

For activists and academics—and everyone in between

Who said this?

“I know that people’s ability to think was always the target and that imprisonment, exiles, threats, pursuit and torture are only ways of robbing people of their humanity or their ability to think and criticize.”

(c.f. *Latifa al-Zayyat, The Search: Personal Papers, translated from Arabic by Sophie Bennett, 1996* 97)



Latifa al-Zayyat



Fe-male Launches a Campaign Aiming to Change Women’s Image in Media and Ads

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Opportunities

Deadline Extended / Call for Papers Conference: Arab Countries in Transition: Gender Rights and Constitutional Reforms

The Institute for Women’s Studies in the Arab World in partnership with the Women and Memory Forum is organizing a conference that addresses gender rights and constitutional reforms in the MENA region.

Guest speakers of the conference are *Dr. Suad Joseph*, Distinguished Professor of Anthropology and Women and Gender Studies at the University of California, Davis and *Dr. Hoda Elsadda*, Professor of English and Comparative Literature, Faculty of Arts, Cairo University and head of the Freedoms and Rights Committee in the Constituent Assembly, Egypt.

Deadline for Application: February 28, 2014.

[Click here](#) for more information on submission guidelines.

Piecing Together the Fragmented History of Esther Mushriq Haddad Christine B. Lindner*

“**A**s a historian of women and gender in the Middle East, I am consistently searching for new sources and opportunities to explore the lives of women and the ways that they performed their identity. But as historians of women’s history know, ‘traditional’ sources of journals, letters and publications written by women are hard to find, particularly for non-elite women. For Arab Protestant women in Ottoman Syria, the focus of my research, their meager presence in the archives is particularly curious due to the community’s late emergence (only in the 19th century), their strong connection to the literary and cultural revivals of *Nahda*, and the employment of education as an integral part of the Protestant identity.¹ This lack of sources has

resulted in Arab Protestant women being marginalized within historical analysis of the community, its relationship to the *Nahda* and of educational development in the region.² The dearth of their written testimonies has prompted some (including myself) to wonder if *not* leaving a paper trail was part of Arab Protestant womanhood, at least for those in Ottoman Syria.³ As a result, the handful of researchers who seek to navigate these constraints and explore Arab Protestant women’s activities, find themselves acting more like detectives and archeologists, rather than traditional historians, piecing together fragments of information to create a narrative that is based, more often than not, on historical speculation.

In my new position as curator of

[Preserving Protestant Heritage in the Middle East](#) (PPHME) project at the [Near East School of Theology](#) (NEST) in Beirut, I find myself both daunted and excited by the potential of this new archival project. Reviewing, organizing and cataloging the hundreds of items is an intimidating task, but one that brings with it the prospects of uncovering forgotten and overlooked elements of history, such as the activities of women in creating and sustaining the Protestant community.

Based in Beirut, Lebanon, the PPHME is part of an emerging movement in the region to organize archives and to make them more accessible to the public. New archival projects in Lebanon include the [Lebanese National Archives](#), the [Arab Image](#)

Piecing Together the Fragmented History of Esther Mushriq Haddad

[Foundation, databases of historical music](#), and the [collection of manuscripts at USEK](#), the [University of Balamand](#) and the [Near East School of Theology](#). While difficulties persist, the problems carefully detailed by Sara Scalenghe and Nadya Sbaiti ten years ago are gradually easing.⁴ Being located in the region allows for these works to be studied by Arab scholars, who may, for visa and monetary constraints, be unable to travel to holding institutions abroad. The increasing push to digitize items and showcase them through online exhibitions expands both public access and discussion, as seen with the [Ottoman History Podcast](#), [Tozsuz Evrak](#) and [Haizine](#). These archival projects are proving to be essential arenas to uncover previously 'lost' or forgotten items, in creating new opportunities for connections amongst scholars, pluralizing access to information, and offering new opportunities to reconsider historical narratives, particularly those pertaining to women, such as the [Women's World in Qajar Iran Website](#).

