



## New Media Discourses, Culture and Politics after the Arab Spring<sup>12</sup>

Alexandra Batonai<sup>3</sup>

The *Arab Spring* is a series of anti-government protests and revolts in the Middle East and North Africa, that began in 2010. Although the demonstrations were not equally successful in all countries, they all had the same objective: to express the economic and political grievances of the populace and to obtain social justice and democratic rights. Revolutionaries used the social media as a platform to mobilise the public and organise rebellions, hence it is indisputable that the social media played a particularly important role during the *Arab Spring*. Moreover, they also gave space to the subsequent online activism, that perpetuated the spirit of the *Spring* events. It is worth to explore how the situation has changed ten years after the uprisings with respect to human rights, politics, nationalism, identity, and public spaces; and how the media has contributed to these alterations. The *New Media Discourses, Culture and Politics after the Arab Spring: Case Studies from Egypt and Beyond* examines this topic from a scholarly perspective, seeking to dispel the clichés about the revolution.

The book was originally published in London by I. B. Tauris Publishing Company in 2022. Later it was reprinted in New York, Oxford, New Delhi, and Sydney. This project was made possible by the support of the Qatar National Research Fund.<sup>4</sup> The volume consists of ten articles written by prominent international scholars<sup>5</sup> and was edited by two distinguished academics: Dr Eid Mohamed<sup>6</sup> and Dr Aziz Douai.<sup>7</sup> In the introduction the editors provide the reader with a historiographic overview about the former studies regarding the *Arab Spring* and scrutinise three crucial themes: (1) the phenomenon of continuity and change in the Arab Uprisings, (2) the change in people's daily life following the Spring, (3) and a critique of dominant narratives about the change in the region. The end of the introduction includes a concise summary of each chapter.

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<sup>2</sup> Aziz Douai - Eid Mohamed (eds.): *New Media Discourses, Culture and Politics after the Arab Spring: Case Studies from Egypt and Beyond*. London: I. B. Tauris, 2022. ISBN 978-0-7556-4051-5. pp. 267.

<sup>3</sup> PhD Candidate at the Eötvös Loránd University; ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0008-7826-9348>; batonaiszandi@gmail.com

<sup>4</sup> It was established by the Qatari royal family to support original, competitively selected research projects.

<sup>5</sup> The authors of the book are Dr Aziz Douai, Dr Eid Mohamed, Dr Sahar Khamis, Dr Ehab H. Gomaa, Dina Abdel-Mageed, Dr Grant Bollmer, Dr Mustafa Menshawy, Azza El Masri, Dr Safa Elnaili, Dr Touria Khannous, and Hasnaa Mokhtar.

<sup>6</sup> Mohamed is an assistant professor of Arab - US cultural policy in the Comparative Literature Program at the Doha Institute for Graduate Studies.

<sup>7</sup> Douai is professor of journalism and the dean of the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research at the University of Regina.

Chapter 2 examines ways of countering gender violence in the countries of the Middle East and North Africa, through the example of ‘the Nude Revolution’ and makes a comparison between it and the ‘SlutWalk’<sup>8</sup> in the Western areas. Even though women’s rights were not the focus of the Arab Uprisings, the *Spring* raised the issues of women and their role in Arab societies. Nonetheless, the demonstrations had a tremendous drawback: in some countries female protesters were subjected to sexual harassment and physical abuse. In response to these horrible events, the Egyptian activist Aliaa Elmahdy<sup>9</sup> launched a new movement by posting her naked pictures online in 2011, with the message that her body belongs only to her. Soon, other Arab female activists, such as Tunisian Amina Sboui<sup>10</sup> started to follow this trend and created the so-called ‘Nude Revolution’. The purpose of this section is to determine whether radical feminist activism can be effective in the MENA region, by scrutinising the general reception of the social media contents of the above-mentioned feminist revolutionaries in the Arab world.

Chapter 3 seeks a response to the question “*Do Egyptians still care about the Arab Spring?*” In order to provide a research-based answer to this question, the authors of this study conducted both a quantitative and qualitative analysis based on approximately 120,000 news articles from the well-known Egyptian newspaper, *Almasry Alyoum*.<sup>11</sup> Thus, they gained a better understanding about how much Egyptians are still interested in the *Arab Spring*. The methodology of this research is multifarious. Emad Mohamed<sup>12</sup> and Eid Mohamed used morphological analysis, topic modelling, feature extraction, regression analysis, statistics, and topic association, among others.

Chapter 4 explains the context of the Egyptian political scene and reconstructs the history of the two major political actors in Egypt: The Muslim Brotherhood and the young revolutionaries. It explores how the two oppositional communities define themselves and tries to determine their identities by analysing their blog posts, online articles and press releases published between 2009 and 2016. The authors describe how these groups have changed the frames they use to identify themselves before, during, and after the *Arab Spring*.

Chapter 5 studies how online Islamic discourse can replicate offline authoritarian power structures. Dina Abdel-Mageed<sup>13</sup> and Grant Bollmer<sup>14</sup> examine the Facebook contents of famous Sunni Muslim preachers between 2013 and 2016 to show how they

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<sup>8</sup> SlutWalk was a series of demonstrations organised in several parts of the world to protest against blaming women’s attire for sexual violence.

