

Whither Arab Women? The Arab Feminist Legacy and The Role of Women in The Arab Spring

Maheep, Yahya Jahanghiri

Faculty of Political Science in School of Social Sciences, Indira Gandhi National Open University, New Delhi
Islamic Studies, Managing Director, Journal of Islamic interdisciplinary Studies, Iran
maheep.jnu@gmail.com

Received: 28-04-2021

Revised: 20-11-2021

Accepted: 01-01-2022

Abstract

The problem with the western line of thinking is that it makes a hasty assumption that religion naturally impedes social change. This assumption betrays the lack of a sense of cultural relativism and fails to comprehend the complex relationship between religion and society in West Asia and North Africa. In fact, Arab feminists recognized this truth a long time ago. As we illustrated above, Arab feminism began as a secular movement that viewed religion as a tool of oppression. It gradually revised its philosophy and reconciled its ideas with Islamic tenets. Scholars like Deniz Kandiyoti, Fatima Mernissi, and many Arab scholars vitally contributed to bringing this about. The Quran and the Hadiths are replete with the message of gender equality, so also the history of Islam which presents a very positive picture of gender relations. Scholars like Nikkie Keddie and Elizabeth Fernea have studied several different Arabic-speaking tribes and communities distributed from the Maghreb to the Arab Gulf. Their effort has revealed that from the historical past women in the Arab world have played significant roles in politics, legal institutions, administration, and even warfare. Therefore, we would like to express our reservations on apprehensions and anxieties which are so vociferously articulated by western academia and media during the developments following the Arab Spring in Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen, and other Arab states.

Keywords: Writer Arab, Feminist, Women, Arab Spring

INTRODUCTION

Five springs have passed since the decades-old quietude of many Arab peoples, enforced by dictatorial regimes, was broken by the advent of the ‘Arab Spring.’ Long suppressed, they burst forth in spontaneous fury and poured out on the streets to challenge the might of tyrants. Many regimes that till then had seemed invincible failed to withstand this swell of anger, eventually, tottered and fell. The world reacted to these developments first with surprise and then with grateful gladness. A new era of freedom of openness seemed to have dawned on the Arab world. One of the most enduring gains of the Arab spring is the visibility it has provided to the condition of Arab women. The myriad protests and demonstrations which characterized the ‘Arab Spring’ saw the active participation of Arab women along with their sons, husbands, fathers, and brothers. They braved bullets and policemen’s batons and

fought shoulder to shoulder with their brothers to overthrow the yoke of tyranny. Arab women's capacity for political action came as a revelation for the non-Arab world.

The stereotype of Arab women which existed in the minds of the non-Arab world – veiled, voiceless, and tethered to the domestic hearth – was shattered forever. Also refuted was the belief that Islam denies women agency and spaces wherein they can articulate their own points of view. This chapter is an attempt to understand the legacies – intellectual, social and economic – which Arab women are privy to and which capacitated them to play the role they did in the 'Arab Spring.' Having done this, we will take stock of how women are faring in the aftermath of the spring in various Arab countries. Women, unfortunately, are very meagerly represented in the new regimes. They have also enforced many measures detrimental to women's freedom. Despite this, we will argue, there is a reason for hope. We must not hasten to apply western heuristic parameters to understand the ethos and a political culture very particular to this region. Doing this will only provide a much-distorted view of reality and result in a failure to understand the attitudes of the post 'Arab Spring' regimes on their own terms.

The Arab Feminist Legacy

Societies across the world have been endeavoring to establish gender equality in their own distinct ways. It is an ideal destiny we are all striving to realize. Like in other parts of the globe, the advancement of women is high on the agenda of the Arab states. Besides being privy to the liberating interventions of the state, women in these countries have experienced the tremors of global feminism. Broadly, as we will see below, women's responses to them can be classified into two strains.

The most formidable foe to women's empowerment in the Arab world is patriarchal dominance. Allowing for both fettering and liberating interpretations, Islam tempers patriarchal dominance variously. As Deniz Kandiyoti observes, conservative elements, using the Quran, the Hadith, and the lives of prominent women in the early period of Islamic history as instances, claimed that existing gender asymmetries are divinely ordained.¹ One school of Arab feminists, thus, advocated a wholesale adoption of Western feminist ideas. From this perspective, Islamic doctrines were looked upon as irredeemably misogynistic and unaccommodating of the aspirations of women.² Another strain of feminist thought sought to reconcile Western feminist ideals with the fundamental tenets of Islam. The predominance of patriarchy in all institutions of Arab life was seen by it as a misinterpretation of the essentially gender-egalitarian character of Islam. These feminists, therefore, called for a reinterpretation of the religious doctrines instead of their rejection. This version of Islamic feminism received greater acceptance in the Arab world.

There were also feminists who did not decry Islam, but were, nevertheless, no less radical. What the likes of Nawal al-Sadawi and Fatima Marnissi fall in this category. Sadawi, an

¹ Nikki R. Keddie, "Women in the Limelight: Some Recent Books on Middle Eastern Women's History," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 34, no. 3 (2002): 553–573; Nikki R. Keddie and Beth Baron, eds., *Women in Middle Eastern History: Shifting Boundaries in Sex and Gender*, Reissue edition. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993).

² Margot Badran, "Between Secular and Islamic Feminism/s: Reflections on the Middle East and Beyond," *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies* 1, no. 1 (March 1, 2005): 6–28.

Egyptian psychiatrist, authored *Women and Sex*, while Marnissi,³ a Moroccan Sociologist, penned *The Veil and the Male Elite*. Sadawi did not limit herself to the social and economic aspects of women's liberation, she took up its sexual side as well.⁴ Marnissi's concern focus was, besides the sexual, the legal-judicial structure that subordinates women in the Arab world. Sadawi and Marnissi confronted both reformists and conservatives.⁵ They cast aside the vague reformist notions of renewal (*tajdid*). The conservatives, who sought to rationalize the status quo and oppose structural change, were also rebutted by them.⁶ Both reformists and conservatives, they argued, expressed the dominant ideology of neo-patriarchy,⁷ a conservative, relentlessly male-oriented ideology that tended to assign privilege and power to men at the expense of women.

