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REVOLUTIONIZING THE BODY: EROS AND DEMOS IN POST-ARAB SPRING WOMEN WRITINGS

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ABSTRACT: *The successful political revolutionary transformations fulfilled by the Arab Spring of 2010-11, acted as a catalyst for synchronous cultural, social and sexual changes. The 'double revolution' heralded the emergence of the new woman, transitioning from the docile and conservative, into a concupiscent hermaphroditic rebel, who dares to demand her sexual rights and freedom, challenge the existing norms and disclose her sexual trauma, pleasures, and desires. The body is 'revolutionized' and instrumentalized to resist marginalization and to propound bodily and sexual rights. There is an attempt to establish a relation between the historical events and their literary portrayal. The gender perspective of the Arab Spring is analyzed through examples of Arab women artists, whose works in literature, graffiti, blogs or social media, reflect the changes in the 'Spring' woman's character, thought, and conceptualization of sex. Their opus epitomizes the new feminine subjectivities created through the intersection of gender, class, and nation.*

KEYWORDS: Arab Spring, Revolutions, Sex, Body, Freedom, Women, Rights, Gender

INTRODUCTION:

The Arab Spring (2010-11) sparked seismic transformations within the frameworks of despotism and the institutional patriarchal practices of authoritarianism. With the successful eradication of ossified political structures and sclerotic regimes, Arabs rediscovered their geopolitical mojo. Arab women, whose vocal fight for justice gave the revolutions a "feminist face" (El Said et al 109), have been similarly impacted by their 'Spring'. Moments of upheaval and transition offer opportunities for women to raise demands for rights and freedoms, and to challenge, subvert and re-signify the existing gender norms and sexed identities, which become malleable at these times of resistance. Arab women partook of this reshaping process, drawing on their national heritages and identities to legitimize their presence in the public sphere, which was utilized by women for dissent through creative iterations of demands for "spatial justice, 'activism by design', demonstrations, occupations and related spatial practices" (Watenpaugh 247). The very participation of Arab women was a challenge to the traditional idea of women as dependents and subordinates.

The openness, intellectual freedom and liberalism characterizing the post-revolutionary landscape paved the way for "countless private rebellions playing out" (El Feki 129) in the domains of gender and sexuality. Realizing that gender identity, and sexual culture are integral cornerstones in the democratic transformation process[i], and that sexual attitudes are entwined in myriad accretions of past and present, of religion, tradition, politics, economics, and culture, hence, sexuality started, along with issues of gender roles and identity, sexual orientation, pleasure, intimacy, eroticism, and reproduction, to sidle towards the centre stage, sharing the spotlight with the political and constitutional issues. Sex became a lens through which to examine the complex social landscape of the Arab world and a catalyst for change and liberation.

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This paper examines both faces of the revolution: Demos (political) as well as Eros (sexual). It sheds the light on the gender perspective of the Arab Spring, the way women bodies were appropriated and instrumentalized before and after the revolution, and the intersection of gender, class, and nation to create new feminine subjectivities. Taking gender dynamics and women's agency as a point of departure, the epistemological and ontological implications of sexualities in the socio-political transformations generated by the Arab Spring, are analyzed. Creative works by women are given as examples to demonstrate the post-Spring rupture in the perception of "sexed bodies" (El Said et al 232).

Background: Pre-Spring:

The Arab Spring brought to the forefront pre-revolution traits including: women victimization, marginalization, and subjugation under a code of societal conduct, patriarchal culture, and discriminative discourse, that advocated women's exclusion, invisibility and relegation to the domestic realm: "women should 'cover-up, shut -up'" (BBC). In the 2000s, sexual repression, which according to Foucault, is political (qtd in Kraidy 163), became rampant in Egypt, fueled by an explosive mix of unbridled capitalism, political corruption, religious recrimination, sexual frustrations and social injustices.

Policing women subjectivities, including sexual freedoms via religiously and socially imposed restrictions and imperatives that designated the ideal versus *the abe* (shameful); and which hindered freedom and equality. The toxic mix of culture and religion were used as a double whammy to launch "a litany of abuses" (Eltahawy 5) against women, to remind them that public space is a male prerogative. Viewed as a source of shame, sex was used as tool of subjugation, and was swept "under the prayer rug" (El Feki 25) to abide by the hypocritical social norms, which "cover up conversations about sexual freedom" and where "men who act like liberals outside the home, inside the home ... are no liberals" (BBC).

Religion was also deployed as a framework to reinforce "normative femininity" (Ferber et al 124) and to hold women "in perpetual bondage" (El Saadawi 1991). The reigning ultra-conservative belief was that women are "the walking embodiment of sin" (Eltahawy 10), whose sexual insatiability must be restrained. A pious woman should erase herself and a woman's body should be the canvas upon which she signals her "acquiescence to conservatism and patriarchy" (ibid 76). A feminist activist proclaims that: "In the Muslim context, patriarchy, despotism, and authoritarianism go hand to hand.... the conflict (is) between authoritarianism ... patriarchy... with gender equality, feminism, and democracy" (BBC). In her analysis of gender in Islam, Fatma Mernissi stresses that in the territorial Muslim sexuality, each sex is allocated a restricted space. Mernissi argues that virginity is a manifestation of a male preoccupation in societies plagued with inequality and scarcity: "The concept of honour and virginity locate the prestige of a man between the legs of a woman" (in Ferguson 183).

The father is the representative of the authoritarian state, keeping his submissive dependents in line by "clamping down on their sexual urges" (Reich 38). This resulted in paralysis of "the rebellious forces… by inhibiting sexual curiosity and sexual thinking in a child, ... the goal of sexual suppression is that of producing (beings)...who will submit to it in spite of all misery and degradation"(ibid 24). Reich considers sexual repression and suppression to be the hallmark of any dictatorship (ibid 211). Hence, the first step to wholesale social reform should be making people aware of their sexual subjugation.

