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Monday 13th June

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An Apology To Our Readers About Amina Abdallah

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Share



06-10-2011 by Linda S. Carbonell

Last February, we were contacted by a young woman who said she was Syrian. She gave her name as Amina. She was commenting on a report I did based on a story filed by Tom Aspell of NBC. Initially, she was asked to write about being gay and Muslim. We were given the impression that she had left England and returned to Damascus to be with family. Then, she started doing what I – me, personally, not the blog – really needed. I wanted someone in the region who could do a much better job of explaining the Arab Spring to Americans than I could from 5,000 miles away.

We helped her set up *A Gay Girl In Damascus*, and carried her stories on our blog. We believed we were doing a service for the people in the Middle East who were and are fighting and dying for liberty. I have spent my entire life believing that liberty cannot be imposed by an occupying army and not all peoples will practice democracy the same way we do. That's why I wanted her stories. And let's face it – she's a damned good writer.

Then, last week, someone named Raina used the GGD site to post a story about an abduction at gunpoint. All very dramatic and very scary. BUT – big-ass “but” here – we did not identify her as Amina Arraf, that came from somewhere else. We didn't even break the story and we have tried to say very little. Well, the rest of us have, I'm the guilty party for any appeals about Amina's safety.

Were we used by this person? Yes. Did we believe her? Yes. Did we care what happened to her? Damn yes. And that's what hurts so much. Did we lose sleep over Amina? Yes. Did we call in every person we ever knew that we thought could help? Yes. Were we scared out of our collective minds? Yes.

We were not intentionally misleading our readers. We try very hard to get our facts straight. We have a very liberal, almost radical editorial slant. We make no claims to being unbiased. We are trying to expand our scope and our readership beyond being advocates for the end of “Don't Ask Don't Tell.” There are so many issues out there that effect all of us – gay rights, women's rights, labor rights,

immigration rights, unemployment, the economy, health care choices, the list goes on and on. All of these things impact us as individuals and they impact the LGBT community every day, even if they are not specifically LGBT issues. And yes, the Middle East does impact our lives. It impacts our government's budget – guns instead of Planned Parenthood – and it impacts those of us who are in the military or have loved ones in the military. I live in Vermont where every life lost tears the fabric of a small town.

Beyond the truth about “Amina,” who apparently is a 35 year-old lesbian living in Edinburgh, Scotland, there is a second story here....LezGetReal and its involvement has been blown out of proportion in some parts of the press. When “Amina” became a media star, giving interviews to CNN, she rarely mentioned us as her starting point. When the story about the “abduction” broke, suddenly everyone remembered us. And that has brought out a disgruntled former writer who is trying to make a media star of herself over this screw-up.

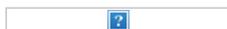
These are the hard facts: Melanie Nathan did not “give up her interest in Lezgetreal.” She was asked to leave as an editorial decision. She was insisting on “repression rights” – the right to decide what stories I could cover and how I could cover them. The specifics don't matter. Her political positions were incompatible with the rest of the staff and I refused to slant the news for her sake. Our executive editor made a choice – the facts or Melanie's fanaticism.

I was brought on to this site for a reason – my age. I lived through the whole second half of the 20th century and did so with a keen interest in what was going on in the world. My opinions are my own. I hope, though I know I'm not always successful, that I am fair. I rail against people who think the whole bloody world is identical to their little view of it. I'm cynical, sarcastic, bitchy and pissed off at a lifetime of watching this country take one step toward civilized maturity and three steps back. I also still believe. I believe that if we understand each other, we can find points of commonality instead of points of hatred. I want people to understand. I still believe in a simple idea, one put forward by an old hero of mine, Gene Roddenberry. We should be celebrating our “Infinite Diversity in Infinite Combination.”

I am also generous enough to think I understand what motivated the abduction story. Last week, and this is actual verifiable fact, the body of a ten year old boy was dumped on his parents' doorstep in Syria. The boy had been tortured and beaten to death by the security police. Not enough attention was paid to this inhuman act. So, whoever “Amina” is, she wrote a story that people would pay attention to. I still want to believe that “Amina” was trying to make people care about her country and force the United Nations to get involved. LezGetReal did not perpetrate this hoax. We were not a part of it. We were fooled like everyone else.

