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Female Reverberations Online: An Analysis of Tunisian, Egyptian, and Moroccan Female Cyberactivism During the Arab Spring

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**Female Reverberations Online:
An Analysis of Tunisian, Egyptian, and
Moroccan Female Cyberactivism During the
Arab Spring Revolutions**

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Honors Thesis
Presented to the International Studies Department
Macalester College
Faculty Advisor: Professor David C. Moore
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Abstract

Digital technologies and social media networks have the potential to open new platforms for women in the public domain. During the 2011 Arab Spring revolutions, female cyberactivists used digital technologies to participate in and at times led protests. This thesis examines how Tunisian, Egyptian, and Moroccan female cyberactivists deployed social media networks to write a new body politic online. It argues throughout that female activists turned to online activism to disrupt gender relations in their countries and demand social, religious, economic, and political gender parity.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Ash-shab yurid isqat an-nizam¹
Ash-shab yurid isqat an-nizam

The People Want to Bring Down the Regime
The People Want to Bring Down the Regime

On January 18, 2011, Egyptian female activist Asmaa Mahfouz posted a video blog (vlog) on Facebook urging Egyptian citizens to protest in Tahrir Square for Egyptian dignity. A founding member of the Egyptian April 6th protest movement, Mahfouz was well-versed in social networking and media sites. She blogged, tweeted, and posted on Facebook daily. In the video, a veiled Mahfouz directed her message at Egyptian citizens—specifically male citizens. She attacked Egyptian masculinity and challenged the men, stating, “If you think yourself a man, come with me on January 25th. Whoever said women shouldn’t go to protests because they’ll be beaten, let him have some honor and manhood and come with me on January 25th.” Posted one month after protests erupted in Tunisia, Mahfouz’s video has been credited with inspiring Egyptian citizens to mobilize and protest in Tahrir Square on Friday, January 25th, for what has come to be known as the ‘Day of Rage.’ She connected her activism with the Tunisian protests and the self-immolation of Tunisian street vendor Mohamed Bouazizi on December 17, 2011:

Four Egyptians have set themselves on fire, to protest the humiliation and hunger and poverty and degradation they had to live with for 30 years. Four Egyptians have set themselves on fire,

¹ Due to technological constraints, I was unable to post Arabic text in this thesis. Microsoft Word for Mac does not support right to left languages and distorts the words. Thus, I tried to include transliterated Arabic words when possible.

thinking maybe we can have a revolution like Tunisia, maybe we can have freedom, justice, honor, and human dignity.

In the days following her post, Egyptians, many of whom supported or participated in the April 6 movement, responded to her Facebook post with comments, reshares and likes². Mahfouz issued another vlog on Thursday, January 24, the night before the scheduled protest, reiterating her message to protest.

Since January 25th, numerous news sites have uploaded and translated Asmaa Mahfouz's vlog, extending its reach through thousands of like, reposts, and shares. Her message articulated multiple identities, resisting both President Hosni Mubarak's authoritarian regime and Egyptian and Islamic gender roles. She claimed the right to stand in the streets next to her fellow Egyptian citizens—male and female—transgressing the boundary between cyberspace and physical space. By using YouTube and Facebook to upload a vlog, she signified that her body was a symbol to rally around. This revolutionary embodiment mirrored the symbolic images of Khaled Said's battered and bloodied body on the "We are all Khaled Said³" Facebook page and the self-immolation of Tunisian street vendor Mohamed Bouazizi memorialized in a viral YouTube clip. However, unlike the symbols of male martyrs expressed in the previous examples, Asmaa Mahfouz

² On Facebook and other blogging platforms, a "like" button is a feature that allows users to show their support for specific comments, pictures, wall posts, statuses, or fan pages. Added to Facebook in 2009, it has since expanded to other websites and allows users to show their appreciation for content without writing a comment.

³ The We are all Khaled Said movement began when images of Khaled Mohamed Said's death at the hands of Egyptian police disseminated online, inspiring Egyptian Google executive Wael Ghonim to anonymously create the page. He posted as an anonymous Egyptian using the universal 'we' to symbolize that Khaled Said's death was an injustice to all Egyptian citizens. This movement was instrumental in organizing the #Jan25 protests that began the Egyptian uprising in January 2011.

performed as a *female* symbol, calling herself the ‘daughter of Egypt’ (binat al masri).