The potential of new archival projects to shift our understanding of women in Ottoman Syria will be demonstrated by highlighting some of the items recently found at the NEST Special Collections. This will be done by presenting the 'detective' work employed to investigate the activities of one Protestant woman, Esther Mushriq Haddad. Her story illuminates some of the diverse activities pursued by Arab Protestant women and the agency that they evoked to shape her identity and relationship to the community. While incomplete, this short study refines our understanding of Protestant women and their role in shaping the Protestant community in Ottoman Syria.

Rolled inside a cardboard tube were found [fifty-five teaching certificates](#) dating from 1865 to 1887. Authorized by American missionaries, these certificates were bestowed to forty-five men and ten women, listing the items that the individuals were certified to teach. One certificate was for a woman named 'Astir al-Haddad' [Esther Haddad]. Receiving her certificate in 1876, Haddad was qualified to teach the 'basics of education', like most of the women who obtained one of these certificates.

A [hand-written list](#) of teachers created by the American missionaries in 1893 provides additional information about Esther. She is listed as 'Esteer Mishrik Haddad' who was then teaching in Aramoun and affiliated with the Abeih Station on Mount Lebanon. Another woman, '[Raheel Mushriq Haddad](#)', is listed above Esther. This woman also worked in Aramoun and was presumably Esther's sister. Interestingly, the list states that both of these women were granted teaching certificates in 1888, although the teaching certificate for Esther is dated to 1876 and that for Rahil ten years later.

The inclusion of Esther's father's name (Mushriq) and her location of work (Aramoun, near Abeih) are key details in unlocking her history. In her memoir, *Mother, Teta and Me*, Jean Said Makdisi wrote that Mushriq Haddad, Esther's father, owned the building that the American missionaries rented for their boy's seminary in Abeih.⁵ Leila, another of his daughters (and thus Esther's second sister), married Yusuf Badr, the first ordained Arab Pastor of the Protestant Church in Beirut and became Makdisi's great-grandparents.⁶ Makdisi's short introduction to Mushriq Haddad illuminates Esther's family background, her connections to both the American missionaries and leadership of the Syrian Protestant church, and the environment in which she developed her identity. Due to these connections, it is of little surprise that she was listed in 1893 as teaching alongside her younger sister at a school near her hometown, then a center for Protestant study.

It is in a memoir of a British traveler to Ottoman Syria and Palestine that further information on Esther is found. In 1906, H.B. Macartney, a supervisor for the British Syrian Mission, wrote that he visited Yusuf and Leila Badr in Jedediah in 1904. Macartney indicated that one of Leila's sisters was 'one of our Biblewomen in Damascus'.⁷ Confirmation of Esther's new position was located, not in the British Syrian Mission's records, but in the records of the American mission. According to the American mission's budgets of 1900-1901 and 1901-1902, Esther received payment as a Biblewoman, not in Damascus, but in

her hometown of Abeih.⁸ At some point Esther must have shifted careers, from education to direct evangelism, and moved from Abeih to Damascus.

Biblewomen were paid female evangelists, who worked under the authority of an ordained male pastor and were often paid by female missionary boards.⁹ Throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Protestant women (Euro-American and Syrian) were excluded from the relatively new role of Protestant pastor in Ottoman Syria.¹⁰ This made Biblewoman the only outlet through which Protestant women could pursue the preaching profession—be it in a non-ordained and thus inferior position relative to their male colleagues. Their work was nevertheless significant, for in many ways they were the hands and feet of the church. They met with individuals who would otherwise not engage with a male preacher, such as conservative women. Biblewomen's work complemented that of female teachers, nurses and doctors, which Protestant women pursued as indirect channels to evangelize. However, Esther, like the other few Biblewomen, left little in regards to written records,¹¹ making it difficult to understand why Esther changed from a career in education to a career as a female evangelist at a relatively late age.

While some of the Biblewomen were widows or in otherwise vulnerable positions, Esther's educational qualifications and social status (as a relative of a prominent Protestant) could have set her apart from her female colleagues. The lack of records makes it difficult to determine the social status of her Biblewomen colleagues and if a hierarchy emerged amongst these women or if a sense of solidarity developed due to the shared commitment to evangelism. Also unclear was her relationship with the Protestant Church leadership, particularly the leaders of the Arab Protestant Church. Having an ordained brother-in-law may have provided Esther with a cushion to soften any challenges against her

evangelical activities, although study of the Abeih church records could shed light onto Esther's relationship with the Protestant leadership.