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Enduring the misogyny of a male-dominated society, which catered for male sexuality, while delegating and negating female sexuality, bodily integrity and reproductive rights, resulted in a condition where, "the brains of women and men have been ruined," and they have "been brainwashed to accept it" (El Saadawi 2016). Bearing the brunt of sexual guilt, hypocrisy and double standard regarding sexuality, many women developed split or multiple personalities: one that is rebellious and revels in autonomy and accomplishments, the other piously and obediently conforming to the codes of behavior. Operating "in a culturally determined maternal autopilot" (ibid 201), they conformed, internalized, and reproduced submissiveness to their daughters.

The Arab culture idolized "the god of virginity" (Eltahawy 114), and at its altar, society sacrificed "girls' bodily integrity and the right to pleasure, as well as their right to justice in the face of sexual violation. According to El Saadawi: "Arab society still considers that fine membrane which covers ... the external genital organs (as) the most cherished and most important part of a girl's body, ... much more valuable than one of her eyes, or an arm, or a lower limb" (El Saadawi, 1980). Many women felt that their hymens belong to their families, or to society and that they are merely "a vagina on demand" (Eltahawy 162).

LITERATURE REVIEW

New 'Spring' Art:

'The body" was a common thread in the massive trove of images and jokes, essays and songs, videos and conversations in the Arab world through 2011 and 2012. Artistic expression became in itself a tool of protest and resistance. The poetics of the Revolution focus on expressing women revolt and protest. The new forms of expression manifested the multiple gender subject positions. With a different discourse and lexicon, the alliances of the new generation is transversal', as it describes "new terrains of open cooperation between activist, artistic, social and political practices" (Abouelnaga 40). The new radical language, derived from popular culture is charged with protest and dissent, and is articulated using new syntax and creative means of expression. The new revolution wrote, sprayed, drew, performed and expressed gender in the most controversial way.

Women turned physical violation into a tool of rewriting the culture of the body. By writing their "body language" (Butler 135), 'Spring' women writers "politicized the private (sex) and employed bodies as an alphabet of resistance in opposition to the ... the grammar of violence" (Abouelnaga 46). By aiming their well-honed pens at the most sacrosanct taboos of sex, they called for the liberation of the body from the repressive injunctions. The authors' multiple voices articulate the female experience and speak of the relations between the sexes, the pull of traditional values and the lure of new needs, love, and sexuality, restrictions and freedoms. The mosaic portraits of women bespeak the dilemmas and realities of Arab women; conflict-ridden and ever-questioning women in encumbered relationships, or oppressed women with stunted or truncated lives, as well as self-assertive and free-style women.

Feminist historiography, or gender narratives, is used by oppressed and marginalized women fiction to disclose their intimate daydreams through the use of fictional identities. These stories highlight the role and importance of sexuality in defining the identity and rights of women. The new voices merge the private and public with the personal and political, thus breaching and transgressing all taken-for-granted boundaries.

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A new genre emerged by the end of 2010, of writing about the wrongs suffered by abused women. The recurrent and defining themes of this genre are force and bondage, and the key vocabularies are consent/coercion, choice and (un)freedom. Literary scholar Dohra Ahmad has called this genre "pulp nonfiction"(Abu -lughod 87). There is mobilization of the pornography of bondage and women are objectified and "eroticized victims" (ibid 103).

METHODOLOGY AND MATERIAL

The researcher adopted the combined paradigm or the mixed research approach, which is based on philosophical assumptions as well as methods of inquiry. Primary and secondary data collection methods have been used for this text based, descriptive study. Various sources have supplied the material , such as collected scholarly literary manuscripts, multi-lingual reference books, journals and articles. Electronic sources such as online scholarly journal articles, website and interviews, were also used. Visual artistic works provided additional source.

Analysis:

The following works from Egypt, Lebanon, and the Emirates portray the changes in the new Spring women's character, thought and output, and present a prism through which the historical events and transformation can be viewed:

Reem Bassiouny *Doctora Hanaa' (Doctor Hanaa')*[ii]

In *Doctora Hanaa'*, the protagonist, Dr. Hanaa' is a strong-willed, self-sufficient and independent scholarly woman. As a child, she has suffered the "psychological and physical terrorism" (42) of gender discrimination. Now a powerful woman, who is "created for leadership" (155), she has overcome and risen to the zenith of her academic career. The day she achieves the post of head of the university department is a "day of great victory. It is a day that history should write. She intends to change history" (65) and to enjoy seeing "everyone ... enter her office like cattle that follows the shepherd submissively" (65). Her position and her single status, give her "the power to acquire anything and everything" (89). She feels free, "unfettered ..., the burden has gone from her back, and pain and shame disappeared from her self" (32). She has the power to "write her history from this moment, ... of triumph, ... her life is in her hands and completely under her control." She notes: "how lovely it is for a woman to grasp and control her destiny! ... She is capable of anything, and everything" (114). There is a parallelism drawn between Hanaa's character and destiny on one hand, and Egypt's, which she feels she reigns, with "Egyptian subjects on whom she will bestow "counseling, direction, assistance and knowledge" (85). She intends to keep both "her life and Egypt's in her hands "(64). Hanaa's character contrasts with other female characters such as Maysa, who is a" subordinate of man" (116), and who believes that "a woman is controlled by her nature and her body. The woman is captive of this treacherous body... she has no will" (118). The religion-obsessed Laila, on the other hand, uses religion as a weapon for "terrifying and braking man" (126).

Now on her fortieth birthday, Hanaa' is obsessed with one idea: "she has to lose her virginity, promptly" (8). Hanaa' confesses that "her virginity has come to strangle her and knock her down. Her virginity, which she has protected for years, became her archenemy, but then she is faced with the question; "Who deserves to unseal doctor Hanaa's virginity?"(8) Hanaa's dilemma is her stance towards men. She has never been "fragile, and no man has ever dared to

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penetrate (her).... she hates defeat and weakness" (26). She is a powerful woman, who "took initiatives... she loved a challenge and victory!"(35). She emulates Shahrazad whose "life (has been) surrounded by and tied to man and dependent on man, and her neck is in a man's hand.... either to be crushed under his feet or to raise her to the highest ranks, and set her on a throne next to him... either to set her free or to keep her captive forever" (145). In a world "governed by man", she admires Shahrazad's skillful innovation and "wishes she could wake up to find Shahrazad has ceased relating...life has not passed, ...men have not taken control, and history is written by women" (145 -146).