This thesis examines a subset of Tunisian, Egyptian, and Moroccan female cyberactivists who participated in the so-called Arab Spring revolutions. Asmaa Mahfouz exemplifies the integral role these female cyberactivists played in the protests that began in Tunisia in December 2010 and spread across the Middle East and North Africa into late 2011. When the dust settled, three presidents for life—Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, Tunisian President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, and Libyan President Muammar al-Gaddafi—had fallen and new governments and constitutions allegedly granting greater freedoms rose in their place. The reverberations of these revolutionary movements continue to be felt today in ongoing protest movements throughout the region. Female cyberactivists such as Asmaa Mahfouz inhabited virtual and physical space simultaneously during the Arab Spring revolutions, demonstrating the importance of digital media for articulating multiple, conflicting identities and remaking the self. This thesis proposes the term *female reverberations* to encompass the influence and scope of Arab women online during the height of the protests in Tunisia, Egypt and Morocco from December 2010 to late 2011. In renowned feminist scholar Joan Wallach Scott’s recent book *The Fantasy of Feminist History*, she writes that the word reverberation “*carries a sense both of infinite regression,*” thus female reverberations are “*—subsequent echoes, succession of echoes—and of effect—reverberations are also repercussions*” (Scott, 2011: 79). Inspired by her work, I substitute the digital media theoretical term ‘connectivity’, which maps online networks and measures influence of

digital technologies, with the term ‘reverberations,’ gendering my analysis of female activism and presence online. In this way, this thesis explores how the revolutionary movements in Tunisia, Egypt and Morocco offered opportunities for resistance, in particular cyber resistance, to be deployed in new ways and spaces.

The theoretical framework of this thesis works at the intersection of feminist critical theory, social movement theory and digital media studies. Using a subset of female cyberactivists from Tunisia, Egypt and Morocco, it seeks to understand how these protests gave birth to diverse networks of female cyberactivists, expanding female reverberations online. In doing so, these female subjects problematized stable categories of ‘women’ ‘citizen’ ‘Arab’ and ‘feminist.’ Thus, this thesis will investigate the liberating possibilities of digital technologies and social media and will examine how these female cyberactivists performed their gender and articulated their identities online.

Throughout, this thesis poses the question: did digital technologies facilitate women’s participation in the Arab Springs in new ways and with greater agency than they had previously experienced? In response to this question, it argues four main points: 1) Flows of information connected female cyberactivism with physical protests, allowing female cyberactivists to live blog, tweet, and film their participation in street protests and upload these documents online; 2) Female cyberactivists deployed different languages (MS, colloquial, English, French, etc.) at specific moments to reach select local, regional, and international audiences; 3) During and after the protests, female cyberactivists established new networks online to connect with fellow protestors, reach out to international

journalists, document their experiences, demand gender equality, and mobilize female networks against gender violence; 4) Female cyberactivists performed a multiplicity of femininities online, from modern Western constructions of femininity practiced by many Tunisian female activists to the intersection of Islamic piety with feminist values several Egyptian female cyberactivists performed. Ultimately, this thesis argues that women in the 2010-2011 Tunisian, Egyptian, and Moroccan protests used digital technologies in diverse ways to participate in and at times lead protests, carving new spaces to articulate claims for political, social, and cultural gender parity.

The remainder of this introduction locates the analysis of female cyberactivism in the political, religious, cultural, socioeconomic and historical processes that construct what has been named the ‘Arab Awakening,’ ‘Arab Spring and Winter’ or simply, the ‘Arab Spring.’ It begins with a brief description of the timeline of protests, which will be expanded upon in the subsequent Tunisian, Egyptian, and Moroccan chapters. From there, it moves to a horizontal perspective—looking at the Arab Spring in the context of transnational social movements and the rising importance of cyberactivism globally. In conclusion, this introduction uses the theoretical works of feminist theorists Judith Butler and Saba Mahmood to address the choice of the term ‘female reverberations’ and to answer the question: why gender? This threefold approach situates the actions of the Tunisian, Egyptian, and Morocco female cyberactivists this thesis examines within the global context of protest movements, digital activism, and gender relations.