Apart from Western-inspired secular feminism and Islamic feminism, the third pattern of the feminist movement emerged in Iran following the Islamic Revolution of 1979. Asef Bayat has analyzed and sketched the contours of this new trend in the essay *Life and Politics*. Paradoxically enough, the author has chosen to call this new movement a "Non-movement."⁸

According to Bayat, the installation of the Islamic republic in Iran following the overthrow of the Shah was, in many ways, damaging for Iranian womenfolk. Severe constraints were imposed upon the public life of women, and wearing of the *chador*, *hijab*, and such markers of modesty was made mandatory. Public policies implemented in the post-revolutionary phase also displayed a brazen hostility towards the aspirations of women. The social and political atmosphere of post-revolutionary Iran, as a result, became too repressive for women to unite, agitate and collectively voice their grievances and aspirations.⁹

Under such circumstances, argues Bayat, the Iranian women's movement did not die out or go into limbo but devised a new strategy to combat. Instead of going for an all-out offensive against the entrenched patriarchy of the Iranian society and the authoritarian regime, they adopted a long-drawn game plan which was more Fabian than revolutionary in character. Thus, Iranian women continued to actively participate in various activities in public life ranging from sports to politics, and chose to attain short-range objectives instead of striving to turn the system upside down overnight in their favor. Such a fight was long-drawn, dispersed, mundane, and unromantic in character, but, argues Bayat, effective in the long run.¹⁰

³ Fatima ; Lakeland Mernissi, *The Veil and the Male Elite: A Feminist Interpretation of Women's Rights in Islam* (New York: Persues Book, c1991.).

⁴ Nawal El-Saadawi, *Women and Sex* (Cairo: Dar El Hilal Publishers, 1969).

⁵ Ummu Kulsum, "Nawal El-Saadawi: Membongkar Budaya Patriarkhi Melalui Sastra," *Lentera* 3, no. 1 (2017): 14.

⁶ Sabry Hafez, "Intentions and Realisation in the Narratives of Nawal El-Saadawi," ed. Nawal El-Saadawi et al., *Third World Quarterly* 11, no. 3 (1989): 188–198.

⁷ Hisham Sharabi, *Neopatriarchy: A Theory of Distorted Change in Arab Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).

⁸ Asef Bayat, *Life as Politics: How Ordinary People Change the Middle East*, 1st edition. (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 2009).

⁹ Mohammad Yusuf Setyawan and Owusu-Ansah David, "Veil (Niqâb) Problematics in Islamic Law Perspective; Religion or Culture? (Islamic Legal Approach)," *Al-Mada: Jurnal Agama, Sosial, dan Budaya* 4, no. 2 (August 1, 2021): 235–239.

¹⁰ Bayat, *Life as Politics*, 2.

On the ideological front, this new form of the feminist movement, or “Non-movement”, as Bayat calls it, was some sort of synthesis between the two earlier varieties. Unlike Islamic feminists, proponents of this new trend gave secular feminism of the Western world its due share of credit and incorporated many of its ideals in their movement. On the other hand, like the Islamic feminists, they too sought to reinterpret Islamic theological texts and develop an intellectual bulwark against the misogynistic ideas and policies of elements within the theocratic regime.

Thus, by focussing on seemingly innocuous objectives which did not collide head-on with religious mores and restrictions, Iranian women devised a novel stratagem to circumvent the authoritarian bias of the patriarchal society and regime. Attainment of every small objective was a victory and a stepping stone to carry the movement forward. Bayat has cited statistics and elaborated upon pro-women public policies enacted in Iran and has argued that this welcome change was the upshot of this long, protracted, “Non-Movement”, carried forward by Iranian women with tremendous patience and perseverance.

The Arab feminist legacy, as we see it, is rich, diverse, and multi-vocal. It serves as a testimony of the fact that Islam and Muslim societies provide enough spaces wherein women can protest and exercise autonomous agency. More importantly, as the above examples demonstrate, Arab women have been, for long years, making sophisticated assessments of their situation in the light of their social and religious mores. Further, the case of Iranian women also proves that religion does not necessarily constrain women’s quest for greater visibility in public spaces. The conspicuous presence of women in the ‘Arab Spring’, thus, should not surprise us in the least. Nevertheless, conflating Islam with patriarchy has been a predominant practice in Arab ethnography emanating from the West. Most Western scholars, besides some Arab ones, have identified Quranic *suras* as the cause behind the subordination of women in Arab societies. This position, it needs to be pointed out, loses tenability when countered with the profoundly gender-egalitarian character of the Quran and the Hadith. Zekiye Demir points out:

Islam is a religion that does not prevent women from either receiving education or working in legitimate environments. One of our Prophet’s wives, Khadija, engaged in trade. Another of his wives, Zaynab, was a craftswoman with her own sewing workshop. Yet another of the Prophet’s wives, Aisha, was an educator and scholar.¹¹

As a matter of fact, even the veil, universally taken to be binding on Muslim women in the West, is not enjoined by Islam. As Tiffany D. Reed points out, “The Quran does not specifically instruct women to wear the veil, it simply instructs them to maintain a modest appearance in public places.”¹² Further, as Abu-Lughod argues, veiling “must not be confused with, or made to stand for, lack of agency.” She, as a result, unequivocally rejects the idea that the veil is a “quintessential sign of women's unfreedom.”¹³

¹¹ Colin Dürkop et al., eds., *Women’s Empowerment in the Arab Spring: Selected Articles* (Ankara, 2012).

¹² Reed Tiffany D, *Middle Eastern Women and Their Rising Impact on Society” Modern Middle Eastern Women* (Monticello: University of Arkansas, 2012).

¹³ Lila Abu-Lughod, “Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving? Anthropological Reflections on Cultural Relativism and Its Others,” *American Anthropologist* 104, no. 3 (2002): 783–790.

It is hard, we observe, to hold Islam culpable for the limits visiting women's freedom in Arab societies. As a result, a consensus is developing that patriarchy among Arabs has its roots in the pre-Islamic days of Arabia and has withstood the attempts of Islam to neutralize it. A current wave of modern scholarship on this line by women Arab intellectuals is posing a serious challenge to the conventional understanding of gender relations in Arab societies. A lot of work based on case studies, analyses of historical and contemporary data and reinterpretation of religious texts is steadily refuting the Western intellectual axioms on Arab social norms.

Arab Women and the Socio-Economic Context

One of the most important factors that contributed significantly to revolutionizing the gender equation all over the world is the triumph of the market economy.¹⁴ Access to salaried work has led to the economic empowerment and independence of women. Arab societies, not being insulated from the rest of the world, have also been witness to this phenomenon. The flourishing Arab economies, buoyed by oil wealth, have witnessed the active participation of women. Despite the fact that the economic empowerment of women is largely an urban phenomenon and is confined mainly among the educated elite, these changes are steadily trickling down to the grassroots of society.

Arab societies have also been steadily urbanizing since the early 1970s. As of now, more than 50 percent of the Arab population is city dwelling. Consumption, emigration from rural to urban areas, and other appurtenances of change have had their inevitable bearing upon the status of Arab women. Three main factors that have profoundly affected the lives of women in the Arab world are access to education, participation in salaried work and the process of globalization. The consequences of these changes have been most conspicuous in the cities. However, as the rural-urban divide was never watertight in the Arab countries, these changes are not confined to the urban landscape and have affected the Arab society as a whole, albeit with spatial variations.