<sup>9</sup> Aliaa Elmahdy is an Egyptian internet activist, who fights for women’s rights.

<sup>10</sup> Amina Sboui is a Tunisian women’s rights activist, who became famous by posting her nude photograph on Facebook with the message that “*My body is mine and not the source of anybody’s honour.*”

<sup>11</sup> in English translation: *The Egyptian Today*.

<sup>12</sup> Emad Mohamed is Senior Lecturer in Computational Linguistics and Translation Technology at the University of Wolverhampton

<sup>13</sup> Dina Abdel-Mageed is a PhD candidate at the School of Culture and Communication at the University of Melbourne.

<sup>14</sup> Dr Grant Bollmer is Associate Professor of Media Studies at North Carolina State University.



use their religious speech to justify the existing social order in the Arab world, and especially in Egypt. They argue that the persuasive power of religion is able to maintain the hegemonic power relations.

Chapter 6 unravels the ‘revolution of pronouns’ in interviews and autobiographies of former Muslim Brotherhood members, correlating with shifts in power and resistance within the organisation. In his research paper, Mustafa Menshawy<sup>15</sup> proves his hypothesis that there is a connection between the Muslim Brotherhood’s usage of the pronoun ‘I’ or ‘we’ and the changing of the political situation.

Chapter 7 represents the importance of the well-known, independent, digital pan-Arab website, Raseef22,<sup>16</sup> set up in 2013, as the voice of the *Arab Spring*. The original goal of this platform was to create an online safe space after the Arab Uprisings, where youth can share their perspectives on Arab realities without fear of censorship and persecution. This study engages with Habermas’s concept of the role of mass media in the public sphere and explores how the internet can provide a space for deliberative democracy. It analyses twelve articles from Raseef22 to show the nature of the public sphere emerging through this website. Subsequently, it concludes that Raseef22 has succeeded in preserving the spirit of the *Arab Spring*; and due to its linguistic hybridity, journalistic talents, and broad Arab and global audience, it could serve as an example for government-owned Arab media platforms to follow in the future.

Chapter 8 studies how Islamists and nationalists in Libya promoted their concepts of nationalism via Facebook after the downfall of the Qaddafi regime<sup>17</sup> in 2011. It also outlines the cyber battles of the two main opposing political orientations and examines their Facebook posts through critical discourse analysis. The article proves that Facebook plays a crucial role in the formation of Libyans’ national identity.

Chapter 9 provides a scholarly critique of Hanan Abdallah’s documentary, “In the Shadow of a Man.” This film shows us the life of four different Egyptian women (Wafaa, Badreya, Suzanne and Shahinda) from a feminist perspective, and it highlights the social, political, and economic struggles of Arabic women through their stories. Concomitantly, it familiarises the viewer with the historical context and the biggest challenges of the 2011 revolution. The main characters symbolise females with different ideological backgrounds. All of them embodies distinct types of Egyptian feminism, such as traditional, liberal, socialist, and religious. The documentary emphasises the diversity of Egyptian women and strives to promote their position in politics.

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<sup>15</sup> Dr Mustafa Menshawy is a former BBC reporter, who has joined to the Lancaster University’s SEPAD (Sectarianism, Proxies and De-Sectarianisation) in 2021.

<sup>16</sup> Its name means sidewalk22 in English, referring to the twenty-two Arab countries.

<sup>17</sup> 1969-2011

Finally, in the last chapter Hasnaa Mokhtar<sup>18</sup> studies the double-edged effect of the technical revolution in the Arab Gulf through the examples of Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. On the one hand, the online spaces can provide avenues for individuals and social movements to initiate local grassroots activism; but on the other hand, the states endeavour to gain supervision over these new online platforms to exert power and control over national public discourses. Beyond that, the new websites may reinforce gendered state violence. Last but not least, the researcher draws the readers' attention to the fact that the situation in the Arab Gulf countries is more complicated than the Western media portrays it. She argues that it is vital to allow the untold stories of minority feminists to emerge alongside the narratives of elitist feminists.

Overall, the *New Media Discourses, Culture and Politics after the Arab Spring: Case Studies from Egypt and Beyond* places the complex and multi-layered interactions between media, culture, and social protests before and after the *Arab Spring* in a new context. The strengths of this study are multiple. All of its articles are well-organised and follow a logical structure. Due to the vast array of authors, its content is protean. It is possible to claim that “*the book’s diversity of views and approaches is a testament to the diversity of the Arab world*” (p. 29.). Its language is not unnecessarily overcomplicated. Although each work in this volume is very thorough and state-of-the-art, the book remains understandable and exciting for the wider audience too. For this reason, I would warmly recommend it to everyone, who is interested in the history of MENA countries and feminist movements.

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<sup>18</sup> Hasnaa Mokhtar is Postdoctoral Associate at Rutgers University’s Center for Women’s Global Leadership. She is also an activist, who fights against gender-based violence.