I would like her to get in touch with us. Even more, I would like her to get on her own site and explain why she did this. We feel as betrayed as her fans, maybe more so because the way this story has blown up has given a disgruntled former writer of this site an ability to attack us in the international press. We have been at a disadvantage in dealing with the press. Our executive editor is deaf. She cannot conduct either live or telephone interviews without a translator. Melanie Nathan knows this. She knows that Paula cannot respond to her accusations because of her disability. If the press needs anything more than what I have written here, they should contact me.

We apologize, I apologize to our readers for being caught up in this exercise in fiction writing. I am truly sorry that we involved all of you in it. It was done with the best of intentions. I want something understood, though, “Amina” didn't say anything that wasn't the truth. The situation in Syria is no less horrific just because she wasn't actually there. People are dying, people are being mowed down in the streets, people are disappearing into the jails and secret police dungeons. IT DOESN'T BLOODY MATTER WHO TELLS US THIS AS LONG AS WE LISTEN TO THE CRIES OF PEOPLE WHO WANT TO BE FREE.



Tagged with: [Damascus](#) [Gay community](#) [Gene Roddenberry](#) [LGBT](#) [Middle East](#) [Syria](#) [United Nations](#) [United State](#)

39 Comments



1. [Shauna](#)

[Posted on June 10, 2011 at 1:07 pm](#)

Linda,

OK wait...you mean to say that there was NO abduction and, in essence, no Amina?

This is the first I've heard! My twitter account blew up all day the abduction story was reported from several news organizations that I follow and yet, nothing from anyone except LezGetReal

that it was a hoax. So, you were not alone (at all) at thinking the story was real and I TRULY appreciate you letting us know the facts.

I have great respect for your site and enjoy reading the different stories on it. :) I am sorry you had a bad egg there, you know? Keep up the great work you do and many, many thanks for keeping us informed!

Have a great weekend,

Shauna

[Reply](#)



2. [A.J. Allen](#)

[Posted on June 10, 2011 at 1:13 pm](#)

I am proud to be a writer on this site. I have built a rapport with our executive editor (Paula) and some of the other staff based purely on respect and trust. I am truly saddened by what has happened and hope that this does not detract from the events happening in Syria. We strive to report the truth here based on facts and I know that I can say every one of us will continue to do so.

[Reply](#)



3. [Liz](#)

[Posted on June 10, 2011 at 3:15 pm](#)

I don't think most people would blame this site for being fooled. I certainly would not. There is an active discussion here on the search for Amina: [Painful doubts about Amina](#).

If it turns out that Amina's blog was written by someone who doesn't match her particular identity, I hope that your readers can treat that writer respectfully and thoughtfully.

[Reply](#)



4. [Fergus Gibson](#)

[Posted on June 10, 2011 at 3:30 pm](#)

Amina, whoever she is, became a story we all cared about. Now that doubts have been raised about her true identity, we essentially have two choices about where we as a community go from here. We can put aside our concern for Amina and move on, or we can take our love and concern for Amina and direct to the interest of all dissidents and political prisoners under oppression for their gender, sexual identity, or political dissent. My proposal is the latter.

Amina was never the only story that mattered in Syria, the Middle East, or the world's brutal regimes. She was the one that reached us on an emotional level, but there are thousands of stories just as important and relevant we haven't yet heard. We have cause to be bitter and feel betrayed if we believe that Amina is an essential falsehood, but let's not almost literally fail to see the forest for the rotten tree.

And let's also remember that as quickly as we accepted the truth of Amina and were apparently burned, let's not rush to judgment on her being fictitious. While we know and can confirm some of her claims are absolutely non-factual and others are in question, we seem still a ways from knowing the important truths of what has happened here. There is someone or some group behind Amina, and as yet we cannot be certain what is true in the story and what is false.

[Reply](#)



5. [Paula Brooks](#)

[Posted on June 10, 2011 at 4:25 pm](#)

Let me clarify something.... when Amina told us she was going to set up her own blog.... we offered her space on our server... an offer she declined....

At no time did anyone at LGR ever have access to her Gay Girl in Damascus Blog....

Paul Brooks.... Publisher.... Lez Get Real

[Reply](#)



6. [davidseth](#)

[Posted on June 10, 2011 at 6:43 pm](#)

You aren't alone. Many of us took the kidnapping of a blogger as personally as you did. Because it appeared that she was targeted and that goons decided to silence and/or disappear her. I made the same mistake(s). <http://dreamantilles.blogspot.com/2011/06/how-many-ls-are-there-in-gullible.html>

I am happy to have made them. I can afford to say, ooops, I was duped. I wouldn't have been

happy if her body had turned up while I was researching whether this was real. In cases like this, let's go with the heart and clean up the mess afterward.