The governments of the Arab countries to are mindful that women are a valuable human resource for the national economy when allowed to participate in it equally with men. They can play a crucial role as agents of change in society and in building their country. The Arab states, thus, have been taking measures to induct women into the economy. Consequently, an increasing number of economically empowered women have succeeded in achieving greater equality in society and reciprocity in their familial and personal relationships. In most Arab societies, thus, the qualitative accumulation of small victories by women has caused patriarchal hegemony to retreat in varying degrees. This, in turn, facilitated the participation of Arab women in the 'Arab Spring' in copious numbers.

The Aftermath of the Spring: Whither Arab Women?

The Arab feminist legacy has acquired great significance later in the light of transformations – both social and political – agitated by globalization and the 'Arab Spring.' Both threaten to undo the prevailing order in the Arab states. While globalization has relaxed

¹⁴ Eleanor Abdella Doumato and Marsha Pripstein Posusney, *Women and Globalization in the Arab Middle East: Gender, Economy, and Society* (Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2003).

traditional bonds and freed aspirations among women, the ‘Arab spring’ has loosed torrents that have been sweeping away entrenched governments. Both portend a changed Arab society and political order. Also, the ‘Arab Spring’ has foregrounded a kind of political Islam in some of the Arab states which have re-established the primacy of Islamic conventions in Arab gender discourses. Hence, a study of changing gender equations in Arab society in the context of the ‘Arab Spring’ demands careful consideration of certain factors: 1) The tug of war between the conservatives and liberals in the Arab world over gender parity and the role of Islamic doctrines in the debate. 2) The secular and religious perspectives of Arab feminism and its temporal and spatial heterogeneities. 3) Universal and Arab parameters of feminist aspirations and their points of convergence and divergence. 4) State strategies for integration into the global economy that have been affecting women’s economic participation and social rights in legal frameworks. 5) Feminist associations that have been vocal and visible in demanding political participation, rights and in effecting legal and policy changes in the face of both globalization and the resurgence of political Islam.

Women played a conspicuous and crucial role in the overthrow of oppressive regimes in all the countries which were visited by the ‘Arab Spring’. We all have seen scores of images of women demonstrators thronging the streets of the capitals of various Arab states on television screens and in print media. As the ‘Arab Spring’ ran its tumultuous course, women’s participation never abated, in all demonstrations, women equaled men in numbers. Along with the squares and streets of the Arab cities, Arab women took to the various social media platforms to vent many generations of accumulated discontent against undemocratic regimes. In fact, the ‘Arab Spring’ turned thousands of young women across the Arab world into citizen journalists in cyberspace. They mobilized people on Facebook, tweeted and posted videos, and made sure that the governments of their countries could not keep the repression unleashed on the protesters a secret; they let the world know of it and bolstered the cause of the demonstrators. As Courtney C. Radsch informs us, “As the uprisings unfolded throughout 2011, a dramatic rise in social media usage occurred, with the number of Facebook users increasing by 68 percent between January and November, a doubling from the prior year that represented a penetration rate of about 10 percent of the population and made it one of the fastest-growing regions on Facebook.”¹⁵ Twitter had been similarly experiencing rapid adoption in the region. The number of Twitter users in the Arab countries had grown from around 3,000 in 2009 to around 40,000 by mid-2010. The result of all the cyberactivism for the women of the region, according to Radsch was that:

The translation of online experiences and relationships into the “real world” blurred the lines between public and private life, and provided new and varied opportunities for women to expand their circles and interact with people they never could have otherwise. Such translation also contributed to attempts to claim control over the articulation of the female identity. Feminist reinterpretations clashed with conservative traditionalists seeking to maintain hegemonic control over the representation of women and their proper roles in society. Blogs and social media made the invisible visible, gave voice to the

¹⁵ Courtney C. Radsch, “Unveiling the Revolutionaries: Cyberactivism and the Role of Women in the Arab Uprisings” (2012), accessed January 31, 2022, <https://scholarship.rice.edu/handle/1911/91851>.

voiceless, and embodied a commitment to free expression and *ijtihad*, or independent judgment.¹⁶

Arab women refused to be cowed when entrenched old regimes sought to quell the outpouring of discontentment with heavy use of the baton. Protesting women in Egypt, for example, were beaten and had their clothes ripped off but their commitment to their cause did not dampen in the least.¹⁷ Those were indeed heady days for Arab women, as a brief overview of their role in the ‘Arab Spring’ in the various Arab states would demonstrate.¹⁸

Egyptian women’s vocal presence on *Tahrir* square did not come as a surprise for those acquainted with their twentieth-century history. It was on the same square that Egyptian women had marched along with their menfolk to drive the British out of their country during the 1920s. The political participation of Egyptian women was due to the efforts of the charismatic Huda Sha’rawi who founded the Egyptian Feminist Union in 1923. The main objective of the union was getting voting rights for the women of Egypt. The Union also unambiguously rejected the veil as a hindrance to the complete emancipation of Egyptian women. It was also due to the efforts of the Union that a law was passed in Egypt stipulating a minimum age of marriage for girls. The Union also sought to forge links with feminists in other Arab countries and organized two Arab Women’s Conferences in 1938 and 1944. The latter resulted in the founding of the Arab Feminist Union. Egyptian women made steady gains over the 1950s and became one of the most liberated in the Arab world. President Nasser encouraged the women of his country to study, work and participate in politics. Egypt became the first Arab country to elect a woman to its parliament in 1957.¹⁹

Egyptian women, thus, had a rich legacy of political participation to look back upon when the first trickle of protestors began to converge on *Tahrir* square. According to Viola Raheb and Ulrike Bechmann, the Egyptian women who joined the protestors were not motivated just by the desire to overthrow Mubarak. Instead, they looked to “fundamentally change the political system.”²⁰ A few days after the ouster of President Mubarak, on the occasion of International Women’s Day on 8 March 2011, thousands of Egyptian women gathered on Tahrir square. Among other things, they demanded that the new Egyptian constitution be drafted with the full involvement of women and that any legislative change in the future must be mindful of the question of gender equality. Egyptian women participated enthusiastically in the elections that were held to form a constituent assembly for their country. The Egyptian voters, however, refused to vest their trust in the women candidates and only six were successful in entering the one hundred-member constituent assembly.²¹ The aftermath of the revolution, thus, was not as rewarding for Egyptian women as they had

¹⁶ Ibid., 8.

¹⁷ Ibid., 36.