Hanaa' rejects the domineering male because she has frequently "felt man's arms controlling and strangling, his voice terrifies and swears.... she has seen his tyranny", and has come to "loathe the eastern man, and his violence and injustice"(41). Realizing that "this is the time of predation,... the time of tyrants and colonizers" (9), she adopts a belligerent, controlling attitude towards Khaled, the younger lecturer she chose to relinquish her virginity to. Once he serves his purpose, Hanaa' believes she can get rid of him with the same indifference she got rid of her virginity. She has mixed feelings towards Khaled; "her emotions were mixed between yearning, guilt, and embarrassment for being a woman, as well as feeling the confidence, power, and ability to acquire anything and everything" (89). There is also the feeling that she is "a vampire, sucking this young man's blood" (89). Sometimes she loved "his generosity and his manhood...other times she hated his eastern-hood and his backwardness" (103) as well as his desire to "embezzle her history and to re-write it, to snatch the leadership" (142). Khaled, on the other hand, represents the "Eastern man with his history, his tale, his defeat and his torture, written by someone else... he expects to be served by his wife and he serves everyone else" (163). Khaled is the product of an environment where women are perceived as men's servants. His "mind can't grasp that a woman is a human" (223). Hanaa' considers both her femininity and Khaled, as her weak point, and that she was "idiotic when she yearned for him as whores and prostitutes, was idiotic the day she let the woman inside her scream and revolt" (179). She "needs a man to bond her because she is Eastern, she needs sweet honey... lots of it, to stick to her place forever."(229). Both Hanaa' and Khaled loved Eastern sweets, even Khaled's Adam's apple "stick(s)to her imagination, like the sticking of honey to her hands" (230). 'Eastern sweets' are used metaphorically as a symbol of addiction to carnality and weakness, common to most Easterns: "we are bound by fear of mothers and eastern sweets... distrusting the system, despair, sarcasm and searching for identity" (231).

Khaled's character is similarly problematic. He is the stereotypical Eastern man who wants an obedient woman who never challenges him.: "she must not have any strong opinions that are hard to change. How ugly is a woman with objective and opinion? She cuts man like an electric knife" (159). Khaled fathoms the complexities of Hanaa's character. Like a "gigantic truck "she is uncontrollable" (35). She is besotted by history, leadership, and authority (93). What bothers him is her refusal to "act as a woman" He questions her: "will you lose your power if you act like a woman one day?" For him, it is impossible for any woman to be both a man's "lover (and) boss" (212).

Bassiouny raises a critical question, "Egypt: whose country are you. Khaled's or Dr. Hanaa's?" (231), thus emphasizing the contradictory "resolution, surrender, stoicism, and infatuation", which comprise "Egyptanality" (218-9). It also highlights the struggle in the new Egypt between the traditional, hegemonic and despotic current, and the new budding endeavor to be a decision-maker and "writer of one's personal history" (219). Despite the clash of Hanaa' and Khaled's wills, and Hanaa's "wish to break him... to defeat him" (225), the conclusion promises

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co-existence and amalgamation, as Hanaa' "tangled her hands into his hands, and she closed her fingers on his fingers powerfully, as though she intends to imprison him in a dark prison between her fingers and the curves of her life" (239).

Janna Fawwaz el Hasan *Ana, Hiya Wa-al-ukhrayat (Me, Her and the Others)*[iii]

The heroine of *Ana, Hiya We-al-ukhrayat,* suffers from deprivations and disillusionment as a wife and daughter. A traumatized, depressive character, she is the product of a dysfunctional family, and an abusive unfulfilling marital relationship, who is aware that she: "never dared to disobey the expected, (she) became, more cruelly, a copy of (her) mother, if (her) father's negligence dwarfed his wife, Samy's (the husband) possessiveness ... his enforced control, and constant assaults, changed (her) to a chicken on which the other feeds and grows" (54). Her mother "was ruined by her lust", and comparably, she is "governed by internal lust, before (she) became even aware of desire, (she) was transformed into a tool for Samy's enjoyment and (her) own destruction. With him, (she) fulfills nothing but the scent of death" (54). Her sufferings are reflected in the general disillusionment of the whole city:

> *I watched the city at those few hours, and I experienced double feelings*
>
> *towards it, nostalgia and empathy, on one side, wrath and disgust*
>
> *on the other side. ,.... everything around me transformed into iron chains,*
>
> *and I hear the wailings of people who desperately need care and*
>
> *consideration. The city poor lived here, with dreams that can't touch*
>
> *the reality holes, ...with desires unaware of being desires. (49)*

In an early conversation, her mother projects and transposes her views of Arab man-woman dilemmatic relationship, rooted in centuries-old heritage of dominance, subjugation, surrender, and stoicism:

> *-All men ... want to be heroes, and when they can't, they take it out on women.*
>
> *-And why does the woman take it?*
>
> *-Because God created us to take it… haven't you seen how we bear babies in our bellies?*
>
> *-He made her a fellow creator.*
>
> *-If God loved women as much, why did He make all the prophets, men? (63)*

Gradually, she began to mutate into her mother; "the only woman (she) used to refuse to be" (50). Her conjugal relationship with her husband became an existential combat, where she "fluctuates between being and non-being" (54). Feeling chained, she used to "crumble in front of him, and give him this absolute authority, which he needed to prove his possession of me. Hence he robbed me of a separate identity. He was able to knead me and frame me any way he likes" (49). Through his "suffocation, ... and his control over (her) life" (66), Samy strips her of her "defenses, (her) family, religiosity, and not- religiosity, (her) body and (her) entity" (57). During their intercourses, Samy transforms her into "a homeless body, so I surrendered to him, losing any ecstasy, because during it I become that body, that nothing" (52). Every time he

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pierced her, she "felt he had snatched me from (her) father's arms, and turned (her) into his obedient doll" (57). Any physical contact between them gave her the feeling of "a huge black hole in life, a woman without scent" (57). As a result, Samy became a man she abhorred and from whom she wished to "free (her) identity that was planted in him (53).