[Reply](#)



7. **A**

[Posted on June 10, 2011 at 7:19 pm](#)

You say, "Amina" didn't say anything that wasn't the truth."

But she did. It appears that *everything* she said about herself, her background, her family and experiences were lies.

You say, "IT DOESN'T BLOODY MATTER WHO TELLS US THIS"

But it does. The single most important thing a writer can possess is credibility. Once there is lost, there is no reason to believe a single word they say.

[Reply](#)



8. **Caoimhe Snow**

[Posted on June 10, 2011 at 7:28 pm](#)

You wrote the following: "Beyond the truth about "Amina," who apparently is a 35 year-old lesbian living in Edinburgh, Scotland"

Can you state your source for this? Is it something you were told by "Amina" herself, or that you learned from another party?

[Reply](#)



o **Paula Brooks**

[Posted on June 10, 2011 at 7:36 pm](#)

We dont have to learn it from another party... she logged into OUR sever 135 times... from 2 IP addresses in Edinburgh.... and ONLY 2 IP addresses in Edinburgh.

We have logs,,,care to check them out for yourselves... there they are.

 **Amina Abdallah**
 aminaarraf@gmail.com
 188.74.110.134

Submitted on 2011/04/19 at 7:10am

Very familiar to those who study history: the wicked evil other, represented by a small poor minority, 'threatens' white male domination. In the last century, the same sort of people warned about the eminent Judaeo-Bolshevik takeover of Germany. Today, we can simply replace the old anti-Semitic rhetoric with new conspiratorial talk of an Islamic conquest. Either way, the solutions the haters advocate are the same. Now, instead of the Protocols of the Elders of Zion, the racists brandish books by bigots like Bawer and claim that the wicked alien is a Muslim rather than a Jew. But the game is the same.

Women and Gays Threatened
 Bid To Impose Sharia Law
 17 #

 **Amina A.**
 aminaarraf@gmail.com
 188.74.64.53

Submitted on 2011/05/01 at 9:48am

THANK YOU PAULA FOR ENCOURAGING ME!

Our Girl In Damascus
 1 #



9. **James**

[Posted on June 10, 2011 at 8:40 pm](#)

While I appreciate your apology, the damage has been done. You are an admittedly biased news organization, one that I usually disagree with on a variety of issues; but I always believed in your credibility. With that in question, I have to ask myself, what other "facts" do you have that would be better classified as opinion or better yet, fiction?

[Reply](#)



o **Paula Brooks**

[Posted on June 10, 2011 at 9:01 pm](#)

Well it was not us who said she was in Syria... it was Amina who did that... to us.... and we did ask about the IP addresses... and were told, in fact, assured, by her, they were proxies to dodge the Syrian Security people.... we believed her

Now with all the subsequent facts that have developed this week we feel we were lied to.... and are feeling rather used.... and hurt.

The fact we got scammed is very embarrassing for us. Talking about it has been difficult and painful, because no one like to be made a fool. But would you rather we remained silent about what we know? We feel if we did that... we would not be doing our jobs... and would

again be letting our readers down.

The point of this apology is to say... we messed up and trusted someone we should not have trusted... and then vouched for that someone to our readers, who then went on to make our readers also think she was a real deal freedom fighter... we don't plan to hide that... in fact we feel its LGRs responsibility to our readers to be honest and forthright and let them know what really happened here...



10. [Melisa](#)

[Posted on June 11, 2011 at 12:19 am](#)

How do we trust this website again? How could research have been so shoddy that you claim you DID notice her IP was from Scotland and asked and she told you she was using proxy server, but you never checked again and just not notice it was always the same two IP addresses. Bull. You either knew and let it go or have absolutely no internet savvy, yet run a website. Which is it? We are not dumb.

[Reply](#)



o [Paula Brooks](#)

[Posted on June 11, 2011 at 3:19 am](#)

No one on this site gets paid.... I myself have a day job and 3 children....

There was no reason to doubt Amina.... she e mailed us nearly everyday... and those e mails were very convincing. At some point you have to trust people and we trusted Amina, which makes all this very personal to us.