¹⁸ Moaddel, M. “The Arab Spring and Egyptian Revolution Makers: Predictors of Participation” Population Studies Center Research Report 12-775, September, 2012 in Reza Jamali, *Online Arab Spring: Social Media and Fundamental Change* (Chandos Publishing, 2014).

¹⁹ Hilal Ali Eddin, *The Evolution of the Egyptian Political System, 1805–2005* (Cairo: Center for Political Studies and Research, 2006).

²⁰ Dürkop et al., *Women’s Empowerment in the Arab Spring*, Raheb, Viola and Ulrike Bechmann. “Women’s Political Protests in the “Arab Spring in.

²¹ Mara Revkin and Yussef Auf, “Beyond the Ballot Box: Egypt’s Constitutional Challenge,” *Washington: Atlantic Council* (2012): 11.

hoped it to be. Nevertheless, in the Egyptian Constitution of 2012, women have been granted several significant rights. It includes the right to assume all high offices, including judicial ones and the right to pass on citizenship to their children. The constitution also reserves one-quarter of the seats in the elected councils for women.²²

The women of Tunisia are the kindred of Egyptian women, having been bestowed with a wide array of rights and freedoms following the independence of their country. Habib Bourguiba, the father of modern Tunisia and its President from 1956-1987, promulgated the revolutionary Code of Personal Status which abolished polygamy and gave Tunisian women the right to judicial divorce.²³ He also encouraged Tunisian women to discard the veil which they did almost universally over the 1950s and 60s. By the 1970s, Tunisia had its own home-grown feminist movement which produced two organizations – the Association of Tunisian Women for Research and Development (AFTURD) and the Tunisian Association of Democratic Women (ATFD). The activists of these organizations were frequently harassed in dictatorial Tunisia, but they worked with a steady dedication to make Tunisian women more aware of their rights, both at home and in the workplace.

Thus, as in case of Egyptian women, the political activism of Tunisian women during the Jasmine revolution emerged from many decades of political education and social emancipation. They too, like their Egyptian sisters, did not quietly return to their homes and jobs once the autocrat, Ben Ali, was successfully overthrown. Like Egyptian women, they strove to consolidate the successes of the Tunisian revolution and expand the scope of the rights they already had. How keen they were on keeping the revolution from being hijacked by the right was apparent when they held a large demonstration at the airport to express displeasure at the return to Tunisia of the till then exiled chairperson of the Islamic an-Nahda party.²⁴ Tunisian women also struggled to change the electoral laws that were being put in place for a future Tunisian parliament. They ensured that the electoral rolls must have men and women in equal numbers.²⁵ Tunisian women activists were ably supported by Prof. Dr. Lila Labidi who headed the Ministry for Women in the Tunisian transitional government. Elections to form the Tunisian constituent assembly were held in November 2011 and saw 49 women candidates being elected to a 217 member house. 43 of these 49, however, were members of the Ennahda party.²⁶ Tunisian women's aspirations, thus, stood a real danger of being hijacked and stymied by political right. The Ennahda party took almost six months to declare that it would retain Article I of the Tunisian constitution and that the constitution

²² Ellen McLarney, "Women's Rights in the Egyptian Constitution: (Neo)Liberalism's Family Values," *Jadaliyya - جادلية*, accessed January 31, 2022, <https://www.jadaliyya.com/Details/28666>.

²³ Charrad, Mounira M. "Cultural Diversity Within Islam: Veils and Laws in Tunisia", in Herbert L. Bodman and Nayyirah Tawhidi, *Women in Muslim Societies: Diversity Within Unity* (Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1998).

²⁴ Eleanor Beardsley, "In Tunisia, Women Play Equal Role In Revolution," *NPR*, January 27, 2011, sec. Africa, accessed January 31, 2022, <https://www.npr.org/2011/01/27/133248219/in-tunisia-women-play-equal-role-in-revolution>.

²⁵ Written Mounira M Charrad and Amina Zarrugh, "The Arab Spring and Women's Rights in Tunisia," *International Relations* (n.d.): 6.

²⁶ Eileen Byrne, "The Women MPs Tipped to Play Leading Roles in Tunisia's New Assembly," *The Guardian*, October 28, 2011, sec. World news, accessed January 31, 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/oct/29/women-mps-tunisia-government>.

would eschew any reference to the *Sharia*. Despite this minor respite, Salafist forces have been increasingly getting powerful in Tunisia. The Tunisian Salafists are demanding that separate prayer rooms be maintained for their country's women and that women students in the universities should enter examination centers wearing the *Niqab*.²⁷

As the 'Arab Spring' unfolded, perhaps the most radical of all gestures made by Arab women agitators came from the women of Yemen. They burned their veils in the middle of Yemen's capital, Sana'a, and called for the removal of President Saleh. In Yemen, protests also brought to the fore the feisty young lawyer Karman Tawakkul, the winner of the Nobel Peace Prize 2011. Besides, the protests in Yemen revealed an unusual keenness on the part of political parties to push more and more women to the van of demonstrations, primarily because of the reason that the presence of women seemed to give the protests greater legitimacy.

Unlike their Egyptian and Tunisian counterparts, Yemeni women do not have much of a history of political participation to look back upon. Before the unification of the country in 1990,²⁸ women were encouraged to participate in public events in socialist South Yemen. In the north, however, women never registered a presence in politics and in public spheres. Following the unification of Yemen, the relatively progressive culture of the south failed to impact the north. The constraints suffered by the women of North Yemen, thus, remained. Legally, however, the constitution of the country does not countenance discrimination against women. Article 24 of the Yemeni constitution does assure all citizens political, economic, cultural and social equality, but in reality, Yemeni polity and society are dominated by Muslim Yemeni men. Women and religious minorities find the Yemeni system hard to deal with. Yemeni women, as a result, have been deprived of their share in the political system following the overthrow of Saleh. The demand made by the Women's Conference of Yemen in March 2012 that 30 per cent seats to be reserved in the Yemeni parliament for women has till date not been met.²⁹

It is considered that Bahrain has been pioneering women empowerment since the beginning of the 20th century. Public participation of women in the state of Bahrain began as early as 1924. Bahrain witnessed its first municipality elections which distinctively entitled the women in participate. Even the women of most of the countries in the world including Britain's did not have the right to vote. It was one of the earliest countries to found a school for girls in 1928. During the 1950s, Bahraini women studied in Egypt, and Lebanon to become school teachers and principals. The first hospital-based Nursing School was established in 1959 there. College of Medical Science was established which created opportunities for Bahraini women to practice as nurses. During that era women who studied were able to profess as heads of various departments, deans of colleges and universities, and

²⁷ Thomas A. Bass, "How Tunisia Is Turning Into a Salafist Battleground," *The Atlantic*, last modified June 20, 2013, accessed January 31, 2022, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2013/06/how-tunisia-is-turning-into-a-salafist-battleground/277058/>.

