
3-1-2006

Meridians 6:2

Paula J. Giddings

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.smith.edu/meridians>



Part of the [Feminist, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Giddings, Paula J., "Meridians 6:2" (2006). *Meridians: Feminism, Race, Transnationalism*. 27.
<https://scholarworks.smith.edu/meridians/27>

This Journal has been accepted for inclusion in Meridians: Feminism, Race, Transnationalism by an authorized administrator of Smith ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact scholarworks@smith.edu

Preface

When the renowned Egyptian physician-psychiatrist, writer, and activist Nawal el Saadawi first told me of her plans to hold a conference entitled “Women, Creativity, and Dissidence” in Cairo, Egypt, in 2005, I immediately envisioned devoting a special issue to the proceedings. At the time, Dr. el Saadawi—whom I had first met some years before as a board member of *Meridians*—was a visiting Neilson Professor at Smith, and I eagerly anticipated receiving the papers from the conference that would be coedited by both she and Dr. Obioma Nnaemeka.

As many of us know, Dr. el Saadawi is a groundbreaking feminist whose interests and more than forty publications of fiction and nonfiction extended the boundaries of Arab literature and the discourse on women, gender, and sexuality. She has done so not only through her writings but as a figure who has demonstrated, again and again, her formidable courage of conviction. Dr. el Saadawi was dismissed from her position as Director General of Public Health Education in Egypt’s Ministry of Health, which she had held between 1958 and 1972, after publishing *Women and Sex*, a text that deals with the tabooed subjects of female sexuality, religion, and female genital mutilation. She continued to advocate for the rights of Egyptian women, and in 1981, after serving as the United Nations Advisor for the Women’s Program in Africa and the Middle East, Dr. el Saadawi was imprisoned by her government for “alleged crimes against the state” under the regime of Anwar el Sadat. Possessing while incarcerated only a stubby black eyebrow pencil and a small roll of tattered toilet paper, she continued to write, and on her release she published *Memoirs from the Women’s Prison*, which continues her criticism of the Egyptian government. In 1991 the organization she founded—the Arab Women’s Solidarity Association, which had nearly three thousand members—was banned after it criticized the U.S. involvement in the first Gulf War; and in 2004 she campaigned for the presidency of Egypt. Indeed her life and work—undeterred by pressure from the state, forced exile, death threats from Islamic fundamentalists, and the censoring

of many of her writings—embody the meaning of “women, creativity, and dissidence.”

Meridians is also fortunate to have had the guiding hand of coeditor Dr. Obioma Nnaemeka for this issue. A Nigerian-born scholar and activist who holds leadership positions in a number of NGOs and has convened the “Women in Africa and the African Diaspora” international conferences, Dr. Nnaemeka is presently Professor of French, Women’s Studies, and African/African Diaspora Studies at Indiana University. She is also a commentator and cultural critic for the French Service of the International Service of Radio Netherlands and the founder and current president of the Association of African Women Scholars. Her most recent works, published in 2005, are *Engendering Human Rights: Cultural and Socioeconomic Realities in Africa* (coedited with Ngozi Ezeilo) and *Female Circumcision and the Politics of Knowledge: African Women in Imperialist Discourses*. *Meridians* is grateful for the tireless effort and tremendous skill—reflected in part by her introduction—that Dr. Nnaemeka has provided for the volume.

Through the vision and work of both coeditors, the readers of this special issue will be illuminated by, exposed to—and sometimes confronted by—scholars, both women and men, who write from cultural locations, including the Middle East and Islamic Africa, that have been underrepresented in feminist discourses brought to light by publishers in the West, and especially in North America. By permitting *Meridians* to publish their meditations on women, dissonance, and creativity, the authors in this volume have aided our mission to expand and deepen the feminist discourse—a discourse that, in an era of globalization, is still, too often, circumscribed.