

BOSTON UNIVERSITY ANTHROPOLOGY GRADUATE LUNCH SERIES

Gender and Associational Life in Syria



**Lindsay
Gifford**

Friday, January 23
12:00 PM
PLS 102 (Anthropology
Seminar Room)

Although organized association independent of government control is systematically discouraged or forbidden by the Syrian regime, women's rotating credit associations (*jama'iyyat*) are a mode of informal organization in the limited space that Syrians find for associational life. Syrian women are more likely to participate in *jama'iyyat* than men because of patriarchal constraints on women's engagement in the public sphere. To be active in the public and build networks outside the home and family, women must use socially legitimate avenues like *jama'iyyat*, or face ridicule and disrespect for their movement outside the home. Hence, perhaps counterintuitively, women participate in public associational life through *jama'iyyat* because these are an acceptable form of public women's activity, whereas men, who do not experience such restrictions on their engagement in the public sphere, see little reason to organize such associations when they can easily build personal networks outside the home. Women situate themselves as "modern" and "active" women in their own discourse on public participation in *jama'iyyat*. In doing so, members of these associations build a sense of identity that is contemporary, capable, independent, and yet morally engaged with values of feminine virtue through community and family support networks.

Lindsay Gifford, an anthropology PhD candidate, is in her second year as a Senior Teaching Fellow, teaching Arabic. Her fieldwork was conducted in 2006-2007 under a Fulbright-Hays Doctoral Dissertation Research Abroad Fellowship.

A light lunch will be provided.

Please RSVP to Mark at 353-2195 or email him at palmerm@bu.edu, if you wish to attend.