²⁸ North Yemen or the Yemen Arab Republic was founded after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire in 1918. South Yemen at that time was a British colony. It became the People's Republic of South Yemen following the departure of the British in 1967; the name was later changed to the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen in 1970. The two Yemens unified as the Republic of Yemen on May 22, 1990

²⁹ *The Status of Women in the Middle East and North Africa (SWMENA) Project 12* (2010).

as leading professors. Bahrain became the first Arab Gulf State to have trade unions, the second to have a newspaper after Saudi Arabia and the first to have a formal civil association for women. Bahrain was the first Gulf state to establish social organizations for women in 1955.³⁰ It had very active social and political clubs in the 1950s and 1960s and has a tradition of active socio-political and cultural discussions at its *Majalis* which are regular social gatherings held at homes and community centers, women organize their own *Majlis* separately.

Bahrain is one of the most open Arab societies with liberal culture particularly concerned with women's issues. Women are not obliged to observe traditional Islamic attire which includes covering the hair and possibly more, though they prefer to do so out of their own choice and courtesy.³¹ In 2005, the Royal University for Women at Riffa became the first international university dedicated solely to women. With an understanding of Bahraini women's background and their position in hand, it is now possible to approach and analyze the recent development in a better way.

Today, Bahraini women play prominent roles in diverse fields of the workforce. They become leading members of authoritative organizations, decision-makers, active participants of the public field as health professionals, teachers, and ministers. Besides, they serve in the private sector as businesswomen, executives, bankers, and entrepreneurs. They exert a positive force in the state machinery through their accomplishments and moving beyond the traditional confinements of home.

The gender wage gap is larger among non-Bahraini than Bahraini citizens. Bahraini men earn an average of Bahraini Dinar (BHD) 691 per month and women BHD 676, whereas non-Bahraini men earn BHD 221 per month and women BHD 189.³² Still, there are large differences in-between different employments, for example, Bahraini women have taken remarkable strides ahead as professionals. About 39.2 percent of adult Bahraini women were employed in 2013.³³ Unfortunately, they still suffer discrimination at the workplace. They, as a result, earn noticeably less than their male colleagues. In the Bahraini "public sector", the average monthly salary of women is 643 dinars while for men it is 706 dinars. Things are worse in the private sector where on average women earn a monthly salary of 307 dinars as against the 454 dinars earned by men.³⁴ The unequal compensation structure is evidence of that.

Politically things are getting changed albeit slowly. The 2002 constitution granted women the vote as well the right to contest in elections. In 2002, six women unsuccessfully contested in the Council of Representatives elections. The country had to wait four more years for its first woman to be Member of Parliament. In 2006, Latifa al-Gaoud became the country's first woman parliamentarian.³⁵ Only she was elected to the parliament again in 2010

³⁰ Anju Malhotra, Sidney Ruth Schuler, and Carol Boender, "Measuring Women's Empowerment" (n.d.): 59.

³¹ Fakir Al Gharaibeh, "Women's Empowerment in Bahrain" 12 (2011): 19.

³² Danish Trade Union, Council for International Development Cooperation. "Bahrain: Labour Market Profile-2014

³³ <http://data.un.org/CountryProfile.aspx?crName=BAHRAIN>. Accessed on May 18, 2016

³⁴ Danish Trade Union, Council for International Development Cooperation. "Bahrain: Labour Market Profile-2014. <http://www.ulandssekretariatet.dk/sites/default/files/uploads/> Accessed on May 16, 2016

³⁵ Bahrain Factsheet "Bahrain Women – Living and Working in Bahrain" May 2013

but three in 2014 election. Although Latifa Al Qaoud was the first woman MP elected in the GCC, she ran both times unchallenged and represented scarcely populated and remote islands of Al Hawar. The example of politics represents an area where there is strong resistance to change. Nonetheless, the participation of women in elections had an important effect on Bahraini society. In 2010 onwards the level of social acceptance of women candidates increased.

Like its neighbors, Bahrain felt the impact of the ‘Arab Spring.’ The uprising in Bahrain, however, was not without precedent. Unlike Egypt and Tunisia which had been quiescent for many decades before being swept into political tumult by the torrents of the ‘Arab Spring, in Bahrain political upheavals were not a novelty. It is important to emphasize the differences between the Bahraini "Day of Rage" and upheavals in other parts of the Arab World. In fact, Bahrain was sporadically shaken by waves of unrest since its independence in 1971 but Bahraini opposition became more vocal in their pursuit for rights in the 2000's.³⁶

Thus, besides the history of political protests, the Bahraini masses seem to have drawn confidence from the new range of political rights that were conferred on them over the 2000s. Since the Kingdom of Bahrain adopted the National Action Charter in 2001, the range of freedoms available to the Bahrainis has expanded. The constitution was adopted by Bahrain in 2002 guarantees equality between women and men in political, social, cultural, and economic spheres. This ‘equality’, however, is contingent upon the provisions of Islamic canon law and is valid only if countenanced by it.

The fact is that Bahrain has no codified status law and matters of marriage divorce, custody, and inheritance are decided by special family courts. They are separate for Shi’as and Sunnis. These courts are often presided over by conservative judges who make arbitrary interpretations of Islamic law.³⁷ Women, generally, are at the receiving end of their whims and caprices. Bahraini women also cannot hand down citizenship to their foreign spouses or to the children they have with them. Bahraini men, on the other hand, can do so.³⁸ Women are constrained by certain other legal limitations. A woman’s testimony in a Shari’a court carries only half the weight of a man’s testimony.³⁹ There is no specific law to redress sexual violence. Though rape is punishable by life imprisonment, marital rape carries no punishment at all. A rapist, in fact, can even escape punishment if agrees to marry his victim. Domestic violence, which is otherwise believed to be common, is rarely reported or talked about by women who suffer it. Nevertheless, in recent times a number of civil society groups and NGOs seeking to lend support to the victims of domestic violence have emerged. Thus, the 2011 uprising in Bahrain is part of a long and perpetual series of unrest.”⁴⁰

At the beginning of response to the call to protest, the Bahraini government tried to dissuade the protestors and weaken mob interest: it placed check posts, barricades and increased security forces around the capital, King Hamad Al-Khalifa announced increases in

³⁶ Toumi, Habib. Bahrain activist at helm of human rights society”, Gulf News, March 21, 2010

³⁷ May Seikaly. “Woman and religion in Bahrain: An emerging identity”, in Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad, *Islam, Gender, & Social Change* (Oxford University Press, c1998).

³⁸ Magdalena Karolak, “Bahraini Women in the 21st Century: Disputed Legacy of the Unfinished Revolution,” *Journal of International Women’s Studies* 13, no. 5 (December 20, 2012): 5–16.