Lastly, Esther's story reveals a high level of agency harnessed by this woman. Recent research suggests that women, like Esther, navigated the educational and employment options emerging in Ottoman Syria in order to develop their careers and social positioning.¹² What is interesting in Esther's case is that she not only forged a career in education, a respectable and relatively stable new option for women, but then changed her career to become a female evangelist, a more unstable and somewhat undefined position. This change produced new opportunities for Esther to engage with others in her community and allowed her to relocate from her village of Abeih to the city of Damascus.

This brief introduction to the history of Esther Mushriq Haddad, has revealed some of the activities for Protestant women. These activities are often marginalized or overlooked in analysis of the community, despite their central role in shaping Arab Protestantism. While fragmented, Esther's history also illuminates the potential that new archival sources hold in reshaping our understanding of women's history in the Middle East.

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References

¹ Some of the basic texts discussing women of this community during the nineteenth and early twentieth century include Ellen Fleischmann, 'Evangelization or Education: American Protestant Missionaries, the American Board, and the Girls and Women of Syria (1830 – 1910)', in: H. Murre-van den Berg, (ed.), *New Faith in Ancient Lands: Western Missions in the Middle East in the Nineteenth and early Twentieth Centuries*, Leiden and Boston: Brill, (2006): 263-280; Julia Hauser, 'An Island Washed by the Crashing Waves of the Ocean? The Kaiserswerth Deaconesses'

Contribution to Female Education in Late Ottoman Beirut', [unpublished Ph.D. Thesis], Universität Göttingen, 2012; Christine B. Lindner, 'Negotiating the Field: American Protestant Missionaries in Ottoman Syria, 1823 to 1860', [unpublished Ph.D. Thesis], University of Edinburgh, 2009; Rima Nasrallah Van Sanne, 'Adèle Jureidini Hajjar (1893-1971): The First Ordained Female Minister in Lebanon', *Theological Review of the Near East School of Theology*, 27: 2 (2006): 76-90.

² The most famous texts on Protestantism in Ottoman Syria grant very little space to women and their activities, often marginalizing their work to footnotes. Abdul Latif Tibawi, *American Interests in Syria: 1800-1901: A Study of Educational, Literary and Religious Works*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996); Ussama Makdisi, *Artillery of Heaven: American Missionaries and the Failed Conversion of the Middle East*, (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2008)

³ Christine B. Lindner, "'An Uncommonly Worthy Girl': Rahil Ata al-Bustani and Nineteenth Century Arab Womanhood', [unpublished paper] presented at Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences Seminar, University of Balamand (May 2010); Conversation with Souad Slim, (Beirut: 18 December 2013).
⁴ Sara Scalenghe and Nadya Sbaiti, 'Conducting Research in Lebanon: An Overview of Historical Sources in Beirut (Part I)', *Middle East Studies Association Bulletin*, 37: 1 (2003): 68-79; Nadya Sbaiti and Sara Scalenghe, 'Conducting Research in Lebanon: An Overview of Historical Sources Outside of Beirut (Part II)', *Middle East Studies Association Bulletin*, 38: 1 (2004): 187-195.

⁵ For the history of this seminary, which eventually became the Near East School of Theology, see George F. Sabra *Truth and Service: A History of the Near East School of Theology*, (Beirut: Librarie Antoine S.A.L, 2009).

⁶ Jean Said Makdisi, *Teta, Mother and Me: An Arab Woman's Memoir*, (London: Saqi, 2005): 143.

⁷ H.B. Macartney, 'Part One: Our Visitor's Story', in: H.B. Macartney and S. Kassab, *Two Stories from the Land of Promise*, (London: The British Syrian Mission & Marshall Brothers, 1906): 38. This book is unique in that it is split into two parts, the first being the traveler's account of Macartney and the second being the memoir of Selim Kassab, the influential, long-term employee of the British Syrian

NGO Highlight

Fe-male Association

The **Fe-male Association** is a Lebanese non-profit, non-governmental and non-sectarian association. It functions under the terms of the Human Rights Charter. The association believes that only a civic society in Lebanon can ensure equality among all citizens. One of its main objectives is to raise awareness over issues related to human rights violations, particularly violations of women's rights.

