Frances S. Hasso and Zakia Salime (eds), *Freedom Without Permission: Bodies and Space in the Arab Revolutions*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2016. ISBN: 978-0-8223-6221-0 (cloth); ISBN: 978-0-8223-6241-8 (paper)

In the spring of 2011 24-hour satellite TV news proved that the revolution *will* be televised, and streamed across the world live over the internet. With the widespread use of social media networks by transnational activists, the "Facebook Revolutions" became the nickname for the popular uprisings across the Arab world that began in Tunisia in late 2010 and soon spread to Egypt, Syria, and beyond. Social media undoubtedly played a critical role in spreading the anti-authoritarian message of activists, as well as helping them challenge problematic and unquestioned representations of the Arab world and the role of women in it. Prominent examples of this digital activism included Leil-Zahra Mortada's Facebook album "Women of Egypt", which challenged mainstream media's invisibilisation of female protesters in Tahrir Square; and the pan-Arab feminist solidarity Facebook group "The Uprising of Women in the Arab World" is still active at the time of writing and has a following of over 120,000. The jury is still out on whether the Arab Spring was a success or failure. Irrespective of whether the revolutions succeeded in their final aims, the uprisings constituted significant cultural, social, and political upheavals which signify *revolutionary*, that is, transformative, moments for their participants. In fact, the contributors to *Freedom Without Permission* play precisely on the rhyming of *thawra* ("revolution") and *'awra* ("chaos") to bring into focus the positive disruption played by women's activism in the lead up to and during the anti-authoritarian protests.

Edited by Frances Hasso and Zakia Salime, the anthology focuses on women's bodies and embodiment in space and place across a range of diverse and interconnected locations in the Arab world, including Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen, and Saudi Arabia. Their collective emphasis on embodiment challenges institutional and political binaries and hierarchies concerning what constitutes active versus passive resistance, and symbolic/cultural versus physical/political activism. In the introduction, Hasso and Salime highlight the way in which

the body is always already present in all forms of political communication and cultural production. Blogs, Facebook pages, and tweets are all the result of an embodied human being who writes, speaks, and otherwise communicates. In many respects, the intimacy and relative security of social media provides women with the space (if not place) to speak and act against oppression and oppressive structures. In her chapter on Egyptian women's blogs, "Politics in the Digital Boudoir", Sonali Pahwa extends the metaphor of intimacy to argue that female bloggers' political transformation prior to, in the lead up to and during the anti-Mubarak protests in 2011, was a direct result of their creation of an intimate (counter-)public sphere. This intimate online public sphere of fellow feminist bloggers served to challenge private/public formulations which see political discourse as the purview of politics outside the home, and the home as an apolitical sphere of (female) domesticity. The blogs analysed by Pahwa demonstrate precisely the opposite; namely, the freedom to speak without fear or shame provided by the female-centred blogosphere.

Nevertheless, outside of this intimate web of sisterly relations and inter-feminist validation lies both male solidarity and patriarchal resistance and repression. As Pahwa's analysis of the *Kolena Laila* ("We're all Laila") collective's campaign against gender-based harassment demonstrates, once the bloggers reached out to a broader audience they found themselves having to make apologetic statements clarifying that "not all men" engage in such oppressive practices. With the intensification of the regime's violence and sexual abuse of male as well as female activists in the aftermath of the 2011 uprising, a distinctly feminist critique has become even more difficult to sustain. From a feminist perspective, this is not particularly surprising, given that collectivist endeavours have historically tended to supersede the interests of women as gendered beings.

Lamia Benyoussef's chapter on "Gender and Fractured Mythscapes of National Identity in Revolutionary Tunisia" highlights that the cyber sphere is just as, if not more, likely to reproduce existing subject positions and oppressive structures as it is to subvert them. She begins her analysis by considering four national(ist) projects expressed in popular music, and their utilisation of gender, race, and class to bring forth new revolutionary

mythscapes. She terms these narratives the populist, pluralist, secular, and Islamist. What all four narratives have in common is their utilisation of women and the role of women in society as the central battleground for their respective imaginaries of a post-revolutionary Tunisia. Each of the mythscapes she analyses is largely narrated by male activists and political figures, and while women are spoken about, they are rarely allowed to speak for themselves. The populist music genres analysed claim to speak for the nation imagined as the emasculated working class male. While the pluralist genre speaks to a nation imagined as more culturally diverse, the heroes of resistance continue to be cast as male, with women and girls relegated to the role of grieving mothers and sisters.

Benyoussef's chapter is at its strongest when she tackles the explicitly misogynist masculinist mythscape of Islamism. Here she carefully unpacks the appropriation of hip hop by Islamists to criticise unveiled Tunisian females as overtly sexual, Westernised, and immoral. Whereas both the populists and the pluralists target their grievances at the regime, invoking gender relations as a metaphor either of emasculation or the machismo of resistance, the Islamists quite explicitly name Tunisian women and their uncontrolled behaviour as the source of moral/national degeneracy. Almost in reverse the secularist discourse interprets veiled women and bearded men as backwards "riffraff" who want to cause trouble and drag the nation into cultural darkness. Here "religious" becomes code for poor and ignorant. On the whole, these competing mythscapes erase and neutralise the agency of women even as they utilise women's bodies as the battleground for their respective nationalist, masculinist, fundamentalist, and classist narratives.

The symbolic currency of women's bodies in collectivist endeavours is not unique to the Tunisian case, as the final chapter of *Freedom Without Permission* demonstrates.[1] Focusing on Istanbul's Taksim Gezi Park protests, Banu Gökariksel's essay, "Intimate Politics of Protest", analyses two symbolic female figures which helped to challenge the Turkish government's misrepresentation of protestors as overwhelmingly young male hooligans. One of the figures, the anonymous "woman in red", has since become an

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1 The title of the book is itself borrowed from Benyoussef's analysis of the revolutionary moment of the early 2010s.

international and commodified figure representing passive, non-violent female resistance to militarised state brutality. The other figure, the "slingshot aunty", has since been outed and discredited as an experienced and somewhat violent activist. Although the woman in red is no less of an activist than the slingshot aunty, her symbolic appropriation has been much easier given that her "nonviolent passivity" in the face of police oppression fits neatly with dominant discourses of female vulnerability to violation and violence in public space. Each of the reviewed chapters testifies to the prominent, if devalued and often appropriated role, of women's embodied activism in collectivist endeavours for freedom, justice and dignity. *Freedom Without Permission* should not be read as a historical snapshot of a particular revolutionary moment, but for its insightful feminist analysis which, while firmly located in specific geopolitical cases, can nevertheless illuminate other similar instances of popular mobilisation and women's role in revolutionary disorder.

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