³⁹ The Bahrain Center for Human Rights. “Family Law in Bahrain”, February, 2014. p.8

⁴⁰ Karolak, “Bahraini Women in the 21st Century,” 5.

social spending as well as a gift of 1,000 Bahraini Dinar to every Bahraini citizen just before the days of protest.⁴¹ Notwithstanding, the protest set in motion as per scheduled and was met with immediate force in the form of tear gas, birdshot pellets and rubber bullets. Injuries and deaths sustained, the protest continued for weeks, as did the government's efforts to quell them. Nonetheless, participation of women in the movements was prominent during first month of greater freedom that challenged the typical stereotype of Muslim women presented in the western media.⁴² Magdalena Karolak writes that during the 2011 uprising women's participation took on a new, unique character than previous forms of opposition as they addressed mixed gender audiences gathered around Pearl Roundabout and literally led the movement."¹⁶ Participation of women became so palpable that female martyrdom became a leitmotif of the dissent's social media. Indeed women's efforts and input into the uprising were enormous and ubiquitous that elongated for years after the initial protest began.⁴³

It is apparent that the participation of Bahraini women in the events of the 'Day of Rage' and following movements were a natural outcome of their steady liberation from traditional roles over the previous decade, as well the keen awareness of issues they acquired in the roles of businesswomen and professionals. Karolak informs us, the protests centered around issues such as constitutional reforms and the deportation of naturalized citizens from Bahrain. The protesters also demanded the abdication of the king. The women activists, however, took advantage of the situation to raise issues important to women, such as the need for electoral quotas for women and the personal status law for Shiites.⁴⁴

To defuse tension and to resolve the issues raised, the Bahraini authorities began the National Dialogue, a series of debates, in July 2011. The participants demanded greater legal guarantees to protect women from domestic violence, parity of genders in the workplace along with a review of salaries of women in the private sector and greater political and economic empowerment of women. It was also demanded that Bahraini women be allowed to pass on their citizenship to the children they have with non-Bahraini men. Once the National Dialogue wound up to close, the government set up Equal Opportunities Units in governmental organisations, same are to be established in private organisations too in the near future. There is yet to be any progress on the other demands made in National Dialogue.⁴⁵ Nevertheless, Bahraini women increased their presence in the parliament when three women MPs were elected in the elections held in October 2011. Women now make up 11% of the lower house and 20% of the bicameral parliament.⁴⁶

Bahrain is a Shi'a dominating Sunni ruled state and political crisis is damaging the country's economy and social fabric. Sectarian (in this case Shi'a/ Sunni) tensions are flaring

⁴¹ Interview with a group of Al-Wefaq activists, Bahrain. 7 January, 2016

⁴² Interview with a group of scholars, University of Bahrain, Manama. 9 January, 2016

⁴³ Magdalena Karolak, "Between Women's Empowerment and Emancipation.," *Arabian Humanities. Revue internationale d'archéologie et de sciences sociales sur la péninsule Arabique/International Journal of Archaeology and Social Sciences in the Arabian Peninsula*, no. 1 (March 6, 2013), accessed January 31, 2022, <https://journals.openedition.org/cy/2108>.

⁴⁴ Bou, Hamoud S.M. "Amidst Unrest, Don't Forget Bahraini Women", Middle East Online, 23 February, 2011

⁴⁵ Habib Toumi. Bahrain activist at helm of human rights society", Gulf News, 21 March, 2010

⁴⁶ Bushehri, Faten and Anne Koopman. "Bahraini Politics: Where Are The Women?" The Bahrain Debate, June 24, 2015.

up in recent time. The sectarian discrimination is practised in different walks of life among Bahraini. The same practice is prevalent in employment, political participation, and other opportunities catered to women as well. Even though women participated in the popular events based on agendas broader than particular gender issues, the uprising resulted in opportunities to further empower women in the public sphere.

Kuwait has many firsts to its credit when it comes to granting women positions of authority. The tiny country was the first Arab Gulf state to appoint a woman university principal, a woman ambassador, a woman Permanent Representative and Head of Mission to the United Nations, and a woman delegate in the mission to the Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries (OAPEC).

Kuwait is considered the most democratic state in the region. It adopted its constitution in 1962, less than a year after the British left the country. It seems to be a liberal document, till one examines it closely. In 1999, for example, the constitution was repeatedly accused in many legal of openly discriminating against women. The constitution of Kuwait does declare that "Justice, Liberty, and Equality are the pillars of society." This might seem to mean that both men and women are covered by this declaration. But it is not quite so, as 'society' in Kuwait does not necessarily encompass both sexes. The next article of the constitution is inherently ambiguous and problematic in Article 29. This states that: "All people are equal in human dignity, and in public rights and duties before the law, without distinction as to race, origin, language, or religion⁴⁷." Constitutions of Arab countries interpret the word "*al-jins*" variously. The constitution of Kuwait takes the word to mean "race", while that of Egypt renders the word as "sex." It is possible that Dr. Othman, who was basing this article on one in the Egyptian constitution, intended the word to mean "sex." The discrepancy, then, can be traced to the discussion as to which meaning for the word "*al-jins*" was intended by the members of the Constitutional Council of the Kuwaiti Constituent Assembly in 1962.

Since 2000 several legal restrictions have been imposed on women's organizations in Kuwait. Elite and middle-class Kuwaiti women have been forming services organizations to help destitute or disadvantaged women for over five decades. The first such organization, Arab Women's Development Society (AWDS) was established in 1962, the Women's Cultural and Social Society (WCSS) followed in 1963. The Kuwait Women's Voluntary Society for Community Service (KWVSCS) was founded by the country's first lady in 1991 and other women's organizations came forward to encourage them to accede into the KWVSCS. Kuwaiti women have been active in Islamic groups since the 1980s. The most prominent among them are Bayadir al-Salam, a Sufi-type organization formed by upper-class women, and the Islamic Care Society.⁴⁸ Women, however, do not enjoy much agency in these bodies and leadership positions are denied to them.

It is significant that during the Iraqi occupation of their country, Kuwaiti women took great personal risks to be of help to their men folk. Buying and selling largely fell upon them

⁴⁷ Constitution of Kuwait. Art 29. https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Kuwait_1992.pdf?lang=en accessed on May 21, 2016

⁴⁸ Al-Mughni, Haya. "Women's Organizations in Kuwait." MER 198 - Gender and Citizenship in the Middle East, Spring, 1996

as men were more likely to be arrested or shot by the occupiers. Women, thus, came to play a vital role in the resistance movement. They transported weapons and food and often suffered torture, violation and death at the hands of the Iraqis. Soon after Kuwait's liberation from Iraqi occupation in 1992, raucous debates on gender issues broke out between the country's legislators and the government. Besides the political role of women, these parleys also centred around the reform of the Islamic Family Law. The debaters reinforced their arguments from vastly diverse reference points. One side argued pointing to the constitution which granted Kuwaiti women certain rights, while the other one appealed to religious sentiments and the roles for women that was prescribed over there.