Likewise, there was no reason to look at her log ins until there looked to be a reason to have doubts about her identity.... and once we had those doubts, we did look at our logs in a most expeditious manner. But auditing our server log is not something we would routinely do with our limited resources and time constraints.

We post up to 40 articles most days... and they are posted by up to 8 writers a day, so those logs are of considerable in length..... and if you are IT person, you know that is not a simple task to pull them up and review them... and it is not something you would do without reason.

We feel we got scammed.... and would love to find Amina so we can have... a "little chat" with her.

And when we do find her... there *will* be a reason to read this site... I can promise you all that.



11. [Jade](#)

[Posted on June 11, 2011 at 5:29 am](#)

I think it's ridiculous that people are questioning the integrity of this website over this issue and I suspect it's coming from someone who wants to discredit LGR. If an organization like Avaaz can get taken in by a story like this, anyone can. Keep your anger for Amina where it belongs, LGR were just being compassionate and trying to help and they deserve our respect.

[Reply](#)



o [Paula Brooks](#)

[Posted on June 11, 2011 at 8:05 am](#)

Yes Jade... we too suspect that a former disgruntled member of our staff is sending trolls from her facebook page in an attempt to discredit LGR....



12. [CathAnnabel](#)

[Posted on June 11, 2011 at 6:14 am](#)

If someone appears to be a dissident, with a perfectly good reason for wanting to disguise their identity, then a number of things follow. First, one is reluctant to probe too deeply if that would risk exposing them to danger. Secondly, things like using a proxy server, not being readily available at the end of a telephone line, are easy to explain. Thirdly, we do not want to be cynical when someone appears to be taking enormous risks to oppose tyranny. Obviously hindsight is a marvellous facility, and those who now berate the former believers are enjoying it to its full. There are now too many discrepancies and clear untruths to explain away, but most of these have emerged since her 'disappearance', and because of the increased media attention. We still don't know the real story, and perhaps we never will. Next time we'll all be a bit more sceptical – and I'm not at all sure that is a good thing.

[Reply](#)



13. [Mara](#)
[Posted on June 11, 2011 at 8:07 am](#)

Hi all,

I've been trying to post on Amina's blog but this post keeps getting deleted. A couple of other posters suggest I post it here as well. See below

Anonymous said...That was weird, a very good comment just disappeared, whoever wrote that last recap can you please repost it?11 June 2011 14:57 Anonymous said...That was me, and every time I post this, the post disappears!11 June 2011 14:58 Anonymous said...Can you perhaps post it again at the lezgetreal site on the post about Amina? This is direct proof Amina is watching this blog and moderating comments now. I saw that comment before it disappeared, hoax confirmed people.11 June 2011 15:00 Anonymous said...Maybe post it and then take a screen shot of it before she deletes it, it's proof that she's moderating this blog still and obviously not in a Syrian jail.

And here is the post in question ...

I feel it's important that we, the saner non-troll/sock puppets people on this forum, post the following facts now and again so they don't get lost in the all the posts.Perhaps this will be picked up by the journos who are no doubt visiting from time to time, so this whole hoax is ended once and for all.

1. Amina is not in Damascus. Most likely she is in Edinburgh. The IP addresses she has used from this city are not proxy addresses but to quote an earlier poster (anonymous 4 11 June 10.54)

"There is no point trying to blow smokescreens with technical jargon, unless you actually understand technical stuff. 'Amina' in recent 'tweets' to the people who helped her to publicise this blog only ever used two IPs – both of them in Edinburgh. Neither 188.74.110.134 nor 188.74.64.53 is an open proxy, and nor can they be used as proxy IPs. Both IPs are from the ISP Keycom.PLC and neither has been or can be used as a proxy. You can verify that quite simply, by contacting Keycom.PLC."

2. Amina's photographs are those of a London woman called Jelena Lecic. It seems they were stolen from her facebook page, even though she has her privacy settings on. Other photos on other Amina pages are also likely to be stolen. The defence of this was to avoid her identity being known to the Syrian regime is hokem. She was doing this long before Gay Girl in Damascus was started and also with online dating sites. One of which has her as living in Edinburgh (here she uses Jelena Lecic's images again)

<http://www.areyouinterested.com/singles/amina51256395397/101347744/profile.html>

3. Check the following site for more information on the search to find out who is Amina <http://lezgetreal.com/2011/06/an-apology-to-our-readers-about-amina-abdallah/Which> says in the comments " We dont have to learn it from another party... she logged into OUR sever 135 times... from 2 IP addresses in Edinburgh.... and ONLY 2 IP addresses in Edinburgh.We have logs....care to check them out for yourselves... there they are."

