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## The Arab Popular Uprisings from a Gender Perspective

As uprisings have engulfed their region, Arab women have often lost out. They have repeatedly been marginalized or have directly experienced a backlash during the transitional period and most of the developments in the region. Indeed, women have generally been excluded from the decision-making process; in the few places where they were adequately represented, they have watched members of Islamist parties set the tone, often attacking the gender equality envisioned by the UN's conventions on human rights. Women have also been the targets of systematic violence from both the Arab states and from fundamentalists, and of reactionary religious propaganda and measures that threaten to eliminate the gains they have made over recent decades.

However, as this paper will argue, this kind of backlash is hardly new. In fact, as many other scholars have shown, throughout history this pattern has been a feature of political upheavals: women have often defied social norms by participating in public events, only to be pushed back into their former traditional roles by conservative backlash. Nevertheless, such backlash often does not hinder the development of a new gender consciousness, one that seeks to break away from traditional norms and roles. This also holds true for the developments that are taking place in the Arab Middle East & North Africa region (MENA).

In order to clarify this argument, the paper will first discuss the pattern of women's political participation that was then followed by their exclusion in the region, offering concrete examples. It will then highlight the argument that this backlash may not be surprising after all. Next, it will offer specific examples of activist actions that show that, despite the conservative backlash, the flux now taking place in the region is indeed unsettling gender perceptions and roles. Whether these changes are sustainable remains a matter of speculation.

### 1. Participation Followed by Exclusion

In the introduction to her edited volume *The Unfinished Revolution*, Minkey Worden argues that while the Arab Spring has raised high hopes, it is already clear that these »political revolutions alone will not be enough to secure rights for women, and might even lead to the weakening of key rights protections«.<sup>1</sup> High hopes were raised because women participated visibly in the uprisings and revolts that swept several coun-

<sup>1</sup> Minky Worden, *The Unfinished Revolution: Voices from the Global Fight for Women's Rights*, New York 2012, p. 1.

tries in the Arab MENA region. But, what is equally visible is that these revolutions cannot secure rights for women, given the pattern of repeated exclusion that has occurred since the original uprisings.

### 1. 1 Forms of Participation

Women were an integral and active part of the political developments in the region. Just like their male counterparts, they demanded change in the political system and with it sought a future with real prospects and economic opportunities. Lack of economic opportunities, the political stagnation caused by patronage systems, corruption, and the lack of good governance all were factors that contributed to their demand for change. Both women and men chanted slogans that included the words freedom, dignity, social justice, and democracy as they participated in the revolts in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Yemen, Bahrain and Syria (during its peaceful phase). Just like their male partners, women utilized modern media and technology as tools in their activism. Like Asma Mahfouz in Egypt, they used the Internet to mobilize for protests; like Arwa Othman in Yemen, they documented the youth uprising through photos; and like Lina Ben Mhenni in Tunisia, they reported on the revolution at a time when media coverage was limited.

At this stage, however, women's active participation was characterized with two features. First, the type of women's participation during this phase was often shaped by the country's local context. The different contexts of Tunisia and Yemen illustrate this point.

In Tunisia, a country with a secular tradition, progressive family law, and a high literacy rate, women were visible from the very start of the Jasmine revolution in December 2010. They also participated actively in planning it and in demonstrating. Amel Grami, a Tunisian professor on Gender and Islamic Studies and a leading activist for women's rights, explained:<sup>2</sup>

»Women mobilized for protests via Facebook; were integral participants in action planning meetings at the universities, labour unions, and political parties; coordinated between organizations; documented the revolution via pictures and videos; and were part of the people's committees that protected Tunisian neighbourhoods [when law and order collapsed]; they hid the wounded from the pursuit of police and gave food to the army«.

By contrast, in Yemen, women's participation has been shaped by the conservative nature of society. Yemen is considered the least developed country in the Arab MENA region, and in the Global Gender Gap Index (GGGI) it continues to occupy the last place in the region as well as in the overall global ranking of 135 countries.<sup>3</sup> Despite the vibrant civil society, and activism, in Yemen, women participating in the public sphere have always faced a cultural stigma. In fact, Nadia Al-Sakaf, the female editor-in-chief of the English-

2 Amel Grami, email interview, October 6, 2012.

3 Ricardo Hausmann / Laura D. Tyson / Saadia Zahidi, »The Global Gender Gap Report 2012«, Geneva 2012, p. 26.

language newspaper *Yemen Times* and a member of the Board of Presidency of the National Dialogue Conference, recounted that »immediately before the start of Yemen's chapter of the Arab Spring, it was unheard of for women—especially those coming from conservative backgrounds—to be photographed by strangers, let alone take to the streets in protest«.<sup>4</sup>

It took a while before women's participation became possible and even fashionable. One female protestor whom this author met in Sana'a in February of 2011 explained that »we started with two women« at the sit-in in Taghir Square, »and now we are thousands«.<sup>5</sup> The participation of well-known activists, including Tawakul Karman, Arwa Othman, Wameth Shakir, and Shatha Al-Harazi, was instrumental in challenging the rigidly conservative norms regarding women participating in public protests.

Second, when women did participate during the early phase of the revolts, they did so without any gender-specific agenda. Each country's context shaped the type of dissatisfaction that both male and female protestors were expressing during this early stage. For example, in Egypt and Tunisia, two countries with a history of state formation, bureaucratic development, and a solid national identity, the protestors demanded social justice and an end to the brutal police state regime. In Bahrain, on the other hand, the protestors were fed up with the Sunni Bin Khalifa dynasty because it continued to exclude the Shiite majority, both politically and economically. In Libya and Yemen, women and men were initially united in their desire to see their despots toppled, though they were divided along regional, tribal, and sectarian lines in course of time. Regardless of the context, at this stage female protestors were not concerned with gender-specific demands. Those demands emerged later on, as a pattern of exclusion repeated itself.

### 1. 2 Forms of Exclusion

Women's participation in the Arab Spring was followed by a backlash that sought to intimidate them and then exclude and shun them from the public sphere. This review will restrict the discussion to the countries that witnessed a change of leadership at the top of their political structures. The backlash took different forms during three phases.

#### 1.2.1. Phase One

During this phase, specifically during the uprising, acts of sexual violence targeted women. This took several forms. Libya witnessed the worst forms of sexual violence during its brief civil war. Several human rights organizations have asserted that rape was used as a weapon of war to humiliate and break the morale of opposition fighters. There were also reports of Viagra being distributed among troops loyal to the former dictator

4 Nadia Al-Sakkaf, »Yemen's Women and the Quest for Change: Political Participation after the Arab Revolution« in: *Perspective Report*, Berlin October 2012, p. 1.