When Kuwait earned its independence from Iraq's occupation, there was much hope among the women in the country for the adoption of constitutional measures to empower them. They staged demonstrations demanding political equality and even publicly burned their *abayas*.⁴⁹ When the Constitutional Council met and its debates commenced, their hopes were cruelly dashed. Gender issues did not figure in the discussions and the debates mostly occurred around the distinctions between "first-level" and "second-level" citizens. Kuwait ratified the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1994 and in 1999.

In May 1999 the Amir of Kuwait passed a decree granting women to vote. However, it still took six more years before the women of Kuwait were enfranchised. This happened when on May 16, 2005 the National Assembly of Kuwait ratified the enfranchisement of women by the margin of 35 to 23. Thus, the advocates of women's rights in Kuwait finally were triumphant. No woman candidate was successful in the 2006 and 2008 elections. In 2009 Kuwait elected four women to its parliament.⁵⁰

Kuwait was not impacted by the 'Arab Spring' per se. Nevertheless, political upheavals in Kuwait coincided with the progress of the spring in other Arab states and were tinged with their spirit. It all began with the dissolution of the Kuwaiti National Assembly in June 2012. Elected in 2009, the assembly was still a year away from completing its full term. The Kuwaiti Constitutional Court declared the dissolution of the Assembly unconstitutional after several members made a plaint to it. The opposition called for protests and by the end of June 2012 a crowd of many thousands was gathering outside the National Assembly and shouting 'Arab Spring' slogans. Among other things, they demanded that Kuwait become a constitutional monarchy in which the Prime Minister will be chosen by the Assembly and not appointed by the emir. The outcome of the Kuwaiti spring too was disappointing for the women of the country. In the elections that were subsequently held, not a single woman candidate could be successful.

⁴⁹ Olimat, Muhamad S. "Women and Politics in Kuwait." *Journal of International Women's Studies* 11(2), November, 2009

⁵⁰ Al-Nakib, Farah. "The Constitutionality of Discrimination: A Search for Women's Political Equality in Kuwait." in *Constitutional Reform and Political Participation in the Gulf* (Dubai: Gulf Research Centre. 2006).

CONCLUSION

The stereotypical image of Arab women in the minds of the non-Arab world – veiled and voiceless – was shattered forever with their active participation and protest in the Arab Spring. Also refuted was the belief that Islam denies women agency and spaces wherein they can articulate their own points of view. But, the outcome of the various Arab uprisings has been disappointing for women as they could not realize their aims fully. When they broke out, these agitations seemed to augur changes in societies and political systems which would grant greater agency and autonomy to them. There was, as a result, much enthusiasm about them in the non-Arab world also. That enthusiasm has since dissipated as the aftermath of the ‘Arab Spring’ has disheartened them. Initially, the ‘Spring’ was seen as a burgeoning of “sweeping grassroots movements” fated to replace “dictatorial governments with democratic systems.”⁵¹ Deniz Kandiyoti too identified a “post-Islamist” generation behind these uprisings, one “which both wishes to promote pious sensibilities in society and takes democracy seriously.”

As the autocrats vacated the bastions of authority, the conservatives gradually moved in to occupy them. As we saw above, women were at the forefront of agitations in every country which successfully overthrew autocratic regimes – be it Egypt, Tunisia, or Yemen. Recent history agonizingly reminds us that the massive occupation of public space by women during revolutions in no way guarantees their political participation. Although the situation of women varies across the region, threats to their human rights converge. Certain quarters of the intellectual world were apprehensive that the governments replacing the dictatorships would be theocratic but it was short-lived in most of the cases or averted.

Women are now confronting practices of exclusion and marginalization from public life, as well as acts of discrimination and violence perpetrated with impunity by extremist groups and security forces in some places. Were all those women participating in the ‘Arab Spring’ “who made sacrifices for the sake of a healthy society with just relationships between women and men” inspired by a utopian dream? At a time when conservative forces appear to be growing in some parts, it is vital that measures be adopted to set up equal rights between women and men as the very foundation of peaceful, progressive, and harmonious societies.

It needs to be underlined that the Arab and Western understandings of gender equality and women’s empowerment are not exactly incongruity with each other. In Arab-Muslim belief is that there are certain essential differences between men and women. Masculinity and Femininity, according to it, are solely biological and not social constructs as some intellectuals in the West academia argue. Therefore, values like feminine modesty and a woman’s need for male guardianship are axioms from an Arab-Islamic point of view. They have surfaced repeatedly through the course of Arab social and political history. Whether one likes them or not, these ideas are rooted too deep in the Arab psyche to be ignored. Hence, an analysis of Arab feminist movements will demonstrate how it is impossible to divorce religion from Arab social and political movements.

The problem with the western line of thinking is that it makes a hasty assumption that religion naturally impedes social change. This assumption betrays the lack of a sense of cultural relativism and fails to comprehend the complex relationship between religion and

⁵¹ "Arab Spring." Global Issues in Context Online Collection. Detroit: Gale, 2013. Global Issues in Context"

society in West Asia and North Africa. In fact, Arab feminists recognized this truth a long time ago. As we illustrated above, Arab feminism began as a secular movement that viewed religion as a tool of oppression. It gradually revised its philosophy and reconciled its ideas with Islamic tenets. Scholars like Deniz Kandiyoti, Fatima Mernissi and many Arab scholars vitally contributed to bringing this about. The Quran and the Hadiths are replete with the message of gender equality, so also the history of Islam which presents a very positive picture of gender relations. Scholars like Nikkie Keddie⁵² and Elizabeth Fernea⁵³ have studied several different Arabic-speaking tribes and communities distributed from the Maghreb to the Arab Gulf. Their effort has revealed that from the historical past women in the Arab world have played significant roles in politics, legal institutions, administration, and even warfare. Therefore, we would like to express our reservations on apprehensions and anxieties which are so vociferously articulated by western academia and media during the developments following the Arab Spring in Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen, and other Arab states.