4. It is likely that Rania, her 'cousin' is also Amina, it is possible that at least one person on this site commenting is also Amina. Amina's identity has been confirmed by no one, no one has come forward to say they know her/have met her in the 'real' world. The gay community in Syria have never met her. Her 'girlfriend' in Canada, communicated only by email / FB/Twitter wiith her. Many Damascus based Syrian's have pointed out flaws in her descriptions of Syria or her lack of understanding of Arabic, particularly their dialect.

This was a very cruel hoax, lacking in compassion for those she befriended and before anyone says it's helped the activists cause, the official Syrian news agency is already using this story to discredit real activists trying to get news out from Syria.

[Reply](#)



o [Paula Brooks](#)
[Posted on June 11, 2011 at 8:20 am](#)

Mara... In our search for Amina.... we turned up this...

Its a Wikipedia edit log and its coming from an IP address that Amina also used to log in to our server...

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Special:Contributions/188.74.110.134>

When you read it, it is pretty obvious there is a very clear Edinburgh connection there.... and I suspect "Amina" was part of a protest of former Israeli-Arab Council to the US, Ishmael Khali, at Edinburgh University in January ... and it seems she wanted to set some facts straight about that protest.

Additionally... when Amina first came to us in February, she shared with us that she had studied and was planning to continue to study Medieval History... please note the Entry referring to Martin of Tours... who is an early dark age Saint.... and the notation made that there are "No Visigoths in Gaul in the 4th century!"....

As a history major myself... that looked like something a Medieval History Major just might say... and as many on the LGR staff found out... setting facts straight was something Amina like to do regularly on this site.... in fact, as Linda noted in her article, it was how she got asked to blog for us in the first place.

MY thought.... find a [Medieval History Major at Edinburgh](#) who also protests visits from controversial Israeli-Arabs.... and you have probably found Amina.... but that is just me talking.



14. *Mara*

[Posted on June 11, 2011 at 9:39 am](#)

Hi Paula,

interesting that you mention Medieval history as there is a person on Amina's blog who also mentioned that she did or does, most people writing on her blog believe this person is Amina. It's pretty clear that someone is monitoring it as comments keep getting deleted, not just mine and the person who also studied/studies Medieval history comes to Amina's defence every time with some very odd posts. I'm feeling that Amina/whoever is a bit of a fantasist and if this is the case, then there could be a very fragile personality behind this – one also lacking in empathy and understanding for what she has done. She is now creating another personality construct on her blog by the looks of things.

See this post here Anonymous said...No, I am not Amina, or Rania, obviously.About my writing, er, you know the difference between phonetic spelling and spelling thru as a speaker of received english, right?When I write as I *speak*, yes i make mistakes. I don't pretend to be "posh" or anything and I havebn't even been to uni cos of health issues, though I got accepted to do Medieval History. Er, not bad for someone who spent their education years in a grubby girls school in a Gulf country. If I make mistakes, forgive me.Jasmine11 June 2011 12:02

[Reply](#)



o *Paula Brooks*
[Posted on June 11, 2011 at 9:57 am](#)

she has done damage... to both Arab people out side the Arab world... and gay people in Islamic counties...



15. *Mara*

[Posted on June 11, 2011 at 9:45 am](#)

Not sure my last post went though but just to say someone on Amina's blog who people believe is Amina, posted that she studies Medieval history. See this post Anonymous said...See this – Anonymous said...No, I am not Amina, or Rania, obviously.About my writing, er, you know the difference between phonetic spelling and spelling thru as a speaker of received english, right?When I write as I *speak*, yes i make mistakes. I don't pretend to be "posh" or anything and I havebn't even been to uni cos of health issues, though I got accepted to do Medieval History. Er, not bad for someone who spent their education years in a grubby girls school in a Gulf country. If I make mistakes, forgive me.Jasmine11 June 2011 12:02

It's very obvious now that Amina is monitoring posts on her blog.