Later, however, she rebels, and the previously docile 'doll', is "transformed ... into a ferocious animal"(45). She matures physically, emotionally, mentally and sexually: "my ardent sexual cravings are no longer based on surrender and fear of initiative, waiting for a gesture from the man. I began to take initiative and take control, and make love until I reach orgasm. I don't abandon my body until it reaches the zenith of joy" (30). She insists on "having (her) true special colors" (51). As a" seeker of admittance"(49), she escapes from "the daily entrapment" (77) into extra-marital illicit affairs, where she finds "comfort in the forbidden, in the inferior to which I descended.. because I felt nothing for my society but ... hallucination" (76). There is a clear resonance of the Arab Spring in the choice of the heroine's lover's name *'Rabee'* which translates into 'spring'. Both the heroine and the similarly frustrated character, Hala, justify their prurient escapades as proof of "existence, … to assert an entity" (43). Both women flee into men's arms to "wrap (themselves) in their bodies, and satisfy the thirst to admit the existence of someone named 'me'". Inside them both, there was a girl: "who was deprived of play, and everything around her was covered in cruelty" (31). Sinful affairs and salacious desires became the means of deliverance.

Maha Gargash *That Other Me*:

The novel is related from the perspective of two rebellious Emirati girls and covers various themes such as feminism, love, family, duty, and liberation. It offers a unique, inside insight at the patriarchal Emirati society and the little-known, ultra-conservative Khaliji culture.[iv] It is a tale of two cousins, Dalal and Mariam, who possess contradictory characters. Dalal -like her mother – has always been rebellious and dissident, Mariam, on the other hand, "was molded ...., obligated to follow the stifling rules her uncle - has drawn up to preserve … family's reputation in Dubai's conservative society … Always so reserved, so Emirati, so unlike (Dalal): the rebel flame of that same family" (34). Both girls are the victims of Dalal's "vindictive father and his cruel control tactics" (38), that afflict the girls with "humiliation, the horrible sense of having been used, violated, stripped of worth"(261). Majed is the epitome of the despotic, oppressive stereotypical Gulf alpha male and the girls' principal persecutor. He is a misogynist with a special loathing towards the strong-willed woman. When his first wife's "sweet demeanor, (is) replaced ...with a haughty sarcasm", that made him "want to break her, the thankless creature she'd become with her unrelenting demands" (106). Majed exerts a demonic physical, emotional and financial control over Dalal and Mariam. He proudly confesses that he has "overpowered them. I've broken them and slashed their resolve. I am in a position of advantage over the pair" (138). Majed is a hypocritical sadist, covering up his vices so that "everything is as it should be, harmless and under control, in the privacy of my home, and out of society's judging sight" (64).

Both Mariam and Dalal represent the new face of the rebellious Gulf girls, who are "out there today, working side by side with men... proving they can stand on their own two feet" (63). The change from docile to daring is evident in this conversation between Mariam and her grandmother, which also accentuates the split n the Gulf society, between the conservative values and the new modernist and liberal trends:

...my grandmother approaches, reinforcing the guidelines I grew up ignoring:

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"Calmness and modesty make up the heart of all that is good in a woman".

She's berating the girl in the picture, this me of so long ago, who is charged with pluck and daring. Ice cracks in my head and my response is a cutting rejoinder: "Silence and acceptance, you mean!" "Hold your tongue!" "I've held it long enough." "No shame in your bony frame, no shame... you're gone completely mad!" (343)

Mariam rebels against the norms of her society where "women...are obligated to do things against their will. And the best lesson (they) can learn is to stifle the pain" (296). Mariam's "quiet rebellion" (142) fulfills her "need to feel self-worth" (99). Hers exemplifies the gradual stages of rebellion accessible to Gulf girls in their constricted environment. Escaping via a virtual reality is the easiest: "dreaming is ... a survival tactic" (199). For Mariam, her initial post-traumatic response was to let her "mind roam, hoping to find an untroubled place where justice and harmony reigned." She would fly in dreams "that shape a future with the man (she)loved. In one's imagination, anything is possible. There's freedom to entertain rapturous aspirations that are too daring to actually be uttered or acted upon" (199). Another rebellion method was her prioritizing higher education, which, is frowned upon by the conventional viewpoint because it "does nothing but makes the woman feel ... so important that she antagonizes her husband" (215), over marriage. Mariam's options are provoking in a society that considers it "freakish and unnatural for a woman to choose independence over being a wife and mother " (271). Dalal 's rebels by valiantly declaring her audacious intention to: "take charge of (her) life" (209) and to break the orthodox taboos by becoming a singer, an intention she is aware is calamitous and even lethal in a society that believes that a singer is a girl who "close(s) the door on modesty and morals. ... (and one who) is open to affairs with all kinds of men" (211). The novel concludes with a celebration of the victorious 'Spring' rebellion of the two girls, which promises hope for more emancipation and achievements.

Nawal El Saadawi, *A Woman Staring at the Sun (Imra'a Tuhaddiqu Fi al Shams)*[v]

In the chapter entitled "A Woman's Perplexity between Sex and Poverty", El Saadawi sketches the relation between "economic repression and the sexual repression" (75), both obstructive to women's lives. El Saadawi condemns the capitalist, and feudal patriarchal class systems for women's sexual problems (circumcision, virginity, the erroneous concept of honour, the veiled prostitution in marriage), as well as their economical and social problems (poverty, illiteracy, deprivation of work with pay, boy/girl discrimination)[vi]. She also rejects the common belief that economic freedom should precede sexual freedom. El Saadawi criticizes the Arab society for its duality and hypocrisy, having "two contradictory faces, a public life and another secret one that contradicts it" (76), and blames all the political and literary groups, the opposition, or government, who share all the "tendency for control and deception... they drawl about freedom, justice, integrity, and loyalty, while in real life, speech contradicts action, especially in regards to the man and woman relationship" (76).