[Click here](#) to know more about **Fe-male Association**

Mission and father of Mary Kassab.

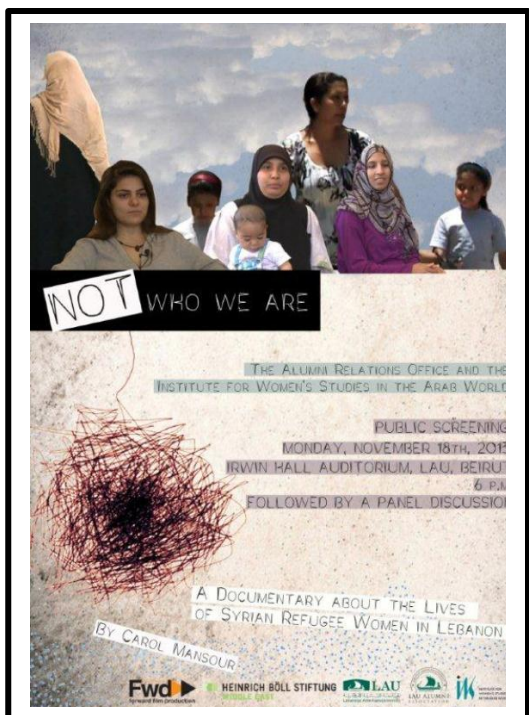
⁸ E.G. Freyer, *Mission Budget 10: 1900-1901*, (Beirut: 1901), Courtesy of NEST Special Collections; E.G. Freyer, *Mission Budget 11: 1901-1902*, (Beirut: 1902), Courtesy of NEST Special Collections

⁹ For more on Biblewomen see Valarie Griffiths, 'Biblewomen from London to China: the transnational approach of a female mission idea'. *Women's History Review*. 17:4 (2006): 521-541.

¹⁰ It was not until 1920 that a woman was ordained in a Protestant church in Lebanon/Syria. Noticeably, this woman, Adele Jureidini Hajjar, was not ordained to an established Congregational/Presbyterian congregation, but rather the new Church of God community. For more on Adele see Van Sanne, 'Adèle Jureidini Hajjar:76-90.

¹¹ It appears that reports, or at least quotes from Biblewomen were logged in the Annual Reports of the British Syrian Mission. These have not yet been located, although excerpts of their quotes were reprinted in Frances E. Scott, *Dare and Persevere: The story of one hundred years of evangelism in Syria and Lebanon, from 1860 to 1960*, (London: Lebanon Evangelical Mission, 1960), especially pgs. 25-31.

¹² A number of examples are presented in the forthcoming book Julia Hauser, Christine Lindner, and Esther Möller, (ed.), *Entangled Education: Foreign, National and Local schools in Ottoman Syria and Mandate Lebanon*.



IWSAW in partnership with the Alumni Relations Office hosted a public screening of the documentary directed by [Carol Mansour](#) entitled “[Not Who We Are](#)”.

The documentary highlights the plight of Syrian refugee women who fled to Lebanon as a result of the war in Syria.

The real life stories featured in the documentary and narrated by Afra'a, Umm Omar, Umm Raed, Samar, and Siham are heart-wrenching and offer a glimpse into what these women have been going through as a result of their displacement.

Watching the documentary, we learn about their losses and their daily struggle to survive. We also witness their resilience and their determination to survive in the hope of returning to their beloved country Syria.

WHO IS SHE? Profiling: Latifa al-Zayyat



Latifa al-Zayyat (1923-1996) is an Egyptian and Arab pioneer woman known for her political activism and literary contribution. She was a full time Professor of English Literature at the Girls' college of Ayn Shams University, and after a few years she headed the department of English language and literature from 1967-1983. Al-Zayyat's political activity as the head of “the Committee for defending the national culture” (Iajnat al-difa' 'an al-thaqafa al-qawmiyya) which was founded after the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty (1979) reveals her true commitment to issues of Arab culture and identity. Some of her political and literary works involve studies such as *Adwa': Dirassat Naqdiyya* (al-Hay'a al-amma lil-Kitab, 1995), an article on “al-Katib wa-l hurriya” (The Writer and Freedom) in *Fusul*, vol.11, 3 (1992-1993) and an interview made by a group of Egyptian women academicians and

