 18). The author cautions us though: she does not take
forbidden footpaths. Rather she rides in the pleasant, agreeable
and less traveled ones. The result is not only a compelling and
interesting investigation of the origins of certain sacred texts
or hadiths but also an engrossing and fascinating exploration of
"Muslim Memory" when it is used to justify a misogynous choice.
Once again, Fatima Mernissi addresses in a direct and courageous
way the problem of manipulation of religious texts on women by the
representatives of the political and/or economic order since the
seventh century.

According to its author, this book is not a history book but
a "narrative-book," a "vessel of memory" (livre-recit, livre-
navire, vaisseau-memoire) which seeks the "unveiling" of our
present from the "make-up" of the past (p. 19). Fatima Mernissi
addresses first the problem of projection while reading a text,
"the written" (l'ecrit). This projection prevents any accurate
"reading" (la lecture).

The introduction starts with a famous Hadith of Prophet
Mohammed who is believed to have said a society which accepts to
be ruled or led by a woman shall never be prosperous. How similar
this is to the oft-repeated Hadith of my Upper Egyptian (sa'id
Hasr) childhood which says: "Damned shall be people ruled by a
woman" (la'an Allah qawn hakamathum inra'a).
The first of the two parts of the book deals with the ways and means of using and/or manipulating sacred texts to protect political, economic, and social power or privileges. The second part sheds light on the existing social customs and moral values of the inhabitants of Medina (al ansars) when the Prophet and al muhajireen (emigrants) escaped Mecca and accepted their hospitality. The author concentrates on the analysis of several "misogynous Hadiths" while venturing back to the three fratricidal years (625-628), or the "revolution" in Medina.

The author proceeds to explore the ways the "experts" chose to establish a religious science, to control the interpretation of the Quran and to establish the Sunna (tradition) based on the Prophet's Hadiths. Except for a brief remark, Mernissi does not address the difference between what is considered part of the Sunna and what is not. According to the basic teaching of the Shari'a, not all Mohammed's sayings or doings are considered part of the Sunna. Also it would have been appropriate and useful for the reader to have a quick reference to the classification of Hadiths, their hierarchy, and their place among other sources of Shari'a. Nevertheless, the author displays the thoroughness of the scholar who goes back to the old "yellow" books, reedited or not, to demonstrate how, in the ninth century, Bokhari conducted his research with a view to validating and authenticating Mohammed's Hadiths. After establishing the bases of his methodology, Bokhari interviewed 1,080 people, collected 600,000 Hadiths, retained 7,275 Hadiths sahih (authentic) with a repetition of the same meaning in another 4,000 Hadiths. According to her findings, the author wonders, if at the death of the Prophet, 596,725 false Hadiths were in circulation (600,000 - 7,274 + 4,000), how many false Hadiths are in circulation today? Mernissi then proceeds with her investigation of the first Hadith, mentioned above, which is considered a Hadith sahih and demonstrates how this Hadith was taken out of context. She continues with other "misogynous" Hadiths in an effort to describe the context and the different steps which led to the imposition of the veil, or hijab. She conducts her inquiry and takes us with her to the past in an attempt to prove that even authentic Hadiths need to be investigated again and again after checking on the motifs and the psychology of those who reported them and, more importantly, after analyzing the socio-economic reasons behind each of them.

Fatima Mernissi also gives us an inspiring, empathic, and vivid description of the Prophet Mohammed in his everyday life: the leader, the husband, the father, the lover, and the sensitive and sensible human being. The man that emerges from these accounts is different from the image that exists today. For Mernissi, the Prophet's project, initially, was the establishment of a religious and democratic community whose members, men and women, were meant to be equal, autonomous, and free. The defeat of Uhud and the Hijra to Medina led, according to our author, to a series of compromises in an attempt to avoid a confrontation between al ansars and al muhajireen. These two groups of Muslims had different ways of life and different sets of values and behavior. The veil, or hijab, is one of the results of a political decision to secure harmony and unity among Muslims of different cultural backgrounds. Nevertheless, the veil still symbolizes regression
vis-a-vis social and sexual equality. The veil was first imposed as a measure to protect the prophet's wives from the harassment of women in the streets of Medina at the time. Later on, the protection was extended to all Muslim women. Finally Mernissi analyses the different attitudes about sexual behavior (sodomy in particular), slavery, and violence against women during the three critical years. The book is a wonderful plea for freedom, independence, and equal rights.

In her conclusion, Mernissi pays homage to Mohammed, to the women of his time, (particularly to his two wives Aisha and Umm Salma) and finally to the free spirit Sakina, the prophet's great-granddaughter. The author adds useful Appendices (Annexes) which comprise a few rules on the author's transliteration of Arabic words into French, the sources she utilized, a chronology of events, a map of Arabia at the beginning of the Hijra, and Mohammed's geneology, as well as the author's acknowledgements.

*Le Harem politique* is an excellent addition to women's studies by the most productive writer on the subject of women in Islam.
MEMBERSHIP/SUBSCRIPTION FORM

I would like to become a member of AMEWS and receive the Newsletter. Enclosed is my check for $15.00 made out to AMEWS. Please do not send checks drawn on foreign (non-US or non-Canadian) banks. If you are subscribing from abroad, please use a money order or postal coupons.

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, long with this form, to the AMEWS Treasurer: Mine Cinar, Dept. of Economics, Loyola University of Chicago, 820 N. Michigan Ave. Chicago, IL 60611

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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 (see address above)

MEMBERSHIP INFORMATION SHEET

Name _____________________________________________

Address __________________________________________________________________________

Telephone Number (s) __________________________________________________________________________

Area/Discipline ____________________________________________________________

Current Research (title and/or brief description ________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

Site, Duration and Funding of Project __________________________________________

Do you want your name on any circulating lists? Yes____ No____