5 Author's visit, Sana'a, February 22, 2011.

Qaddafi.<sup>6</sup> The problem was aggravated by the stigma connected with rape. The male relatives of women who had been raped took various actions. Some committed suicide; others killed the women who had been raped; still others, acting in fear, killed women family members to prevent them being raped when Qaddafi's troops advanced to their areas.<sup>7</sup>

Though on a different scale, sexual violence was also used in Tunisia and Egypt, where members of the security apparatus systematically harassed, threatened, and targeted women, using sexual violence to intimidate them, according both to Fédération internationale des ligues des droits de l'Homme and to Iqbal Gharbi, a Tunisian Professor who followed these events closely.<sup>8</sup>

Yemen did not witness this type of sexual violence, but the cultural norms that condemn the mixing of sexes caused problems for women who wanted to participate. Shatha Al-Harazi, a young woman activist who took part in the protests and is a member of the National Dialogue Conference, described the situation: »Women participating in the protests were harassed by their own families, who tried to prevent them from leaving home. They feared for their safety or were reacting to rumours spread by supporters of [former Yemeni president] Saleh about the ›inappropriate mixing‹ between young men and women in the sit-in squares«.<sup>9</sup> Saleh openly exploited the social norms in a speech on April 15, 2011. He said, »Islam forbids men and women mixing in public places«, and called on women to »return home«.<sup>10</sup> His comments led Islamists to crack down on the sit-in camps and to impose strict segregation between the sexes.

### 1.2.2 Phase Two

This phase occurred after the fall of the incumbent presidents and during the transitional period that led to elections. At this stage, women were often excluded from the decision making process; here Tunisia was the exception. This marginalization reflected a wider conservative social context. Sexual violence and harassment were also part of the pattern.

In Libya, women were often token representatives; this followed a pattern that was also common during the Ghadafi regime: women held »soft« positions related to women and social affairs. Among the 14 members of the National Transitional Council (NTC), established on February 27, 2011, one woman was in charge of legal affairs and women.

6 N. N., »Evidence emerging of use of rape as tool of war in Libya – ICC prosecutor« in: *UN News Centre*, June 8, 2011, <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=38664&Cr=libya&Cr1> (accessed Oct. 30, 2012).

7 N. N., »Women and the Arab Spring: Taking their place?« in: *FIDH Fédération internationale des ligues des droits de l'Homme*, March 2012, <http://www.fidh.org/Women-and-the-Arab-Spring-The> (accessed Oct. 31, 2012), pp. 27–28.

8 N. N., »Women and the Arab Spring: Taking their place?«, op. cit. (FN 7), p. 18; Iqbal Gharbi, email interview, October 14, 2012.

9 Shatha Al-Harazi, email interview, October 8, 2012.

10 President Ali Abdullah Saleh, »Speech« in: *Yemen Satellite Channel*, April 15, 2011, YouTube, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qZNMYn5l0Y8> (accessed Sept. 9, 2013).

In the first cabinet that the NTC announced in November of 2011, out of 28 members two women held portfolios: for health and social affairs. The number of women representatives remained unchanged in the 33-member cabinet created after the election. This time they again held two portfolios: those for social affairs and tourism.<sup>11</sup>

While nominal representation is common within the Arab MENA context, in Libya it occurred against the backdrop of deep-rooted patriarchal traditions, a tribal culture, and conservative social norms. This was combined with Islamist conservatism, which has been a common feature of most of the new political elites. These factors together played a role in producing laws that discriminate against women in the post Qaddafi era. In 2013, for example, Libya's Supreme Court effectively lifted some of the existing restrictions on polygamy. Polygamy had been legal in Libya under Qaddafi, but the law required a man to obtain the consent of any current wife or wives before marrying a second or third one. However, on February 5, 2013, the Constitutional Chamber of the Supreme Court ruled that this law contradicted Libya's Constitutional Declaration because it »explicitly states that Islamic law is the principal source of legislation«. It added that the marriage law »restricted polygamy with a set of conditions that make polygamy often impossible, thereby implicitly prohibiting it. As such, it is in violation of the constitution«.<sup>12</sup> A second example is the effective prohibition against Libyan women marrying foreigners. In fact, Human Rights Watch reported that in April of 2013, the Ministry of Social Affairs stopped issuing marriage licenses for Libyan women marrying foreigners after Libya's grand mufti called on the government to ban the practice.<sup>13</sup>

Egypt offers the worst example of institutional exclusion among the countries that experienced the Arab Spring. Douaa Hussein, an Egyptian expert on gender issues, explained this weak representation by pointing to the conservative nature of members of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) and their alliance with the Muslim Brotherhood after the fall of Mubarak. The alliance affected the composition of all the committees created during this period.<sup>14</sup> For instance, the Constitutional Review Committee did not have a single woman among its members. In fact, most of its members were also members of the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) or figures known to be sympathetic to MB ideology. Within this context, the SCAF decided to abolish the quota of 10 percent women in parliament that was introduced during the Mubarak era. The result was immediate: after the parliamentary elections at the end of 2011, women had only 2 percent of seats in the new parliament.<sup>15</sup>

11 N. N., »A Revolution for All« in: *Human Rights Watch*, May 27, 2013, p. 14–15, [http://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/libya0513\\_brochure\\_LOWRES\\_0.pdf](http://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/libya0513_brochure_LOWRES_0.pdf) (accessed Sept. 9, 2013); N. N., »Women and the Arab Spring: Taking their place?«, op. cit. (FN 7), pp. 27–29.

12 Quoted in N. N. »A Revolution for All«, op. cit. (FN 11), p. 30.

13 N. N. »A Revolution for All«, op. cit. (FN 11), p. 31.

14 Douaa Hussein, email interview, October 12, 2012.

15 N. N., »Women and the Arab Spring: Taking their place?«, op. cit. (FN 7), pp. 19/20; N. N., »Statement by the National Front of Egyptian Women on the Composition of the Constituent Assembly« in: *Al Ahali Newspaper* (in Arabic), September 11, 2012, <http://www.masress.com/alahaly/16197> (accessed Nov. 1, 2012); Mervat Hatem, »Gender and revolution in Egypt« in: *Middle East Report*, N. 261 (Winter 2011).