feminists (Sumaiya Ramadan), woman of letters (Radwa Ashur), literary and cinema critic (Farida Mer'i), and Latifa al-Zayyat, “Hawla al-iltizam al-siyassi wa-l-kitaba al-nisswiya,” (On Political Commitment and Women's Writings) in *Ali: Journal of Comparative Poetics: Marxism and the critical discourse* (Cairo: AUC publication, 1990). Some of her English research includes studies on critical concepts by Ernest Hemingway, T.S. Eliot, David Hume, D.H. Laurence, and Ford Madox Ford. She contributed to literary journals on Abd al-Rahman al-Shirqawy, Alfred Faraj, Michael Roman, Mahmud Diab and Yusuf Idriss. Al-Zayyat did not contribute any critical work on contemporary Arab women's writings, the way May Ziyadeh did at the beginning of the last century. Her famous novel *al-Bab al-Maftuh* (1960)¹ was translated into English (2000); her last novel *Sahib al-Bayt* (1997)² was also translated. In 1992 she wrote her auto-biography, *Hamlet Taftish: Awwaq Shakhsiya (The Search: Personal Papers)*,³ in which she records her entry to prison twice, once in the monarchy era in al-Hadra Prison in Alexandria (1949), and again in al-Qanater Prison in Cairo (1981) at the age of fifty-eight. Latifa al-Zayyat is an activist who was conscious from the start of her responsibility towards the nation. She believed that the individual self can only be understood and enriched if it is merged in the collective self.

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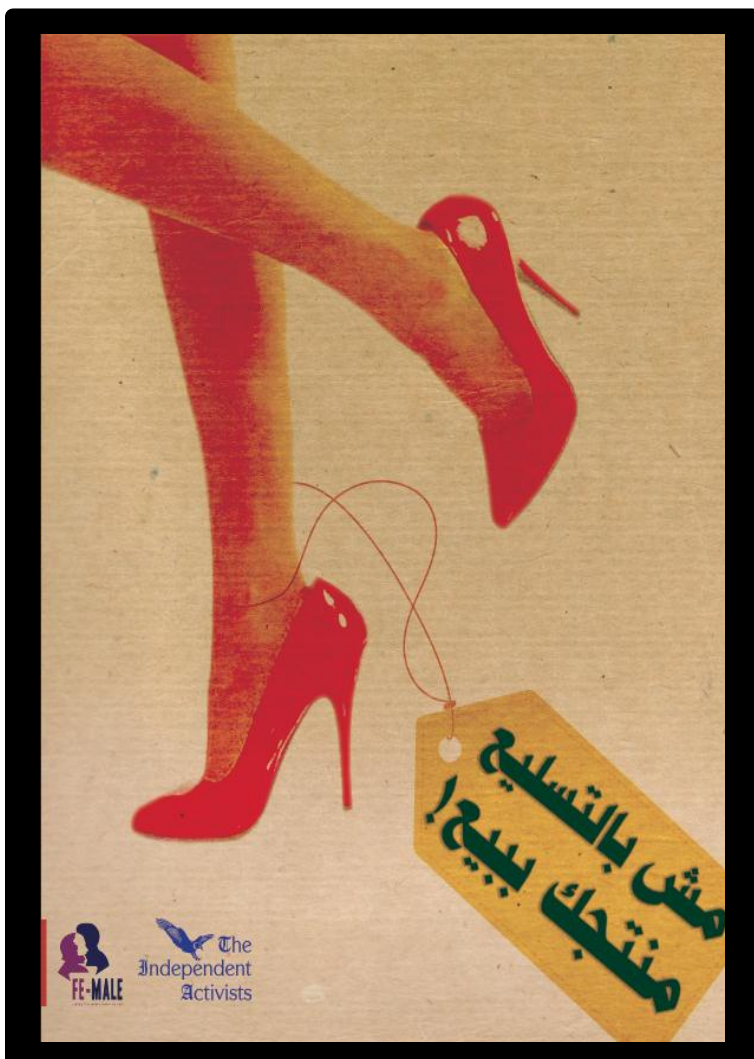
Notes:

¹Latifa al-Zayyat, *al-Bab al-Maftuh*, (Maktabat al-Anglo-Misriya, 1rst. ed. 1960 and al-Hay'a al-Amma lil-Kitab, 2nd.ed. 1989); Latifa al-Zayyat, *The Open Door*, translated by Marilyn Booth (Cairo: AUC press, 2000).