REFERENCES

- Abu-Lughod, Lila. "Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving? Anthropological Reflections on Cultural Relativism and Its Others." *American Anthropologist* 104, no. 3 (2002): 783–790.
- Ali Eddin, Hilal. *The Evolution of the Egyptian Political System, 1805–2005*. Cairo: Center for Political Studies and Research, 2006.
- Badran, Margot. "Between Secular and Islamic Feminism/s: Reflections on the Middle East and Beyond." *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies* 1, no. 1 (March 1, 2005): 6–28.
- Bass, Thomas A. "How Tunisia Is Turning Into a Salafist Battleground." *The Atlantic*. Last modified June 20, 2013. Accessed January 31, 2022. <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2013/06/how-tunisia-is-turning-into-a-salafist-battleground/277058/>.
- Bayat, Asef. *Life as Politics: How Ordinary People Change the Middle East*. 1st edition. Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 2009.
- Beardsley, Eleanor. "In Tunisia, Women Play Equal Role In Revolution." *NPR*, January 27, 2011, sec. Africa. Accessed January 31, 2022. <https://www.npr.org/2011/01/27/133248219/in-tunisia-women-play-equal-role-in-revolution>.
- Bodman, Herbert L., and Nayyirah Tawḥīdī. *Women in Muslim Societies: Diversity Within Unity*. Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1998.

⁵² Barbara Harlow, "Women in Middle Eastern History: Shifting Boundaries in Sex and Gender. Nikki R. Keddie, Beth Baron Accommodating Protest: Working Women, the New Veiling, and Change in Cairo. Arlene Elowe Macleod Both Right and Left Handed: Arab Women Talk about Their Lives. Bouthaina Shaaban Woman's Body, Woman's Word: Gender and Discourse in Arabo-Islamic Writing. Fedwa Malti-Douglas Women and Gender in Islam. Leila Ahmed," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 20, no. 1 (October 1, 1994): 223–228.

⁵³ Amal Rassam, "Elizabeth W. Fernea, Ed., Women and the Family in the Middle East: New Voices of Change (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1985). Pp. 368.," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 19, no. 4 (November 1987): 507–508.

- Byrne, Eileen. "The Women MPs Tipped to Play Leading Roles in Tunisia's New Assembly." *The Guardian*, October 28, 2011, sec. World news. Accessed January 31, 2022. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/oct/29/women-mps-tunisia-government>.
- Charrad, Written Mounira M, and Amina Zarrugh. "The Arab Spring and Women's Rights in Tunisia." *International Relations* (n.d.): 6.
- Doumato, Eleanor Abdella, and Marsha Pripstein Posusney. *Women and Globalization in the Arab Middle East: Gender, Economy, and Society*. Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2003.
- Dürkop, Colin, Viola Raheb, Suna Güzin Aydemir, Ulrike Bechmann, and Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, eds. *Women's Empowerment in the Arab Spring: Selected Articles*. Ankara, 2012.
- El-Saadawi, Nawal. *Women and Sex*. Cairo: Dar El Hilal Publishers, 1969.
- Gharaibeh, Fakir Al. "Women's Empowerment in Bahrain" 12 (2011): 19.
- Haddad, Yvonne Yazbeck. *Islam, Gender, & Social Change*. Oxford University Press, c1998.
- Hafez, Sabry. "Intentions and Realisation in the Narratives of Nawal El-Saadawi." Edited by Nawal El-Saadawi, Catherine Cobham, Sherif Hetata, Georges Tarabishi, Basil Hatim, and Elisabeth Orsini. *Third World Quarterly* 11, no. 3 (1989): 188–198.
- Harlow, Barbara. "Women in Middle Eastern History: Shifting Boundaries in Sex and Gender." Nikki R. Keddie, Beth Baron Accommodating Protest: Working Women, the New Veiling, and Change in Cairo. Arlene Elowe Macleod Both Right and Left Handed: Arab Women Talk about Their Lives. Bouthaina Shaaban Woman's Body, Woman's Word: Gender and Discourse in Arabo-Islamic Writing. Fedwa Malti-Douglas Women and Gender in Islam. Leila Ahmed." *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 20, no. 1 (October 1, 1994): 223–228.
- Jamali, Reza. *Online Arab Spring: Social Media and Fundamental Change*. Chandos Publishing, 2014.
- Karolak, Magdalena. "Bahraini Women in the 21st Century: Disputed Legacy of the Unfinished Revolution." *Journal of International Women's Studies* 13, no. 5 (December 20, 2012): 5–16.
- . "Between Women's Empowerment and Emancipation." *Arabian Humanities. Revue internationale d'archéologie et de sciences sociales sur la péninsule Arabique/International Journal of Archaeology and Social Sciences in the Arabian Peninsula*, no. 1 (March 6, 2013). Accessed January 31, 2022. <https://journals.openedition.org/cy/2108>.
- Keddie, Nikki R. "Women in the Limelight: Some Recent Books on Middle Eastern Women's History." *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 34, no. 3 (2002): 553–573.
- Keddie, Nikki R., and Beth Baron, eds. *Women in Middle Eastern History: Shifting Boundaries in Sex and Gender*. Reissue edition. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993.
- Kulsum, Ummu. "Nawal El-Saadawi: Membongkar Budaya Patriarkhi Melalui Sastra." *Lentera* 3, no. 1 (2017): 14.
- Malhotra, Anju, Sidney Ruth Schuler, and Carol Boender. "Measuring Women's Empowerment" (n.d.): 59.
- McLarney, Ellen. "Women's Rights in the Egyptian Constitution: (Neo)Liberalism's Family Values." *Jadaliyya - جدلية*. Accessed January 31, 2022. <https://www.jadaliyya.com/Details/28666>.

- Mernissi, Fatima ; Lakeland. *The Veil and the Male Elite: A Feminist Interpretation of Women's Rights in Islam*. New York: Persues Book, c1991.
- Radsch, Courtney C. "Unveiling the Revolutionaries: Cyberactivism and the Role of Women in the Arab Uprisings" (2012). Accessed January 31, 2022. <https://scholarship.rice.edu/handle/1911/91851>.
- Rassam, Amal. "Elizabeth W. Fernea, Ed., Women and the Family in the Middle East: New Voices of Change (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1985). Pp. 368." *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 19, no. 4 (November 1987): 507–508.
- Revkin, Mara, and Yussef Auf. "Beyond the Ballot Box: Egypt's Constitutional Challenge." *Washington: Atlantic Council* (2012): 11.
- Setyawan, Mohammad Yusuf, and Owusu-Ansah David. "Veil (Niqâb) Problematics in Islamic Law Perspective; Religion or Culture? (Islamic Legal Approach)." *Al-Mada: Jurnal Agama, Sosial, dan Budaya* 4, no. 2 (August 1, 2021): 235–239.
- Sharabi, Hisham. *Neopatriarchy: A Theory of Distorted Change in Arab Society*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1992.
- Tiffany D, Reed. *Middle Eastern Women and Their Rising Impact on Society*" *Modern Middle Eastern Women*. Monticello: University of Arkansas, 2012.
- The Status of Women in the Middle East and North Africa (SWMENA) Project* 12 (2010).