In contrast, Tunisia stands as the exception in women's representation. Adequate representation, however, hardly meant actual influence in seeking gender justice; in fact, just the opposite occurred. The reform of the election law adopted by the high commission on April 11, 2011, required parity on electoral lists. This was the first reform of this kind in the region and beyond. During the October 2011 elections, however, the vast majority of parties put men at the top of the lists; as a result, the assembly responsible for drawing up the new constitution did not have an equal representation of men and women. Women won 59 of the 217 seats (27 %). Of these women, 39 belonged to the Islamist Ennahda party, which won 89 of the overall seats, around 41 %.<sup>16</sup> The conservative Islamist ideology held by the Ennahda women parliamentarians was strongly felt as this paper will illustrate later.

In Yemen, women's representation was mixed. It was shaped by the fragile political context and the international fear that the state would collapse. The possible regional and international repercussions of the Yemeni crisis led international actors – i. e., the Gulf Cooperation Council and the United States – to step in to reduce the risk of a full-scale state collapse. Given their concerns about counter-terrorism, these countries designed a policy they hoped would stabilize and legitimize an ally willing to cooperate with their security priorities.<sup>17</sup> This policy was again evident in the way the Gulf Initiative of May 2011 was formulated. It sought to stabilize the situation by keeping the political order intact and negotiated a compromise with the very military and tribal elites that brought the country to collapse. Not surprisingly, women, considered politically insignificant, were not involved at all during the negotiation that led to the declaration of the Gulf Initiative, which, however, did provide a roadmap out of the crisis.

Still, once the agreement was reached, the involvement of the United Nations and international actors, such as the EU, Britain (involved independently outside the framework of EU) and the United States, guaranteed that women could participate in the bodies established to oversee the transitional period. Pressure from Yemeni women's activists was instrumental in achieving this goal. Amal Albasha, Director of the Sisters Arab Forum for Human Rights and later the official spokeswoman of the National Dialogue's Technical Committee, recounted that 35 women's activists organized to meet with Jamal Benomar, United Nations Special Adviser on Yemen. Initially, his assistant declined a meeting request. Amal Albasha, who was conducting the communication, threatened to raise a complaint to the United Nations about their exclusion from the process, demanding that the UN respects its women's rights commitments. Benomar met with them and promised their inclusion.<sup>18</sup> Hence, women made up 27 percent of the

16 N. N., »Women and the Arab Spring: Taking their place?«, op. cit. (FN 7), p. 28; N. N., »Final Report on the Tunisian National Constituent Assembly elections« in: *National Democratic Institute*, October 23, 2011, p. 17, [http://www.ndi.org/files/tunisia-final-election-report-021712\\_v2.pdf](http://www.ndi.org/files/tunisia-final-election-report-021712_v2.pdf) (accessed Sept. 10, 2013).

17 Ginny Hill / Peter Salisbury / Léonie Northedge / Jane Kinninmont, »Yemen: Corruption, Capital flight and Global Drivers of Conflict« in: *A Chatham House Report*, London, September 2013, p. 3.

18 Amal Albasha, interview by author, Sana'a, November 11, 2013.

Technical Committee, which is tasked with preparing a national dialogue conference, and they are 30 percent of the members of the national dialogue conference.

Before concluding, it should be mentioned that during this second phase, both the state and Islamist groups perpetrated acts of systematic violence and intimidation that targeted women, and they faced no legal or social consequences. Two examples will illuminate this point.

In Egypt, on March 8, 2011, women gathered in Tahrir Square to mark International Women's Day. They were attacked and harassed by a male group of counter-protestors. A day later, the harassment became more systematic when the army stormed the square and arrested the protestors; 18 women were detained, and the army forced seven of them to undergo »virginity tests«. In March 2012, a military court acquitted the only military officer on trial for this sexual assault.<sup>19</sup> The security forces, and various thugs, repeatedly engaged in systematic sexual violence during the military transitional period and the short term of former President Morsi. It did not really make a difference whether the incumbent was a military council or a member of an Islamist party. The methods of intimidation remained the same.

In Tunisia, Islamist Salafi groups—emboldened by the quick collapse of law and order and then the rise of Islamist parties in the country—started to target women teachers and students in universities and tried to impose religious dress on unveiled students and teachers, sometimes using violence and intimidation to achieve their purpose. A famous case of a well-known woman professor at Zeituna University illustrates how the failure to address such intimidation left women vulnerable. Using an alias, she explained:

»To my shock after the revolution, I came to campus to give my class lectures and was confronted by students and professors who demanded that I veil myself on campus. I refused to submit to their request. As a result, they banned me from teaching unless I wore the veil. It was a battle every day as I walked on the campus. Unfortunately, due to the ridicule and discrimination I have suffered on this issue, I have now begun to wear the veil as I teach my classes so I can keep my job and continue to educate my students«.<sup>20</sup>

### 1.2.3 Phase Three

This phase saw the Islamist parties come to political power in Tunisia and Egypt; with it came a backlash of another sort, a dogmatic one that insists on the inherent inequality between woman and man. Despite the differences between the Islamist political parties that came to power in Tunisia and Egypt, what they share is a conservative religious perspective towards women. Islamist movements, in their two influential versions, the Muslim Brotherhood and Salafism, have a principled position towards women. They

19 N. N., »Women and the Arab Spring: Taking their place?«, op. cit. (FN 7), p. 17; N. N., »World Report 2013« in: *Human Rights Watch*, New York 2013, p. 531.

20 Quoted in N. N., »Women and the Arab Spring«, op. cit. (FN 7), Appendix D, *Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate*, Washington, DC, November 2, 2011, Kindle issue.

differ in the limits they want to see imposed on women's role in society, but they share the conviction that women should be at home. They both believe in a biological distinction between man and woman, which, in their view, should be reflected in differences in rights.<sup>21</sup>

Hassan Al Banna, the founder of the Islamist Muslim Brotherhood, articulated this view: »The distinction between man and woman in rights comes from their natural differences, which are unavoidable (inevitable), and in accordance with the difference in the task each is conducting, and for the protection of the rights given to each...«.<sup>22</sup> According to this view, women are equal to men in dignity but not in rights, and the protection of women requires men's guardianship. Moreover, the Salafi movement insists that because the woman's role is to be at home, she should not be allowed to work or to be politically active. On the other hand, while the Muslim Brothers subscribe to the same demand that women tend to their »natural« role as mothers, they accept their economic and political participation within certain limits. Both insist, however, that men's authority over women, in both family and society, remains unchallenged.<sup>23</sup>

These ideological features are reflected in the demands and measures advocated by Islamist parliamentarians and policy makers in Tunisia and Egypt. In Tunisia, where the majority of women in the Constituent Assembly were members of the Islamist Ennahda party, their world view had an effect on the promulgation of the constitution and clashed with organizations advocating for women's rights and human rights. Amel Grami explained:<sup>24</sup>

»Given that the majority of women members were from the Ennahda party and have no experience either in human rights activism or with the women's struggle [...] most of them followed the demands and orders of the party: Ennahda women supported substituting ›complementary roles‹ for ›equality between man and woman‹; they opposed naming international human rights conventions as references for the constitution, and insisted on criminalizing offenses against the ›sanctities‹ [...]. [Over time it became clear] that their motivation was revenge for the [secular] eras of Bourqiba and Bin Ali.«.