[Reply](#)



16. *Louise*

[Posted on June 11, 2011 at 10:56 am](#)

Have you tried approaching Edinburgh University? The IPs do seem to trace to their keycom service and if so, it's a breach of their computer misuse and student code of discipline

<http://www.ed.ac.uk/schools-departments/information-services/about/policies-and-regulations/computing-regulations>

The most likely avenue of complaint that I can see would be via the Academic policy officer dealing with student discipline and complaints <http://www.ed.ac.uk/schools-departments/academic-services/about/contacts>

People who fake online identities with dramatic tales of suffering, using collectives of sockpuppets to back themselves up, tend to be mentally unwell. I've seen the exact same thing done by someone who claimed to have suffered atrocities in another country and who then claimed to be dying of cancer, and she turned out to be a repeat offender. This person may need intervention from his/her university not only to stop them scamming others but so they can get professional help.

[Reply](#)



17. *Ken*

[Posted on June 11, 2011 at 11:13 am](#)

The person who created the Damascus blog has obviously been foolish, and has let it get out of control to the extent that the credibility of genuine victims of the Syrian regime could be

undermined. She should fess up and apologise.

However, this is turning into a lynch mob, especially the post from Louise above. Time to give the blogger time to sort her head out. There's no danger of anyone still mistaking her blog for reality..

[Reply](#)



- o [Bridgette P. LaVictoire](#)
[Posted on June 11, 2011 at 12:11 pm](#)

Ken,

It is quite possible that it did get out of hand. Unfortunately, if it did, she needs to come forward quickly to try and mitigate the damage that she's done to others. While no one will be mistaking the blog for reality, the lies have caught up and hiding won't make that go away.

While a lot of people won't understand what happened, a lot will be sympathetic, and it would be best if she just came clean as soon as possible.

Ken, also, Amina needs to do this in order to make things right. We know that she or whomever this person is has not disappeared from the planet, and now is too scared to come forward. Unfortunately, for all the good she tried to do, now she is doing a great deal of harm by not coming forward.



- 18. [Louise](#)
[Posted on June 11, 2011 at 3:25 pm](#)

I've watched people who create sock puppet collectives around fake personas like this cause great in-real-life hurt to others, and not just do it once, but keep on doing it, inventing new personas and causes for the psychological pay-off they get. This is not a unique case. What then happens is that genuine cases of people who need help get suspected and ignored, and valuable online support networks are undermined. It is a form of abuse of others which is done over the internet. It is not victimless. It also corrodes trust in online communities where it happens, especially when the person also works by having sockpuppets jump to their defence.

A complaint through the proper channels and procedures for dealing with this sort of abuse may not only get the person behind this the help they need, but prevent them victimising others again. It's telling that you think a suggestion of a complaint through a formal channel where someone has full rights to represent and defend themselves is a 'lynch mob'. Is that you 'Amina'? Of course, you will be reading this and won't be pleased to see anyone suggesting IRL consequences for you. What you have done is wrong and damaging and may prevent other LGBT people or Syrian dissidents from getting help when they need it. If you are tempted to do this again, for the love of goodness, don't. Get help and get counselling.

[Reply](#)



- o [Ken](#)
[Posted on June 11, 2011 at 5:30 pm](#)

Firstly, I agree 100% with Bridgette. As I said, she should fess up and apologise.

No Louise, I really am not Amina, or whatever her name is. It's a consequence of what she has done that there is no way I could prove that statement to your satisfaction without giving you far more documentary evidence of my life than would be prudent to a stranger. But especially not to you, who is arrogant enough to suggest informing the authorities of misconduct by someone who you know next to nothing about. Has she legal residency in the UK, for example? What are her conditions to remain in the UK? Why is she there, if she is? Is she at risk of deportation to an unsafe country? Are the university officials sympathetic, or will they just phone the home office?

Anyway if 'Amina' is reading this, listen to Bridget above, it's the only way you'll get these self righteous, self appointed judges to shut up. And the people you should be apologising to are the Syrian people..