El Saadawi stresses the maximal importance of simultaneously liberating the mind and the body, "because it is impossible to separate the body and the mind" (79). She highlights the dangers of physical restriction on women's sexual and psychological health, as well as the close parallelism between "physical circumcision and mental circumcision" (79). She gives

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examples of the high price paid by women who capitulate to society's pressure against their will, whether by wearing a veil or "writing articles about poverty and not about circumcision or sex… to be praised or for fear of being censured" (80).

Joumana Haddad, *I killed Scheherazade : Confessions of an Angry Arab Woman* and *Superman is an Arab: On God, Marriage, Macho Men, and other Disastrous inventions*

A "fanatic of femininity" (Haddad 2010), growing up in country that 'hates her' for being an atypical "bad girl" who is not " veiled, subdued, illiterate, oppressed, and certainly not submissive"(18), Joumana Haddad offers through her book *I killed Scheherazade,* a furious tirade about the state of women who are deprived of expressing their bodies. Haddad revolts against the need for women to master the art of 'Schizophrenia', hypocrisy, "being split in two and forbidden from speaking the blunt truth" (21), and that their lives and stories need to be repressed, clamped-down and encoded, rewritten to suit the vestal guardians or soldiers of Arab chastity, so the latter can rest assured that the delicate Arab 'hymen' has been protected from sin, shame, dishonour or flaw (21). Haddad's book is likened to "taking "your clothes off, layer by layer, in front of strangers.. to express your ultimate self " (73).

Haddad offers Arab woman tools of liberation because, according to ElSaadawi: a " better world is not possible without freeing the minds, bodies and most of all language of women" (63). One way of freeing women language is to disregard censorship which "is an act of RAPE (69) The body and sexuality should not be censored. Erotic/explicit literature is the answer since a woman writing such literature in the Arab world is claiming freedom "to shock, .. in short: the right to CHOOSE (74). Arab women writers are invited to produce the "counterpart of a woman Casanova" (Michel Onfray qtd. 70),

> *talking taboos as excision and circumcision ... about gay life...*
>
> *about dangerous self-mutilation rituals.. about how*
>
> *psychological complexes affect gender identity.. about the body's*
>
> *social dimension ..about fetishistic practices... about sexual*
>
> *identity.. about contemporary novel's critical perspectives on sex...*
>
> *about visons of desires... about the male body.. about orgasmic*
>
> *movements in Sufi practices..." (* 91)

To exemplify this liberating method, Haddad offers her own magazine JASAD ("Body ' in Arabic) . Being the first Arab woman to create a magazine about the body, Haddad and JASAD were labelled "immoral, unethical, sinful, debauched, corrupt and corrupter, depraved, decadent, criminal, wicked, unscrupulous, dishonorable, and devious" (82). Haddad confirms that JASAD as non-pornographic magazine, at a time when there is sufficient political, artistic, cultural, mental, intellectual and moral pornography. Haddad abhors Scheherazade , who represents the censored and controlled woman.

In *Superman is an Arab,* which is a follow-up or sequel to *I killed Scheherazade*, Haddad presents her viewpoint on the problematic Arab battle of the sexes. It is a manifesto against the macho Supermen., as against the authoritative and patriarchal Arab system.. Haddad's objective is to deconstruct the Arab traditional perception of the "trinity taboos" (71) of sex,

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religion power. She fumes at the emphasis on women's virginity, which leads the bodies of women to be religiously regulated, even mutilated. Haddad is similarly scornful of the victimized women, whom she sees as "self-doubting ..(Scheherazade)" (96) who "fak(e) orgasms "(165), and use seduction and sex to get what they are entitled to. These women have been brainwashed and trapped by patriarchal manipulation and compulsory denial, and forced by an illusory social freedom, to live a "double life" (39).

Haddad is calling for a new kind of women "the kind of strugglers who fight tooth and nail for their rights. These independent rebels are capable of toppling "patriarchal institutions upside down" (87). Haddad is a harbinger of third-wave feminism[vii] ; which incorporates transgender politics and sex positivism. Third-wave feminist women are "assertive, powerful and in control of their own sexuality" (96). They are, "in possession of their bodies" (101).

Haddad rails against the hypocritical Arab double standard, especially in the sexual sphere; which is biased when judging a "liberated adult woman (who)is seen as a slut, not as a person who rightfully decides what to do with her own body" (122). In such society, a man who love sex is hailed as virile and is entitled to collect sexual experiences, while a sex-loving is called a nymphomaniac. Arab women are supposed to be "born without sexual needs, impulses or fantasies" (67). Haddad questions "what do ethics have to do with how frequently I use my vagina?."(123).

The combination of eros and demos is evident in that Haddad's call for revolting against all the "terrorists, along with the dictators and religious fanatics" (14), Her revolt is against society as a whole. Haddad stresses the vital need for a new femininity and masculinity in these times of revolution and change in the Middle East. Haddad, however, is frustrated that the hope that the Arab Spring revolutions will terminate the superman species has failed, exposing the Arab Spring as "merely 'cosmetic' spring (108) or "another winter" when it comes to the rights of women. Haddad believes that all the talk of democracy is bullshit without the restoration of women equality with men and the re-evaluation of her situation She concludes that the Arab revolts are "still far from being rid of the patriarchal monopolization of private and public lives" (106-7). [viii]

Similar to fiction, the new 'Spring' poetry is characterized by harsh critique of the established narratives of society, the cultural and sociopolitical norms, as well as the patriarchal paradigms. Gender relations, are the main leitmotif on which Sara Allam's poems are based. She destroys emotional, social, body-related, cultured, religious, and aesthetic rules. In her quest for agency, Allam "says the unsaid in a rebellious tone.[ix]

The power of women's presence has additionaly manifested itself in the chants, banners, jewellery , songs, slogans, and most importantly graffiti.