The third draft of the Tunisian constitution, published in April 2013, did not refer to international human rights conventions; instead, in Article 5, it considered the state to be the patron of religion and the protector of sanctities. Accordingly, religion, Koran, and Islamic figures are all issues the state should protect. It also omitted the word »equal« in the formulation of Article 11 on women and men: »women and men shall be partners in the construction of the society and the state«. However, the outcry that followed the

21 For concrete examples on the world views of the two Islamist groups towards women in Yemen, Syria and Kuwait, see Elham Manea, *The Arab State and Women's Rights: the Trap of Authoritarian Governance*, London 2011.

22 Hasan Al Banna, »The Muslim Woman Tract«, in Arabic, n. d.

23 Elham Manea, *Ich will nicht mehr schweigen: der Islam, der Westen und die Menschenrechte*, Freiburg 2009, pp. 162–164.

24 Amal Grami, email interview, October 6, 2012.

publication of Article 28 in the first draft of the constitution made Ennahda compromise on mentioning the »complementary roles« of men and women in the constitution.

In Egypt, Islamist parliamentarians belonging to the Muslim Brotherhood and Salafi parties (which together secured 75 % of the seats) tried unsuccessfully to reverse some protections for women. They tried to lower the age of marriage, set by law at 18, to the »age of puberty«; to abolish a law that bans female genital mutilation; and to reinstate old marriage and divorce laws that had been gradually scrapped during the previous decade.<sup>25</sup> They did succeed, however, in shaping the constitution of 2012 to correspond to their world view.<sup>26</sup> As in Tunisia, the new constitution failed to state that international law took precedence over national law. Again, this raised concerns about Egypt's commitment to the human rights treaties to which it is a state party. In addition, the constitution failed to list clear grounds that prohibit discrimination; these include sex, religion, and origin. Instead, it simply stated in Article 33 that citizens »are equal in public rights and duties and they shall not be discriminated against«, failing to mirror the non-exhaustive formulation contained in the international covenants.<sup>27</sup>

Finally, the failure to explicitly prohibit discrimination on the grounds of gender was compounded by the effects of Article 219, which defines the principles of Shari'a law. According to Article 2, Shari'a is defined as the »fundamental rules of jurisprudence«.<sup>28</sup> The formulation of article 219, which defines Shari'a in terms of rules and not of principles, was bound to impact the rights of women, especially as these rules often discriminate against women in many areas, including marriage, divorce, and family life.

While articles in a constitution may be theoretical by their very nature, the ruling Freedom and Justice Party and its Muslim Brotherhood movement were hardly theoretical in their position towards women's rights when its representatives attended the 57<sup>th</sup> session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women in New York between 4 and 15 March 2013. The session succeeded in producing a non-binding UN document entitled »On the elimination and prevention of all forms of violence against women and girls«. On March 13, the Muslim Brothers sharply criticised the document in a statement, saying it was »deceitful« and that it clashed with Islamic principles and undermined family values. Specifically, they complained about: substituting male guardianship with partnership within the family; full equality in marriage law, prohibi-

25 Iman Bibars, »The Middle East: Fighting for Women's Rights« in: *Reuters*, June 21, 2013, <http://www.trust.org/item/20130621101103-68ft5/> (accessed Sept. 11, 2013);

Safaa Abdoun, »Factbox: Women's Rights in Egypt«, *Reuters*, November 9, 2012, <http://www.trust.org/item/?map=factbox-womens-rights-in-egypt> (accessed Sept. 11, 2013).

26 Out of the 100 members in the Constituent Assembly, which was assigned the task of drafting a new constitution, seven were women; five of them were members of Islamist parties and have expressed views at odds with gender justice and equality; see N. N., »Women and the Arab Spring: Taking their place?«, op. cit. (FN 7), 19–20; N. N., »Statement by the National Front of Egyptian Women on the Composition of the Constituent Assembly«, op. cit. (FN 15).

27 N. N., »Egypt's New Constitution limits Fundamental Freedoms and ignores the Rights of Women« in: *Amnesty International*, Press Release, November 30, 2012, <http://www.amnesty.org/en/for-media/press-releases/egypt-s-new-constitution-limits-fundamental-freedoms-and-ignores-rights-wom> (accessed Sept. 11, 2013).

28 Ibid.

tion of polygamy; acceptance of a Muslim woman's marriage to a non-Muslim; equality between the sexes in inheritance; penalizing rape within marriage, and women's sexual freedom and reproductive rights.<sup>29</sup>

## 2. Attitudes, Norms, and Mobilization in Flux

Thus far, this paper has shown how the optimism about women's participation, which was growing during the early phase of the Arab Spring, was replaced with gloomy apprehension and serious worries, especially as the backlash sought to systematically intimidate and exclude women. Yet this exclusion is neither surprising nor new. In fact, it is part of a historical pattern long observed within the Arab region. Women have often participated in revolutions and resistance movements and have defied traditional norms and structures. Yet when these periods of extraordinary events end, their gains, in terms of both space and independence, fade quickly. Examples abound; they include the 1919 Revolution in Egypt, the Syrian Independence Movement of the 1930s and 1940s, the Algerian War of Independence (1954–1962), the Palestinian Intifada (1987–1991), and the short Kuwaiti struggle for independence against the Iraqi occupation (1990–1991).<sup>30</sup>

Globally, on the other hand, scholars in gender studies have observed mixed outcomes among the effects and after-effects of women mobilizing into new roles during periods of war, revolution, and political upheaval. In fact, Juliá and Ridha point out that temporary reversal of gender roles during wars have led to role transformations in some countries. For example, the status of women in France and Britain progressed more during the years of World War I than during several decades of peace. The same can be said about women during the Civil War in the United States, which created a »revolution of woman herself« and provided a »springboard from which women leaped beyond the circumscribed women's sphere into arenas heretofore reserved to men«. This experience was enhanced during World War I; women »described their wartime activities as personally liberating«.<sup>31</sup> However, Juliá and Ridha make another point. In some cases, war can open up new areas to women, as they take on the work and decision-making responsibilities of the now-absent men, and these changes later become accepted and integrated into the societies. This has happened recently in Eritrea and the Tigray region.