- 19. [Louise](#)
[Posted on June 11, 2011 at 7:20 pm](#)

Nobody even knows if he/she is a non-UK national at all, and the university procedures and regulations are there for all to read and to decide whether they think the protections they give are robust enough or not. He/she may not even be a student after all. But the people who've been on the receiving end of this have a right to ask questions and to ask for the matter to be looked into through the normal channels for doing so, to protect themselves and their community. These things are controversial and difficult because after someone has posted moving and tragic posts under an online 'persona' there is such emotional investment involved and the natural reaction is to protect them, in case there is some truth to what they have said. But people who do this can go on to abuse again under new personas, even turning up again in the same community under a new IP. I've said my piece on this – I've posted because I've seen very similar things elsewhere and the terrible

damage they do, and as I have local knowledge I've posted the info in case those affected do want to take it up and see if they can get to the bottom of it through that channel. This may also be useful reading http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Munchausen_by_Internet

[Reply](#)



Mara

20.

[Posted on June 12, 2011 at 6:58 am](#)

Great research over the Electronic Intifada, pretty much lays this to rest as a hoax <http://electronicintifada.net/blog/ali-abunimah/new-evidence-about-amina-gay-girl-damascus-hoax>

[Reply](#)



Gray

o

[Posted on June 12, 2011 at 7:39 am](#)

Kudos to the Electronic Intifada, that's very interesting new information. MacMaster and Froelicher have some explaining to do. In light of these findings, MacMaster's statement isn't really convincing: "Whoever that person 'really' is, I have doubtless interacted with her at some point. I do not know further than that about her." Well, "Amina" used their former home address and the connections to Edinburgh indeed are VERY "unusual" coincidences. And the fact that "gay girl in Damascus" used a photograph obviously shot by MacMaster/ Froehlich, but not published in that uncropped form, shows that the contact must have been more close than described in that statement.

Imho a very promising new angle of the story, and I guess that may be the clue to the mystery surrounding the blogger.



Gray

o

[Posted on June 12, 2011 at 8:31 pm](#)

"I guess that may be the clue to the mystery surrounding the blogger."

Aparently a good guess:

<http://damascusgaygirl.blogspot.com/2011/06/apology-to-readers.html>



Gray

21.

[Posted on June 12, 2011 at 7:08 am](#)

Sry, folks, I know I'm too curious and it's not my business at all, but I'm wondering about the Melanie Nathan angle of the story. You wrote "the way this story has blown up has given a disgruntled former writer of this site an ability to attack us in the international press." Uh, really? I checked with Google News and the only mention I could find was a comment by Nathan on the BBC website. She posted there "Amina and her lies was the direct cause of Melanie Nathan giving up her interest in LezGetReal; I realized this was BS and my Partners in LGR stood behind Amina calling me a bigot!" If that's true, it's rather farfetched to say "The specifics don't matter". In that context, of course they do.

Now, ok, this may necessite an anwer by Lezgetreal, even though "the press" doesn't seem to be very interested in your quarrel. But obviously Paula Brooks is smart, knowledgeable and more than qualified enough to present her/your side of the story, in a written response (which is always better than an interview that can get off track). So, isn't it an exaggeration to effectively accuse Nathan of exploiting the situation? At least for the casual reader, without any inside knowledge, this doesn't look as if there's an all out attack on your website and the writers.

And is it a good idea to call the stances of an obviously very determined and merited member of the LGBT community "fanaticism"? I looked into the stories Nathan has written and don't see anything really radical there. It seems you folks had an argument about editorial responsibility and there have been hurt feelings on both sides, but making overbroad accusations in public doesn't make that situation any better. In these times were virtually all liberal accomplishments of the last decades are under right wing attack, progressives and LGBTs need to stand together to fight back. It's not helpful at all in this situation to let catfights divert the attention from the common causes.

I know this probably sounds naive, but can't y'all get along? You folks here do a good job fighting for LGBT and liberal issues, and Melanie Nathan seems to be a real fighter for the same issues, too. I hope you'll manage to overcome your differences. Remember, "united we stand, divided we fall". But, ok, as I said at the start, I know it's really not my business, so excuse me pls for weighing in. Peace.

[Reply](#)



Gray

o

[Posted on June 12, 2011 at 7:53 am](#)

Oops, sry, I confused this, Nathan didn't leave a comment at the BBC website but at this blog:

<http://www.towleroad.com/2011/06/syrianabduction.html>

My fault, sry.



22. *Ken*

[Posted on June 12, 2011 at 7:43 am](#)

According to this research, it appears my cautionary protectiveness was misplaced:

<http://electronicintifada.net/blog/ali-abunimah/new-evidence-about-amina-gay-girl-damascus-hoax>

And here's a picture of the lovely couple in Edinburgh:

<https://picasaweb.google.com/bfroelicher/FirstDaysInEdinburgh#5515348250348481538>

Apologies if I was a bit sharp Louise, I still think an element of caution was valid...

