

Editorial

Samira Aghacy

Arts of Resistance

As targets of violence, women in the Arab region continue to resist at a variety of levels, notably by producing knowledge through literature and the arts. Their works are acts of defiance, cultural and political resistance, as real-time eye-witness accounts of the on-the-ground political, social, and military situations. In this manner, they attain visibility having been largely excluded from active participation in the historical and cultural narratives of the Arab world except in emblematic modes. Their short stories, poems, and novels have created a free space to challenge traditional discourses pertaining to women. Within this terrain, they have the freedom to embrace or revise traditional discourses, to challenge the binaries of power in society, and to seek ascendancy and control.

Women have also found other venues such as film, art works, photography, graffiti, cyber space, social media, online platforms, and so forth. As cyber activists operating in a virtual space, they transgress the public/private divide which enables them to sidestep the power discrepancies in social structures, misogynic discourses, and violent practices within the parameters of their daily lives. The writer's role in wars or liberation struggles is to provide a medium through which the subaltern achieves visibility and communication with centers of power, and challenges the 'master narratives', the deeply-entrenched sociopolitical formations. As in the Palestinian resistance movements, there has been a strong link between political, military, and cultural resistance in an attempt to liberate the land by challenging the centripetal forces of political and cultural hegemony and power.

Brinda Mehta's "Writing for Gaza" focuses on the writings of a young generation of writers from Gaza, particularly women who published their short stories in Refaat Alareer's collection titled Gaza Writes Back. These stories are their acts of resistance to war and occupation and their way to write back to the older generation of Palestinians who represent factional opinions. Their writing is a revaluation of the past 60 years of struggle. Writing is a testimonial that gives voice to the voiceless, an

attempt to make a political statement in the face of occupation, and an indictment of war crimes against civilians.

Elham Atashi's "Women, Agency and Spaces of Protest: Lessons from the Iranian Revolution" looks back at the Iranian Revolution through the eyes of the women and girls to give the Arab region advice for moving forward in the post-Arab Spring. Despite institutional barriers, Iranian women have pushed boundaries and made efforts to dominate the public arena by taking advantage of women's historically strong access to education. This education has enabled Iranian women to read and master religious texts in order to offer counter interpretations of Islam that advocate for equality and liberation. They have looked for creative ways to disrupt imposed patterns of political and religious power. Atashi's view is that change takes time, but the independent voices of woman continue to grow in strength.

Larbi Touf's "Public Space and Woman's Political Participation in Morocco after the 2001 Constitution" maintains that despite the adoption of the 2011 Moroccan Constitution – which gave women important legislative rights – inequalities between men and women remain deeply engrained in Moroccan society. Touf reminds us that legislation is not enough and instead, activists in Morocco have had to refocus on implementation of such legislation.

Leila Alikarami's "The Limitation to the Consent to Marriage Under Iranian Civil Code" asserts that Iranian law has failed to accommodate the realities of women's lives by passing legislation that discriminates against them especially that all laws are passed by men and are based on *shari'a*.

Lama Abu Odeh's "Those Awful Tahrir Rapes" maintains that street violence unleashed against women in Egypt are the result of the state's slack enforcement of laws of discrimination against women. Although the blame is placed on the unruly poor who have invaded the city and caused the violence, it is clear that members of the social security forces have also participated in the rape and harassment of women in Tahrir Square.

This issue's Mary Tuner Lane Award Winning Undergraduate and Graduate Essays both look at art and literature. Yara Nahle's "Shirin Neshat: At the intersection of overlapping identities" situates Neshat's work as a commentary on the status of women and girls in Iran, and the many ways gender identities are implicated in the Iranian political status quo. Neshat's work attempts to trace the ways that normative gender roles and identities have changed in relation to the political climate in Iran and the way that the outside world views women in Iran. Neshat's work is meant to show the audience what life is actually like in Iran, giving the audience an opportunity themselves to draw conclusions and assumptions about the visual portraits as they want.

Serine Jaafar's "Madness and notions of Gender within alternative spaces/times in Mrs. Dalloway and The God of Small Things" compares two seemingly opposite pieces of literature from the lens of madness and its gendered implications. Jaafar discusses madness and its feminization as part and parcel of women's strategies for survival –

madness creates a temporality in which women can exist outside of social pressures and gender biases. This temporality, Jaafar argues through both Mrs. Dalloway and *The God of Small Things* is critical to women's existence.

This issue of *Al-Raida* serves as a powerful reminder of the amount of work that feminists and activists around the Arab region have had to continue in the wake of the Arab Spring. Across platforms as variegated as media, personal narratives, legal and policy reform, and historical analysis the authors of this issue support both each other and activists across the region in their continued work to improve the lives of women and girls in an attempt to actualize the promises of the Arab Spring.

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