- 29 N. N. »Statement of the Muslim Brothers on the Document of the UN Women's Centre 13 March 2013« in: *Ikhwanonline* (in Arabic), March 13, 2013, <http://www.ikhwanonline.com/Article.aspx?ArtID=141984&SecID=212> (accessed Sept. 11, 2013).
- 30 Mervat Hatem, »Gender and revolution in Egypt« in: *Middle East Report*, N. 261 (Winter 2011); Elham Manea, *The Arab State and Women's Rights*, op. cit; Mervat F Hatem, »The Pitfalls of the Nationalist Discourses on Citizenship in Egypt« in: Suad Joseph (ed.), *Gender and Citizenship in the Middle East*, Syracuse 2000; Nikki R. Keddie, *Women in the Middle East: Past and Present*, Princeton 2006; Miriam Cooke / Angela Woollacott (eds.), *Gendering War Talk*, Princeton 1993.
- 31 Maria Juliá / Hadi Ridha, »Women and War: the Role Kuwaiti Women Played during the Iraqi Occupation« in: *Journal of International Development*, Volume 13, Nr. 5 (July 2001), pp. 585, 595.

More often, however, women's positions in relation to men remain unchanged, or little changed, once the men return home.<sup>32</sup>

Not all of the upheavals of the Arab Spring caused wars. Libya had a short civil war, Syria is now in civil war, and Yemen saw sporadic spats of armed conflicts in various areas. In Egypt and Tunisia, the uprisings did not lead to the absence of men that Juliá and Ridha mention; instead, it led to situations where women and men, working together, shaped the events unfolding in their home countries through their participation, mobilization, and actions. The question that one should ask here is this: Have the situations of wars and uprisings, where women came to the fore and sometimes, as in Yemen and Libya, assumed new roles, led to a sustainable change in women's lives and their roles in society?

Clearly, it is too early to give a definite answer to this question. What is also clear, however, is that many of these countries are in a state of flux, like melting wax, and despite the backlash of Islamist fundamentalism and heavy-handed police state tactics in some of these states, activists fighting for gender justice have not been pushed to silence. In fact the opposite has occurred. Hence, although the first phase of women's mobilization during the early stages of the Arab Spring lacked a gender agenda, once they experienced the backlash, women started to coordinate their mobilization in a better way, and they articulated their demands for women's rights and gender equality. Most important, several actions that challenged the established social norms in matters concerning social behaviour, sexuality, and homosexuality indicate that a new gender consciousness is slowly emerging. In the following section, examples of two types of gender-specific actions will be highlighted. Those in the first type aim to integrate women's rights into laws. Those in the second type defy traditional norms regarding sexuality in general.

First, some mobilization actions aim to integrate women's rights and equality into constitutions and laws and seek better political representation at the institutional level. These actions have yet to produce any actual impact or real change, and the fractured political elites at the top have often held them hostage to the politics of survival.

As mentioned earlier, when women participated in the early stages of the Arab Spring, they did not have a gender-specific agenda. This changed after the incumbent presidents stepped down and women were systematically excluded from the transitional bodies and institutions that were shaping the emerging political order. However, instead of being pushed to silence, as happened in earlier situations in the Arab MENA region, this time women have frequently mobilized and coordinated their efforts to systematically counter these attempts to exclude them.

In Egypt, the »blue bra incident« of December 17, 2011, was a rallying point for women and men alike. The incident was the savage beating of a female protestor by Egyptian military forces. Clips and videos revealed a limp woman being dragged by her arms along the street, with her abaya ripped open, exposing her naked torso and blue bra. Security

32 Ibid.

forces surround her, many wielding batons; guards hit her and one stomps on her.<sup>33</sup> In response, on December 20, thousands of women and men marched in Cairo's Tahrir Square in what was described as the largest demonstration of women in Egypt in decades. According to Douaa Hussein, an Egyptian gender expert, this incident was a defining point for the women's movement in Egypt. She explained:<sup>34</sup>

»Before the incident the performance of women's organizations and human rights activists was very weak and any reactions were tentative and ineffective. The reactions to the composition of the constitutional committee, which did not even have one woman, were merely comments and denunciations. All the later ministerial reshuffles and the governors' appointments all passed with mere condemnation, out of proportion to the policies of marginalization [...].«

However, in the second phase, after the incident, she saw a change:

»[...] their performance and discourse [...] became more unified [...]. [It started] with the 20 December march in response to the ‚blue bra incident‘ [...] and the discourse became stronger and more proactive. Women's organizations participated and made suggestions about the law on non-governmental organizations, and 7 organisations developed complete drafts of the constitution; and they established a coalition of women's organizations [...].«

Coordinated mobilization was also observed after the uprising against President Morsi on June 30, 2013. For example, on September 8, the Committee of Women for the Constitution sent an open letter to the Committee of the Constitution, which was created to modify the 2012 Constitution. The women's committee had several demands for the new constitution. It should

»declare Egypt's respect for international conventions to which it is a party; specify a quota for women in all elected councils with a percentage no less than 35 %; declare clearly equality, equal opportunities and non-discrimination between the sexes; criminalize all forms of discrimination; integrate gender mainstreaming within the society; guarantee economic, social, and cultural rights and human development while obliging the State to allocate the necessary resources (health care, education and scientific research, housing, employment, pensions and social insurance, etc.) in accordance with specific standards and targets«.<sup>35</sup>

Similar demands were also articulated by the Coalition of Women's Organizations, this time to the Committee of Fifty, which had been assigned the task of drafting the modified

33 Isobel Coleman, »Blue bra girl« rallies Egypt's women vs. oppression in: *CNN online*, December 22, 2011, <http://edition.cnn.com/2011/12/22/opinion/coleman-women-egypt-protest/index.html> (accessed Oct. 8, 2013).

34 Douaa Hussein, email interview, October 12, 2012.

35 N. N, »An Open Letter to the Committee on the Constitution«, *Committee of Women and Constitution* (in Arabic), September 8, 2013.

constitution.<sup>36</sup> However, the fact that women could coordinate their mobilization and articulate their gender-related demands does not necessarily mean they had any real influence. They have so far had little influence in the Egyptian context. Concretely, Douaa Hussain described these actions as a kind of »elitist advocacy«; so far, she says, it has failed in its language, discourse, and performance to reach to the grassroots level where the Islamist influence is widespread.