[Reply](#)



23. *Ken*

[Posted on June 12, 2011 at 8:17 am](#)

Check this out: <http://electronicintifada.net/blog/ali-abunimah/new-evidence-about-amina-gay-girl-damascus-hoax>

It seems 'Amina' is this lovely Atlanta couple, currently residing in

Edinburgh: <https://picasaweb.google.com/bfroelicher/FirstDaysInEdinburgh#5515348250348481538>

You were right Louise, they look quite capable of dealing with University officials. Still think a bit of caution was appropriate. Sorry If I was a bit sharp..

[Reply](#)



24. *Louise*

[Posted on June 12, 2011 at 8:46 am](#)

No worries, Ken! Very sorry for being hasty to you. My own experience and reading have left me jaded since it turns out people who do this sort of thing have usually never been in any danger at all and are nothing like their online personas. Nice work by the electronic intifada.

I do think there's something to the munchausen-by-internet angle to this. The condition was first described with people pretending to be seriously ill and undermining supportive communities, but it can be done by inventing a political persona too. I saw someone do both, first claiming to be a victim of war crimes (imagine how protective we all felt!) and then claiming a fatal illness and turning out to be a hoaxer all along. I think maybe looking for those sort of signs (the sockpuppeting, the fake IDs the escalating drama) can help in detecting such things. But these hoaxes can be very elaborate and very hard to detect. It's amazing the time energy, effort and research people put into them.

[Reply](#)



25. *CathAnnabel*

[Posted on June 12, 2011 at 3:16 pm](#)

<http://damascugaygirl.blogspot.com/>

Tom McMaster has now acknowledged authorship of all posts on the website. Apparently he doesn't believe he's done any harm. Some of us may beg to differ.

[Reply](#)



o *Bridgette P. LaVictoire*

[Posted on June 12, 2011 at 3:26 pm](#)

Thank you for informing us of this.



26. *Octarin*

[Posted on June 12, 2011 at 4:31 pm](#)

I have been closely following the story of "Amina", since I am one of the GV translators for my language, and the one who was up to today responsible for the news and updates for this -willingly might I add-. I just read this person's Tom McMaster's response in his/her blog and all I can say is that I am deeply disgusted by this. I can see several points where this is doing harm, including but not limited to the backfire on the gay community, and the credibility of the Syrian revolt. The same time as this fake story has been running, Hamza's mangled body still lies warm in Syrian

minds, but the world ha been made to focus on a gay butterfly’s fake muslim ID. Forgive me for being harsh. This is going to harm the entire Syrian revolt big time, internationally. This person should be, somehow, made to feel the immense harm he/she has caused. Too bad there is little to no international internet law. I think that at this stage, the less attention is paid to this, the better for the real war crimes in Syria.

[Reply](#)



27. *FR*

[Posted on June 12, 2011 at 5:39 pm](#)

I’ve also been following this story, drawn in by the initial headlines of the blogger’s “kidnapping”. Now that it is all out, I see no apologetic feeling between the lines of Tom’s “apology”. There is so much premeditation going on here, so many decisions to deceive. Tom MacMaster’s online relationship with Sandra Bagaria – she said in an interview that they had planned to take a vacation together this month! I wonder what else he has done at the Lesbian dating sites he seems to hang out at with his stolen photos. (he was very quick to hide his own personal picasa photos once that link got out). Also, not to mention how he has deceived this website. I have never visited Lez Get Real before but was very impressed with this post. It’s reprehensible that he would use honest people in this way, even to the point of pretending he does not know how to set up a blog, so that you would help him do it. I hope the media will tar and feather him. He deserves it.

[Reply](#)



o *Ana*

[Posted on June 12, 2011 at 7:55 pm](#)

I wouldn’t be surprised if it was either some sex fantasy or a plot to extort money. It would be pretty easy to convince some naive man or woman into giving you money to “get the beautiful girl out of harms way.” Some of the unanswered questions that have not been answered may reveal more. There are hints that this is not the only story & identity. While my attention will be turning towards helping actual Syrians & Gay Rights movements, I’ll definitely be keeping an eye on what happens to Tom & Britta.

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