Arab Women's Changing Identities, Activisms and Resistances in a Changing Region

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Abstract

The wave of uprisings which swept the Arab world in 2011 did not just instigate a "political awakening" that has shaken the power structures in a number of Arab countries and resulted in dictators fleeing their countries, resigning from office, or facing brutal death. Rather, it also instigated a "social awakening" that has shaken Arab societies' commonly held assumptions about gender roles and women's ability to challenge them. This was evident in the many heroic examples and iconic images of Arab women's multiple activisms and resistances, in both the political and social spheres, which stunned the world and earned its respect and recognition, as evident in the selection of Tawakul Karman, as the first Arab Nobel Prize winner ever, in what has been seen by many as a node to the "Arab Spring" movements, in general, and to Arab women's roles in them, in particular.

Keywords

Libya, politics, cyberactivism, democracy, public sphere, gender, journalism, Arab Spring, Bahrain, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, activism, Muslim women, Egypt

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Therefore, three years after the eruption of this massive wave of revolt, it is mandatory to revisit Arab women's complex realities and to reexamine their multiple roles, challenges, and opportunities in the realm of socio-political activism, with a special focus on their utilization of various mediated modes of communication and self-expression to affect change in their shifting societies, and to analyze how and why they are using them and with what outcomes. This is what this special issue of CyberOrient devoted to "Arab Women" aims to achieve, through capturing the complexity of the shifting political, social and communication landscapes in the Arab world three years after the eruption of the "Arab Awakening" movements, with a special focus on how and why they are affecting, as well as being affected by, Arab women's multiple roles, activisms and resistances, in both the private and public spheres, as well as in the political and social domains.

In doing so, it casts a wide net which stretches geographically across different countries in the region, including Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, Libya, Saudi Arabia and Bahrain, while stretching temporally to cover different time periods: before, during and after the eruption of the "Arab Spring" revolts in 2011.

It also casts an equally wide net thematically, through covering a wide array of topics, including: Egyptian Islamist women's deployment of multiple forms of online and offline modes of expression to enact socio-political change; Libyan women journalists' changing roles, both during, and after, Gaddafi's rule; Bahraini women's deployment of social media tools to enact political change and social reform in their conservative, Gulf country; Saudi Arabian women bloggers' usage of their blogs as tools to express and negotiate their identities, thus contributing to the creation of a new form of indigenous Islamic feminism; Moroccan women's reliance on mediated representations and artistic forms of expression, such as videos, to redefine socio-political boundaries and enact resistance in the context of the February 20th movement; and Jordanian women's reliance on multiple platforms of offline communication to protest controversial legal codes, such as "Article 308," which came to be infamously known as the "Rape Law."

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Most importantly, it tackles all of these complex issues through a number of insightful contributions by a highly qualified and impressively diverse pool of experts, who represent both "indigenous voices" from within the Arab region and the "outsiders' gaze" from Western contributors, while combining the perspectives of academics, activists and journalists; in addition to both women and men's outlooks on the issues at hand.

Therefore, this special issue hopes to provide the reader with an equally diverse, deep and thorough analysis of the complex, intertwined and shifting realities of Arab women's multiple struggles and their deployment of mediated modes of self-expression in their quest for political justice and social equity, whether online or offline; whether individually, as independent actors, or collectively, as members of organized movements; whether they embrace secular or Islamist ideologies; and whether they are mainstream or citizen journalists.

By doing so, it hopes to unpack some of the complexities of these phenomena, while complicating some of the simplistic assumptions about them simultaneously, through painting a rich picture that captures the changing and multi-faceted realities of Arab women's identities, roles, and struggles in an equally, and rapidly, changing region, and their numerous impacts on redefining not only the notions of feminism(s), socio-political activism(s) and resistance(s), but also civic engagement, citizen journalism and cyberactivism.

We hope that our readers will find this special issue not only intellectually stimulating, thought provoking and eye-opening, but also enjoyable to read!

References

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