In fact, one sees that the degree to which women's organizations have been able (or unable) to integrate their demands into constitution or change laws deemed discriminatory have often been held hostage to the type of politics of survival the fractured political elites are engaged in. This pattern of politics is not new. It has been engrained in the gender policies of the post-colonial Arab states and continues to be conducted in the aftermath of the Arab uprisings. In their politics of survival, state leaders and core elites, faced with constant challenges to their legitimacy, often make alliances with political and social groups within a traditional base of power. They often exploit the Islamist card; that is, they deploy the support of some Islamist groups to legitimize their positions and policies in a religious sense and/or to delegitimize those of their rivals. This opportunistic behaviour has meant that if it made political sense to do so, the state would act in favour of women's emancipation. If it does not make sense to do so, it will not.<sup>37</sup>

In the Egyptian case, the apparently positive changes, such as the current 10 % representation of women on the Committee of Fifty, were often the result of a top-down approach. In this case, it was the Minister of Defence, Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, who pulled the strings and allowed it to happen. Yet he was not so much recognizing the importance of women's participation as making a tactical political gesture, aimed to highlight the difference between a new, presumably pro-women order and the earlier apparently reactionary and Islamist one.<sup>38</sup>

In Libya, the fact that women were coordinating their advocacy did not lead to their stated objective, though it did succeed in guaranteeing them a margin of representation. In January 2012, the National Transitional Council adopted a new electoral law, which did not include a quota for the representation of women. An earlier draft had set a 10 % quota for women in the Constitutional Assembly »unless there are not enough female candidates«. As a result, NGOs and women's organizations, including the Voice of Libyan Women and the Libyan Rights Organization, organized demonstrations outside the office of the prime minister in Tripoli, calling this provision »scandalous« and demanding a higher quota. Instead of raising the quota, the council simply deleted the provision. The new law stipulates that 50 % of candidates on electoral lists must be women, but parties have no obligation to place women candidates at the top of their lists.<sup>39</sup> Nevertheless, the zipper system that called for male-female parity on parties' lists

36 Women made up 10 % of the membership; however, most were selected from among those sympathetic to the new regime.

37 Elham Manea, *The Arab State and Women's Rights*, op. cit., pp. 107–112.

38 Al-Sisi was a member of SCAF during the first transitional period and made comments to the effect blaming the women who endured the »virginity tests«.

39 N. N., »Women and the Arab Spring: Taking their place?«, op. cit. (FN 7), pp. 27, 30.

of candidates brought a surprise in the parliamentary elections in July 2012: women won 17 % of the seats in the new body.<sup>40</sup>

In addition, women's organizations and NGOs have coordinated their advocacy work to ensure that women will be better represented in politics and that gender demands will become mainstream issues in the constitution. For example, in August and September of 2012, a coalition of women's groups launched the Right Committee Campaign, which aims to lobby the GNC for a »diverse and independent constitutional drafting committee«. It also demanded that the committee writing the constitution has at least 30 % female members. Another coordinated effort was made in December of 2012: a number of leading women's NGOs met with the head of the GNC and gave him a signed petition calling for »affirmative action to ensure the inclusion of women in the Constituent Assembly«.<sup>41</sup> Along the same lines, women activists from across Libya met in January 2013 in Tripoli for a Voice of Libyan Women Conference. They repeated their demand that women make up 35 % of the Constituent Assembly and that the assembly hire a gender expert as an advisor. Also in January 2013, 29 women members of the congress formed a cross-party women's bloc in the GNC to promote women's rights and push for women's representation in the Constituent Assembly. The announcement came days after a member of Congress for the Region Zawiya criticized the presence of women in the congress. He said that the »attire of congresswomen and gender mixing within the GNC had caused god to be furious with the legislature, resulting in the congress' shortcomings«.<sup>42</sup>

Will these coordinated advocacy measures lead to concrete improvements in women's political representation? Again, it is too early to give a concrete answer. However, given the contentious political situation within Libya, regional and tribal divisions, and the rise in influence of the Islamist militia, it is safe to assume that women's demands may not be at the top of the priority list of the current ruling elites.

At this point it should be mentioned that when women's organizations and activists did succeed in mobilizing the »streets« along with NGOs, the political elites often responded to demands for women's rights. This was evident in Tunisia after the outcry that followed the publication of Article 28 in the first draft of the constitution. Women's organizations coordinated their efforts to erase this article and were met by a counter-effort by Islamist women's activists.

Several tactics were used by women activists, members of organizations such as the Democratic Women's Association, La Ligue Tunisienne des Droits de l'Homme (LT-DH), and L'Association des Femmes Tunisiennes pour la Recherche sur le Développement (AFTURD). These included demonstrations that brought thousands of supporters to the streets of Tunis as well as an online petition that garnered 30,000 signatures. The campaign used multi-media tools and repeatedly reminded Tunisians of the gains women

40 D. Soguel, »Libyan elections give women a 17 % starting point« in: *WeNews*, July 18, 2012, [http://womensenews.org/story/the-world/120719/libyan-elections-give-women-17-starting-point#.UJkPZm\\_A\\_4Y](http://womensenews.org/story/the-world/120719/libyan-elections-give-women-17-starting-point#.UJkPZm_A_4Y) (accessed Nov. 1, 2012).

41 N. N., »A Revolution for All«, op. cit. (FN 11), p. 12.

42 *Ibid.*

made during the post-colonial period which could be threatened by the terminology of »complementarity« roles of men and women.<sup>43</sup> These actions were countered by women members of Islamist parties, who supported Article 28. Some expressed frustration with secular opponents whom they believed were taking the law out of context. Others defended the article on ideological grounds. For example, Farida Labidi, a member of the Ennahda Executive Council, declared, »One cannot speak of equality between man and woman in the absolute«.<sup>44</sup>

Such advocacy actions by women on both sides of the spectrum are indicators, as Charrad and Zarrugh argue, of the »ways in which women's organizations and activists asserted themselves in debates in Tunisia during the post-revolutionary period«. In fact, this kind of assertiveness departed significantly from the top-down promulgation of gender policy »that prevailed in earlier eras«.<sup>45</sup> Most importantly, the grassroots actions by women's organizations were effective. Article 28 was omitted from the second and third drafts of the constitution of December 12, 2012, and April 30, 2013, respectively. The Ennahda party later made another concession by excluding specific references to Shari'a law as the official and primary source of legislation in the country.<sup>46</sup>

Thus, Tunisian women's rights activists' success in mobilizing reflected several elements of the country's context: Tunisia's long tradition of secularism and women's emancipation, Ennahda's lack of hegemonic power in the political scene (40 % voted for it, but 60 % did not), and the ability of women's groups to mobilize the »streets«.