Graffiti

Graffiti was part of the 25 January Revolution from the start. An explosion of graffiti and murals erupted in 2011 on the walls of many Arab cities, registering the birth of the new aesthetic text and exhibiting the concatenation of art and politics. The form ranged between drawn images and quasi political manifestos.

Graffiti related to women was part and parcel of the revolutionary stance as a whole. Women's issues and women's rights have been widely reflected on the walls. Women used graffiti as a

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visual blog, through which to offer their discourse, and to reclaim and politicize the public space.

The new visual text (graffiti).used an overtly wrathful language. Revolutionarily, it provided a new approach to rethinking the transformation of gender in all its complexity. The drawings of female graffitists, like Mira Shihadeh, Hanaa al-Degham, Bahia Shehab, and Hend Kheera, reflected the violations of women and their bodies, hence moving women's bodies from the private and silenced to the public and enunciated. Graffiti was a means of empowering women and endowing them with agency.

Adopting this same line of thought, the Women On Walls (WOW) project focuses on women's empowerment through feminist graffiti[x]. Examples of feminist graffiti:

Figure 1. Women on Walls ست الحيطة

Figure 2. Woman is a Revolution المرأة ثورة

Slogans:

"I have opened the floodgates" was the slogan of Fuada Watch iniative, based on the character of 1969 movie *Shay min al -Khouf* (Something to Fear). Fuada's words were resurrected and modified into "I have opened the floodgates of freedom" in post-revolutionary Egypt. In 2012, Fuada's image functions an iconic symbol of regeneration, rebellion and liberation.

On April 13, 2011 a website called Muslimal Media WaTCh uploaded a poster of plastic trash bags lined against a mud wall. A closer look reveals a figure shrouded in a blue burqa, hunched among the bags. The slogan reads: "Oppressed woman are easily overlooked". Feminists are throwing light on the abuses the women suffer, and urging women to talk about solutions for their problems and not be treated and thrown away as mute garbage bags.

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Digital Information communication technology (ICT) and gender relations:

The rise of global communications is one of the many forces of change that have transformed the lives of Arab women. Arab women are making their voices heard: documenting the realities of their own lives, exploring their changing identities, and insisting upon greater participation in the public sphere. the Internet and its associated technologies have affected the political and cultural spaces, by creating alternative discourse.

The post Arab Spring era witnessed Arab women aggressively invading cyber space. They used information communication technology to engage in what Manuel Castells calls "resistance-oriented identities" (in Nouraie-simone 40) . Arab Spring women turn to digital media and technologies tools for expressing political identities and voice. This platform has "expanded women's opportunities to contest their marginalities and to express their identities and activism" (ibid 39). Young Egyptian women used the emancipatory power of communications technologies to achieve liberation, turning Facebook into a vibrant and inclusive public square. They also use it to maintain their psychological well-being as a space to break the constrains and flout societal norms. Online, women experience autonomy and independence. Technology became a gateway to more daring behaviour, as a means to chat about taboos and controversial subjects.

Social media and new virtual arena produced a new powerful "Scheherazade" type women, with virtual values and virtual intelligence, conquering normally male-dominated contexts. In their virtual spaces, women raise their voices and stir the ire of conservative and paternalistic forces in society, "the new information technologies are basically anti-hierarchical and detrimental to power concentration" (Nouraie-Simone 57). 'Online activism questioned taken-for-granted concepts about gender roles. For example, in 2013, Abeer Abde al-Aziz launched a project titled Zat (self) for Women Poets, to give voice to women whose voices are unheard. Another example is the Egyptian belly dancer Sama el Masry, who became, through her on-line comic video clips, an unconventional symbol in the fight against Islamist extremists.

Blogs*:*

Emboldened by the freedom of movement and expression experienced in chat rooms, young women soon took to blogging anonymously about their private lives and politics, pushing boundaries as they explored taboo subjects such as relationship between the sexes, religious discrimination, and doubts about God[xi]. During the decade, an especially vibrant Egyptian blogosphere developed. The most famous perhaps was Aliaa Al-Mahdy, or the Naked Blogger of Cairo.

Nudity*:*

Nudity was an important modality of feminine agency, where the body is utilized as a tool of resistance. Nudity is used as a protest and rebellion against the restrictions enforced by a "superstructure of deception (that) veil(s) the woman's mind" (Daniel 122). Uncovering the human body stretches the notion of "ownership of the female body" (Al-Najjar and Abusalim 145)[xii] There has always been hostility to women's sexually and politically provocative nude body. It is deemed to disturb identity, system, order, and disrespects borders, positions and rules. A woman's public nudity is especially inflammatory during revolutionary periods.

Aliaa Al-Mahdy caused a stir when she initially cast her photograph as 'nude art' in October 2011. Her naked photo raised a chorus of anger and disapproval. AL-Mahdy's blog hails the

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human body as an organizing principle to understand creative insurgency. Nakedness connotated an extreme form of transparency that resonated powerfully with other development in the Arab uprisings. "Aliaa.. by the simple fact of displaying her nudity .. (raises) questions that embarrass society (similar to) youth that bare chests to bullets" (Kraidy159-160. Her action was at once personal, political, sexual and artistic, and she soon became one of the most "politicized bodies" of Egypt's revolution (ibid 176).

Al-Mahdy representation of one's own naked body is important because it proves women's ability to act unbridled by male authority, to freely convey one's own thoughts and one's own self, the power to lead one's own life on one's own terms. Al-Mahdy was a menace to the national sovereignty in the digital era because she subverted important boundaries and left a networked record of her transgression. Not only did she violate social and religious taboos against overt female sexuality, but also fused the political with the aesthetic, biological and digital. She was Satanized for using the female nude to release, deregulate and disseminate her body into the Egyptian body politic.