²Latifa al-Zayyat, *The Owner of the House*, translated from Arabic by Sophie Bennett (London: Quartet Books, 1997).

³Latifa al-Zayyat, *Hamlet Taftish: Awwaq Shakhsiya*, (Cairo: Dar al-Hilal, 1992).

Latifa al-Zayyat, *The Search: Personal Papers*, translated from Arabic by Sophie Bennett (London: Quartet Books, 1996).



Fe-Male launches a campaign aiming to change women's image in media and Ads

Fe-Male, non-profit, non-sectarian and advocacy NGO, announces launching an online advocacy campaign entitled **"Not by Commodification Your Product Sells"**. The one month online campaign will shed light on the different types of gender discrimination produced in the media and ads and on how Commodifying and Sexualizing Women Leads to Gender Violence. This campaign will include a video and caricature pictures on the issue. The campaign falls under the following long-term objectives:

- Banning the dangerous messages media is transferring to young generations.
- Promoting a balanced and non-stereotyped portrayal of women in the media and ads.
- Creating a functioning forum of discussion about the image of women in media and ads.
- Changing women's image in media and advertisements towards the elimination of stereotyping and objectification of women.

Special thanks for *Indyact*, who supports this online campaign.

Email: info@fe-male.org

FB: www.fb.com/sharikawalaken

Want to Share your Thoughts & News?

Write to Us!

We are interested in articles, announcements, conference reports, workshop updates, film-screenings, and social initiatives related to women and gender issues in the Middle East, North Africa and beyond.

Please e-mail:

amewsbulletin@gmail.com

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:
al-raida@lau.edu.lb

Forthcoming issue:

Women & Photography in the Arab World

Highlights



Gender & Entrepreneurship in Iran: Microenterprise and the Informal Sector

Author: Roxsana Bahramitash
Publisher: Palgrave Macmillian
Year of Publication: 2013
Language: English

Iran is estimated to have the third largest informal sector in the MENA region—a major source of income for many low-income households whose numbers are growing as sanctions tighten. Gender and Entrepreneurship in Iran provides insight into the role of informal networks in employment creation in Iran from a gender perspective. Drawing upon theories of social capital, social network, and the postcolonial feminist critique of mainstream development, this analysis sheds light on the ways in which poverty and unemployment may be tackled.



Unveiling the Harem: Elite Women and the Paradox of Seclusion in Eighteenth-Century Cairo

Author: Mary Ann Fay
Publisher: Syracuse University Press
Year of Publication: 2012
Language: English

There is a long history in the West of representing Middle Eastern women as uniformly oppressed by Islam, by Islamic law, and by men. Stereotypical views of Middle Eastern women today maintain that they are without legal rights, do not attend universities or have jobs outside their homes, and are not full citizens of their countries because they cannot vote or hold public office. Similar misinformation circulated in the eighteenth century when European male travelers to Egypt, documenting their observations, depicted harem women as sexual objects, deprived of autonomy, and held captive by their husbands. Fay's *Unveiling the Harem* offers a persuasive corrective to this distorted view of Middle Eastern women.

Instead of the odalisque of nineteenth-century painting and the fevered imaginings of European travelers, historical research reveals that elite women in powerful, wealthy households exercised their rights under Islamic law, property rights in particular, to become owners of lucrative real estate in Cairo as well as influential members of their families and the wider society. One such woman, Sitt Nafisa, who was literate in several languages, commissioned a public water fountain and a Qur'anic school that still stands today. She played a pivotal role as the intermediary between French officials and her husband, who was leading the revolt against the French from Upper Egypt. Based on documents from various archives in Cairo, including records of women's property ownership, repeated visits to eighteenth-century palaces and their family quarters, and textual reconstructions of the elite residential neighborhoods of the city, *Unveiling the Harem* presents a lucid and historically grounded portrait of Egyptian women, stripped of the powerless victim narrative that is still with us today.

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



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