The *second* type of actions defies traditional norms regarding harassment, sexuality, and sexual orientations. The backlash against gender justice and the mixed record of women's effectiveness in mobilizing should not be reason to think that the situation in the Arab world has returned to normal. In fact, as this paper argues, a return to normality is not synonymous with a return to the status quo regarding gender relations. This is not only evident in countries like Egypt or Tunisia, it can also be detected in the last place where one would expect it: Yemen. Things are not back to normal because of a slow yet tangible shift among young people in norms and attitudes towards the taboo subjects of sex, sexuality, harassment, and mixing between the sexes. Two examples are used to illustrate this point:

*Example One.* Sexual harassment has often been taboo in Egypt. It was often said that women experienced it but never talked about it – it was a disgrace, filling them with shame and guilt, and should be kept secret. Yet this is no longer the case in Egypt today.

The sweeping victory of the Islamist parties in the parliamentary elections of November 28, 2011, and January 11, 2012, marked the beginning of a new trend in harassment. Unveiled women were assaulted in poor neighbourhoods, on public transportation, and on the street. Vigilantes formed groups to enforce Islamic laws, and Islamist political

43 Mounira M. Charrad / Amina Zarrugh, »The Arab Spring and Women's Rights in Tunisia« in: *E. International Relations*, September 4, 2013, <http://www.e-ir.info/2013/09/04/the-arab-spring-and-womens-rights-in-tunisia/> (accessed Oct. 8. 2013).

44 Quoted in *ibid.*

45 *Ibid.*

46 *Ibid.*

leaders and members of parliament praised them and advocated enforcing the wearing of the hijab (headscarf). This was the context in which young teenagers (aged 12 to 15), working in an organized and collective way, attacked both veiled and unveiled girls in parks and in public; the attacks were reported in areas all over Egypt during the two Eid public holidays in 2012. The women-only car on the Cairo Underground was regularly invaded by attacking men. Physical and sexual assaults targeted women in the streets of poor urban and rural areas, as well as women protestors in Tahrir Square, scene of several gang rapes. These attacks followed a pattern. A group of men would surround the victim, form a ring around her, and push her to an isolated area before her defenders would have time to stop them.<sup>47</sup>

Many women activists saw these attacks as an orchestrated attempt to intimidate women and stop them from participating in political actions. The feeble reactions from the authorities, which either denied the incidents occurred or blamed the victims for their »un-Islamic behaviour«, drew national outrage. Yet the most important change was in the way women reacted. They did no longer keep the harassment secret. In fact, many of the women activists who were sexually attacked came forward to describe their experiences openly on Facebook and then on television.<sup>48</sup> Such testimonies were unheard of and defied the common code of conduct in such situations. They also caused great controversy within Egypt. Between those supporting the victims and those blaming them, another generational conflict was visible. Women told this author privately that »older« women insisted that girls who were »proper« would never reveal such incidents, or they insisted that such harassment never occurred – statements that caused their daughters to burst out in anger.<sup>49</sup> Meanwhile, activists insisted that these tactics to silence them would not succeed. One famous activist, Jasmine Elbermawy, who experienced a gang attack on November 23, 2012, called publicly on Egyptian women »not to fear«. She called on them to »continue to demand your rights, go down [to the streets] and do not look at these ugly attempts that seek to intimidate us. The smallest right we have is to maintain our humanity«.<sup>50</sup>

*Example Two.* In Yemen, specifically in its Northern part, the youth uprising of February and March 2011 had unexpected effects that resulted in new trends in social behaviour. Not only did women start to participate in demonstrations, defying the strict segregation of sexes common in North Yemen. Two other developments also took place. Again, neither symbolizes a social revolution. Yet they do indicate a slow social change taking place among a certain segment of educated and urban youth.

47 Iman Bibars, »The Middle East: Fighting for Women's Rights«, op. cit. (FN 25).

48 See, for example, Akher Annahar Program, »Jasmin Elbermaoui recounts her harassment« in: *An Nahar TV Channel*, November 1, 2012, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WvBPvIjg8xI>; Akher Annahar Program, »Hania Moheib recounts her harassment« in: *An Nahar TV Channel*, November 1, 2012, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=25X1o1fsXc>.

49 Author's visit, Cairo, April 2013.

50 Salah Aldin Muntasar, »Don't be afraid – Jasmine Elbermawy: A Message to Egyptian Girls (women)« in: *Ahram Digital* (in Arabic), July 5, 2013, <http://digital.ahram.org.eg/articles.aspx?Serial=1344475&eid=15367> (accessed Oct. 8, 2013).

The first relates to what Hind Aleryani, a young Yemeni journalist and activist, described as »the phenomenon of mixed cafes in Yemen«.<sup>51</sup> She said that while the political situation remained as before, she observed a new phenomenon in the cafes of Sanaa, calling it a »social change«, evident in young men and women *sitting together!*<sup>52</sup>

»This [mixing and sitting together in a public place] of course never happened in the past, and when I say in the past I mean in the last few years, no less than four years ago. At that time, mixing between young men and women was very strongly denounced. In fact, when I was at Sanaa University, if a young woman talked to a male fellow student, she risked ruining her reputation. This perception and fear was so engrained that the brother of a friend of mine used to be afraid to talk to her at the university lest others think he was a stranger. So to let her know he was ready to leave and take her home, he would shake the car keys in his hand as a sign. Of course this method was humiliating, but no one denounced it. This has changed somehow now. How? It happened thanks to the sit-in squares that formed during the days of the revolution. It seems that these squares broke the barrier of fear, [a fear] which made young men and women dread each other as if they were from another planet.«<sup>53</sup>

This brings to point the second change in Yemen. This author hesitates to call it a development because it concerns a single incident in Sanaa, but by all accounts, it is a historical incident, simply because it never happened before. A young male activist came out as a gay man, and he announced it on his blog while he was in Yemen!

Alaa Jabran was a key figure in the Yemen youth movement; he organized and led protests throughout the 2011 uprising. He then decided it was time to announce his sexual orientation and said this on his blog.<sup>54</sup>

»Equality and rights must be claimed; no one will give us what we deserve. Fear is the most powerful motivation in this formula and hell yeah, I'm afraid. We, queers, are under siege, are being attacked on all fronts and I'm afraid that it's okay with us. Being visible is the first step! And if we remain invisible, they [heterosexuals] will continue living, not acknowledging our existence nor your invisibility, and we'll just end up contributing to a culture that only tries to kill us. Every day one of us is taken, we're taken by homophobic governments, religions and worst of all, we're taken by our own silence and denial.«

51 Hind Aleryani, »The Phenomenon of Mixed Cafes in Yemen« in: *France 24* (in Arabic), July 2, 2013, <http://f24.my/177Vypk> (accessed September 9, 2013).