In November 2014, Al-Mahdy reiterated that her action was "feminist nude art/protest" (in Kraidy 165*)* A -Mahdy's maiden blogpost of her nude body selfie was the first in a series of sexually transgressive pictures that put women, their bodies, and representations of women's bodies at the very heart of revolutionary struggle, such as close-ups of menstruating vagina and of public hair dyed blue that she posted in Dec 2014. *A Rebel's Diary* represents a recent trend in Arab and Egyptian cultural production that blurs the social, artistic and stylistic boundaries.

DISCUSSION

NEW ARAB SPRING WOMAN AND THE DOUBLE REVOLUTION:

The Spring women are often portrayed as the makers of the new cultural identity of the nation. The newly empowered Arab Spring firebrand woman refuses to submissively conform to cultural and religious practices of the patriarchal society, resists marginalization and insists on redefining the nationalist agenda. Raising her "voice of dissent" (El Hamamsy and Soliman 9), she lashes out at a culture of censorship and sexism, grasping more leeway in personal and sexual decision-making, and consequently, calls for a double revolution, which demands an inclusive freedom that incorporates sexual freedoms and real gender equality. This can be achieved through dismantling misogyny and "abolishing a system of gender apartheid upheld by the patriarchs, within and without" (Eltahawy 197), as well as through the rejection of the "sociological normative standard" (Daniel 122). One intrinsic feature is the deconstruction, then the reconciliation of the private-public dichotomy, so as to transfer the revolution of fighting the patriarch, from the public streets into the houses. This personal/ political connection is described thus:

> *We might have removed Hosni Mubarak from Egypt, Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali from Tunisia, Muammar al_Qaddaf in Libya, and Ali Abdullah Saleh n Yemen, but until the rage shifts from the oppressors in our presidential palaces to the oppressors on our streets and in our homes - until we topple the Mubaraks in our minds, in our bedrooms and in our street corners -our revolution has not even begun.*

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(ElTahawy 32)

The new women relocate the epitome of domestic oppression from the interior to the exterior and take over the central/public masculine space. One way of achieving this is by re-signifying the stereotyped female cultural representations, in order to empower and legitimatize women's contemporary resistance activities, for example, the traditionally domestic norm of *sit-El-beit* (the lady of the house), is re-inscribed into an empowering representation of the public, or what Kraidy calls "performative-contentious model[s] of the public sphere" (70).

Women's new identity is a corollary of the concept of the revolution, by establishing the new women's agency and the "feminine subjectivity"(El Said et al 25) that is reflective of liberal/ feminist desires. The new woman rejects the constrictive private realm, resists discipline, limitations, segregation and normative femininity, rebels against the concept of 'respectable' girls and subverts the monolithic interpellation of society. "Radical feminism" (El Said 26) becomes the subaltern agent that challenges power from within grassroots culture to reimagine women's equal citizenship and to transform the concept of victimization into a concept of agency in order to augment their political resistance and to integrate the personal (body) with the political "revolutionary trajectory" (ibid 250). The new woman emerges as a hermaphrodite; simultaneously libidinous and militant, she reclaims control over her own body, her independence, and her sexual rights. These rebellious women "re-engineer their own virtue" (Zoepf 91), unlearning the cultural and religious lessons and taboos, deflecting body shame and rejecting sexual guilt.

Revolutionizing the body:

Gender issues are at the core of society. The body represents the materialization of class divisions and gender hierarchies. Gender, and the body are fundamental to the Arab uprising. The body is a linchpin of revolutionary change and is crucial to the rise of revolutionary selfhood. It is also a prism through which to view the power and the emancipation of women. Although gender equality was not an explicit demand of the Arab Spring revolutionaries, implicit in their calls for democracy, and the right to self-determination was the notion of inclusiveness, equality and emancipation, as well as the call for a shift in gender dynamics.

The power of the erotic:

Audre Lorde spoke of the power of the erotic in women's lives: "our erotic knowledge empowers us, becomes a lens through which we scrutinize all aspects of our existence"(in Espin 131). According to Lorde, oppression corrupts and distorts the sources of energy for change (such as women's erotic energy), so as to protect itself. . She encourages women not to fear "the power of the erotic" and to reclaim the erotic to be able to "develop healthy identities" (ibid 131).

Michel Foucault described sexuality as "an especially dense transfer point for relations of power" (1998 103). Foucault explains that the purpose of using and perceiving the body as a means of discipline and punishment is that it defines the control over others' bodies. Thus, discipline produces "subjected and practiced bodies, 'docile bodies' (1979 138). Women bodies are the anchoring point for the manifestation of power as they play an intrinsic role in socio-political transformations. A Foucauldian approach, allows us to capture the significant power women exercise in shaping masculine trajectories. According to Tamara Mayer: "when the nation, gender, and sexuality intersect, the body becomes an important marker - even a boundary- for the nation" (2000:13).[xiii] As a "marker of identity"(Abouelnaga 9) and a strong

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political medium, the body is a tool to resist, mobilize and change.

The Arab Spring revolutionized gender by making the body, the "main protagonist of the revolution" (Hafez 36) and setting a new paradigm of power relation, where women challenge patrilineality and cry out: 'my body belongs to me', and if "I want sex. it is my right to want sex. I celebrate this desire I feel" (Eltahawy 224-5). The strongest act of rebellion was that of women regaining control over their bodies and sexuality. Re-inscribing and reinstating the female body in the public sphere was a defiant strategy . The Arab female body, which has been, for a long time, sexualized and subjugated, witnessed tremendous transformation, from being a docile tool of repression and the passive object of male sexual pleasure, into a "productive body" (Burkit 3) and an instrument of the feminist agency, that subverts and returns the "masculine gaze" (Berger 63)

RESULTS

Reviewing all the previously mentioned examples and excerpts from works of literature, graffiti, digital works and blogs, reveals the main traits of the new Spring creative expressions as follows:

-Challenging the status quo, and questioning the didactic influence of art in the society[xiv]

-Replacing the hypocritical "culture of concealment" (El Feki 291) with the new culture of disclosure regarding sexual taboos, based on the "spirit of confession " (ibid 289).

