“Locating Transnational Feminist Rhetorics: (Re)Positioning Lebanese Feminist Arguments”

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In the introduction to College English’s special topics issue on transnational feminist rhetorics, Wendy S. Hesford and Eileen E. Schell, in “Configurations of Transnationality: Locating Feminist Rhetorics,” defined transnationality as “movements of people, goods and ideas across national borders and... it is often used to highlight forms of cultural hybridity and intertextuality” (463). The introduction piece calls for a focus on transnationality in the field of rhetoric and composition, but also highlights some of the limitations in doing so, particularly with our own definitions and disciplinary focus on “American” aspects of our work (463). “At this historical juncture,” claim Hesford and Schell, “transnational feminism might best be characterized as an interdisciplinary analytic, attentive to the constraints of neoliberalism and to the power differentials and inequalities that shape geopolitical alignments” (467). Furthermore, they note, “we are interested in how transnational publics, which emerge as processes, are bound to and intersect with national publics and their discourses (Hesford)” (467). Remapping the locations of feminist rhetorics and transnational approaches requires a close attention to not only the way in which the discourse is perceived and shaped across national boundaries, but also the ways in which we define, understand and come to know the discourse communities and assumptions under which we operate. This presentation is part of a larger feminist historiography of Al-Raida, a Lebanese feminist journal introduced in 1976 by the Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World at the Lebanese American University. As a site of institutionalized discourse, this journal may allow us to trace the ways in which issues of gender in the Middle East are treated and revised from a global understanding into the local context. My larger research study recovers foundations of modern Lebanese feminist discourses as they are articulated in the journal by tracing discourse strands, or conversations, which include Family Planning, development, politics and narratives of the Lebanese civil war. This article further explores through a content and textual analysis, the editorial letters of Rose Ghurayyib. By situating each particular editorial letter within the each discourse strand in dominant and local historical contexts, the shifting rhetorical function of the journal is explored through various historical moments, particularly with respect to the Lebanese civil war. This article rhetorically analyzes the ways in which Ghurayyib’s arguments are positioned vis-à-vis the larger discourse of the women’s movement and the use of normative and transnational language to situate and articulate Lebanese feminist arguments against the civil war. Thus, this study addresses the question of how certain conversations in a particular Lebanese academic journal have shaped and been shaped by the global and local women’s movements. This research further highlights the dialectic and recursive relationship of transnational public discourse and local understandings and definitions of the Lebanese state.