52 Ibid.

53 Ibid.

54 Alaa Jabran, »On Identity, Sexuality, Gender and other Stuff« in: *Alaa Blog*, May 29, 2013, <http://ajyemen.wordpress.com/2013/05/29/on-identity-sexuality-gender-and-other-stuff/> (accessed Sept. 9, 2013).

Asked why he chose to do that in a country that punishes male homosexuality with the death penalty, he answered: »I took part in the revolution to change our reality; it is not a revolution if we don't revolutionise every aspect of our community and ourselves«.<sup>55</sup>

Judging from the death threats he received, the denunciations that poured in on his blog, and his later flight to Canada, the social revolution he was hoping for has not yet arrived. Nevertheless, the fact remains that others – Yemeni homosexuals, male and female – wrote on his blog, and they expressed similar positions. They want to be visible! A decade ago, this incident, with its echo and the support it got from a small number of Yemenis, could have been an incident in a novel, never imagined in reality.

### 3. Conclusion

The way that women experienced the Arab Spring, by participating and then being excluded, may not have been surprising after all. It reinforced a historical pattern well established within the Arab MENA region. Women would take part in historical events taking shape within their own countries; they would demonstrate, mobilize, and assume new roles that defied the traditional views of woman's role in society. The moment the situation started to calm down, society sent women the message that they should go back home.

While this pattern seems to have been the norm in various revolutions, wars of independence, and intifadas in Arab countries, elsewhere, however, the general trend was an emergence of a new gender consciousness that sought to redefine women's roles in society as well as their space and independence. The reason this kind of development was historically hindered in the Arab MENA region is related, in my opinion, to the emergence of the authoritarian Arab state, with its politics of survival and most importantly its intolerance of any independent civil society action, including independent women's movements. The stagnation that dominated the political spectrum, which was reflected in all aspects of life within the region, was so suffocating that something had to give – hence the uprisings that started when Bu Azizi set himself on fire in Tunisia on December 17, 2010. But what has since been termed the Arab Spring was really just a winter for Arab women. The same pattern repeated itself. Women participated, in ways tailored to their local contexts, only to be faced with a backlash. The backlash was not only caused by a conservative society. It was compounded by the actions of political elites, indifferent to women's rights and eager to survive politically, and of ideologically determined Islamist movements that made a mission of implementing their world view of the woman's role in society.

Instead of succumbing to the pressure and going back to their homes, women reacted differently this time. Women's groups and activists as well as human rights organizations started to articulate positions that specifically address issues of gender justice and human rights for women. This was a departure from their initial participation in the uprisings

55 N. N., »Alaa Jabran: One of Yemen's first openly gay men« in: *BBC News Online*, June 19, 2013, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-22893341> (accessed Sept. 9, 2013).

where the focus was national aspirations for political change and democracy. This departure was necessary: as these activists and groups realized, more democracy did not necessarily mean more rights for women. In a democracy where those coming to power seem intent on rewriting the meaning of universal women's human rights, speaking of biologically determined and complementary different roles and hence rights, democracy seems to elevate these views to legally sanctioned gender discrimination. Moreover, in a transitional and very uncertain period where the political elites are still juggling to survive politically, women's rights have been the least of their concerns, let alone a priority.

This time was also different because women's and human rights organizations started to coordinate their actions and join forces to advocate for more rights and participation for women. The effectiveness of these actions has been mixed, often dependent on the political context and the elites' politics of survival. Only when these organizations were in a position to mobilize the »streets« in addition to NGOs, these actions did have a real effect. The ability to reach the masses seems to be the decisive element that can make a difference in such a context.

This time is different for another reason too. For the first time one can discern indications of social change: once-taboo issues relating to sexuality, sexual harassment, gender mixing, and homosexuality are not only being discussed, they are even being defiantly challenged. And just as young people were the power engine of the Arab uprisings, they were also the driving force behind these challenges. In such a context, one can more and more often detect a generational gap that provides speaking room for a younger generation that does not seem to subscribe to the rules dictated by society. Whether these indications will lead to full social change is still up in the air. What is clear is that these uprisings, despite their chilling effects on women's lives, have unsettled certain perceptions about gender and women's rights.

### *Summary*

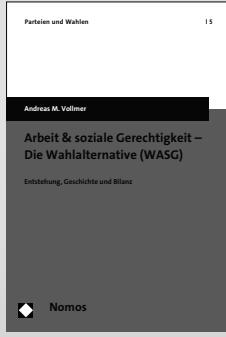
Throughout Arab history, women have played an integral role in many independence movements and at times of wars, and in the process defied social stereotypes and traditional constraints. However, the moment the situation started to normalize, the old social norms and traditional perceptions of women's roles have tended to reassert themselves. The same can be said about women's visible participation in the Arab popular uprisings of 2011: participation was followed by a conservative backlash. This paper will narrate the pattern of women's political participation that was then followed by exclusion, offering concrete examples. It will highlight the argument that this backlash may not be surprising after all. Nevertheless, despite the backlash, the flux now taking place in the region is unsettling gender perceptions and roles. Whether these changes are sustainable remains a matter of speculation.

## Zusammenfassung

In der arabischen Geschichte haben Frauen immer wieder in Unabhängigkeitsbewegungen und zu Kriegszeiten eine wichtige Rolle gespielt und sich dabei über traditionelle Rollenmuster hinweggesetzt. Kaum jedoch hatte sich die Situation normalisiert, manifestierten sich die sozialen Normen und die Wahrnehmung der Frauenrolle in ihrer ursprünglichen Form. Dies gilt auch für die Teilnahme der Frauen in den arabischen Volksaufständen von 2011: Auf die Teilhabe folgte die konservative Reaktion. Der Artikel behandelt anhand konkreter Beispiele die zu beobachtenden Muster der politischen Partizipation von Frauen, auf die dann Ausgrenzung folgte. Er argumentiert, dass der Backlash nicht überrascht. Gleichzeitig aber bricht der Wandel die hergebrachte Gender-Wahrnehmung und die entsprechenden Rollenmuster auf.

*Elham Manea, Die arabischen Volksaufstände aus einer Gender-Perspektive*

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