-Revolting against hegemonic masculinity and demonstrating "obsessive references to women's presence"(El Said et al 53).

-Shockability: breaking taboos and dealing with themes that profess to the seismic shift in sexual life such as abortion, pornography, homosexuality, prostitution, free love, the sexual coming-of-age, sexual diversity, even cross-dressing and other behaviors that were shrouded in myth and disinformation.

-Re-signifying gender norms by depicting authority in a parodic light as well as through the 'pastiche-effect ' (Butler 188) of combining the sexual with the political, and pitting the two interlocutors against each other. This allows the subversion of the voice of authority and the dismantling of gender identity .

- Deconstructing gender in order to reject the dualism of male and female, hence putting women in the centre.

- Representing the female body in pain. New narrative does not shy away from speaking of female physical illness and disability.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The paper highlights the relationship between sexuality and revolution in the Middle East. Women played a vital role in the Arab Spring uprisings as agents of change. Pre-Arab Spring women suffered intimidation, oppressive restriction and marginalization. Their expression of

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own sexuality were silenced or condemned and its meaning interpreted by men, who deauthorize the t woman's of her experience, thereby fostering the myth of male superiority. Women were assigned a traditional gender role and sexual behavior. Post Arab Spring women took on leadership roles in the uprisings, defying the prevailing stigmas and disturbing their assigned roles. Sexual defiance emerged alongside political rebellion on the streets of Arab cities. Sexuality has a strong revolutionary potential and is central to social and political change. Women became the agents of national and gender reconciliation, by endeavoring to redefine autonomy and to impose their visibility and sexualized presence, and to demand a more mutualistic gender relation.

It is noteworthy that in spite of the catastrophic aftermath of most of the Arab Spring uprisings, one important victory for women that cannot be denied, is their newly gained 'taboo-oriented identities'. Arab women succeeded to a large extent in imposing the sexual into the new social contract of their new societies, and in heralding obvious shifts in gender norms, gender identities, and sexual attitudes. Real transformation of social relations, however, is still a dream yet to be fulfilled. The new 'Spring' women have realized and proclaimed that the 'Spring' victory is partial and half-finished. Their works emphasize that, for the fledgling sexual revolution to reach its full bloom, there needs to be a progressive comprehensive revolution of the mind and a sexual re-evaluation, based on a new construct of gender that counteracts the hegemonic discourse, greater democratization in personal relations and promotion of sexual awareness, within a "coherent, positive intellectual framework for sexuality" (El Feki 291)[xv] For the sexual revolution to be incorporated into the political revolution, there needs to be an "alteration of human sexual structure" (Reich 211).

Following the findings and discussions above I recommend that further research using primary data be conducted to find the reasons for the incomplete success or the semi-failure of the Arab Spring revolutions in achieving the bona fide sexual/ female revolution where men and women work together to destroy the old order and forge a new way of life, based on a more mature and fulfilling relationship between the two sexes. Some of my recommendations for the inauguration and success of the sexual revolution are:

- Raising sexual awareness through the inclusion of sex education in the school curriculum.

- Promoting sexual rights and gender justice, based principally on the right of women to exercise 'sexual citizenship'.

- Advocating freer sexuality for women, freeing female body language and restricting censorship.

- Increasing women options and opening outlets for expressions of women subjectivity and self-fulfillment.

Notes and further Research:

[i] See Alvarez, (1990); Al-Ali (2005); Waylan (2007) and Al-Ali and Pratt (2009)
[ii] [ii] The English translation rendered for the Arabic quotes of this novel is the writer of the article's own endeavour.
[iii] The English translation rendered for the Arabic quotes of this novel is the writer of the article's own endeavour.
[iv]http://www.goodreads.com/book/show/25817397-that-other-me
[v] The English translation rendered for the Arabic quotes of this novel is the writer of the article's own endeavour.
[vi] For the impact of economical conditions on and the different methods used by Third World women to maneuver and construct a career under conditions of financial crisis see: Dennis, C. in Haleh Afahar (1991)

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[vii] For more on third wave feminism, see "Baumgardner and Richards, (2000) Manifesta: Young Women, Feminism And The Future.
[viii] For additional reviews on Haddad's works, see:, Segal (2012) and AL- Yafai (2012)
[ix] See "al-Ary hadd al-imtila" (Nudity to the edge of the fullness) and "hadd al-ikhtifa" (to the edge of disappearance) by Sara Allam. Allam has published two volumes Doun athar li qobla (Without a trace of a kiss) 2013 - Tofuku azzar al-wehda (Unbuttoning loneliness) 2015. For works of other similar poets, see Sabrin Mahran Sara Abdeen Malaka Badr in Abouelnaga 2016)
[x] For more on Women on Walls, see http://womenonwalls.org/ and Nada Barakat.
[xi] Examples of famous bloggers are Jordanian Roba Aol-Assi Yemeni Afrah Nasser and Egyptian Walaa Emam
[xii] Another relevant modality is dance Dance has always been associated with sexuality, and a female dancer is considered one of questionable moral status who erotically (used) /displayed her body. Reed notes how that "in some colonized areas, dance practices posed a genuine threat of political resistance or rebellion (506). Dancing (especially belly dancing), became a tool of defiance, used to resist hegemony and to reclaim space and bodies from the controlling authority.
[xiii] For the intersection between femininity, sexuality and politics and for the relation between the obsession with veiling and covering the body and preserving the 'honour of the state", see A. Parla (2001), A. Ong (2003) and Lila Abu-Lughod (1998), (2005) and (2015).
[xiv] See Kolawole 94
[xv] For further reading on the Arab Spring, see Minky Worden (2012), Stevenson (2015), Sowers and Teensing (2012), ElHassan (2017), and Aspden (2016)

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