1.1 *The so-called ‘Arab Spring’*

Political analysts and journalists credit Mohamed Bouazizi’s self-immolation on December 17, 2010 as the match that ignited the Tunisian protests. A frustrated and defeated street vendor, suffering abuse at the hands of the police, Bouazizi lit himself on fire in front of the governor’s house less than an hour after a female Tunisian police officer confiscated his wares. His martyrdom enraged Tunisians and protests spread across the country, organized via mobile phones, blogging, Facebook and Twitter. Female Tunisian bloggers such as Lina Ben Mhenni’s *A Tunisian Girl* encouraged Tunisians to protest and disseminated information about the protests throughout the Middle East and North Africa region and internationally. Mhenni’s internationally renowned blog and Asmaa Mahfouz’s vlogs demonstrate how female networks online mobilized activists and fostered solidarity in the protests. On December 28, 2010, Tunisian President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, in office since 1987, responded to the Tunisian protestors by issuing a proclamation stating that dissent would be severely punished (Dabashi, 2012). After two weeks of prolonged violence and defections from the Tunisian military and police, Ben Ali fled for Saudi Arabia on January 14, 2011.

News of Ben Ali’s departure from power spread throughout the Arab world, transmitted by digital media when state-run media sources refused to broadcast the protests. In Egypt, a 40-year-old restaurant owner Abdou Abdel-Monaam Hamadah set himself on fire on January 17, 2011 in front of parliament. The protest scheduled for Egypt’s national police appreciation holiday on January 25th organized by members of the “We are all Khaled Said” Facebook page, the

April 6th movement, and the Kefaya (“Enough” in Egyptian colloquial Arabic) movement took on greater importance. January 25th arrived and became known as the ‘Day of Rage’ after thousands of Egyptians flooded Tahrir Square and chanted “*The People Want to Bring Down the Regime.*”⁴ Wael Ghonim, the then anonymous creator of the We are all Khaled Said Facebook page, writes in his autobiography *Revolution 2.0*, “The scene at Tahrir was one of the most enthralling I had ever seen. Enormous numbers of protestors—thousands, if not tens of thousands—covered most of the ground space in the square” (Ghonim, 2012). Protests escalated until February 11th, 2011 when President Hosni Mubarak announced he was stepping down and that the army was in charge. The fall of Hosni Mubarak and Zine El Abidin Ben Ali shocked the region and the world. Many Arabs, such as Egyptian feminist activist and writer Nawal El Saadawi responded with enthusiasm and optimism. After Egypt appeared to have fallen to the revolutionaries, countries across the Arab region experienced various levels of protests, political upheaval, and regime change.

Protests in Morocco differed from their fellow North African countries. These protests did not share in the velocity nor the violence of Egypt and Tunisia and left the king in power. Some scholars argue that this is due to the movement’s demographics—it was largely a university student-led, urban protest (Salime, 2012). In addition, King Mohammed VI responded to the protestors’ demands rapidly, raising the minimum wage, increasing scholarships for students, raising the pay for civil servants and calling for the parliament to revise the constitution. Influenced by the activists in Tunisia and Egypt, Moroccan

⁴ Asmaa Mahfouz’s vblog January 26, 2011

youth first protested against Morocco's high unemployment rate, government corruption, legal gender inequalities, and political oppression in Rabat on February 20th, 2011. King Mohammed VI responded to these protests with several concessions, specifically a new constitution that redistributed the government's power and allowed for gender reforms. In addition, King Mohammed VI responded to the protestors' demands rapidly, raising the minimum wage, increasing scholarships for students, raising the pay for civil servants and calling for the parliament to revise the constitution. Protests dwindled after the constitutional referendum on June 24, 2011. Nonetheless, the February 20th Movement opened new spaces for Moroccan female activists to engender online and offline discourse. This in turn facilitated the creation of SlutWalk Morocco, which later became known as Woman Choufouch⁵, a movement that highlights sexual harassment and gender violence towards women.

While many scholars contest that the origins of the Arab Spring can be found in the decades preceding 2010, with the global recession and high unemployment of the young, education Arab population, this thesis focuses on the role of digital media in organizing, mobilizing and responding to these causes. The following paragraphs trace the evolution of social media microblogs such as Twitter and Facebook and locate their growing importance in political protests preceding the Arab Spring, providing examples from the early 2000s Color Revolutions in Eastern Europe and the 2009-2010 Iranian Green Revolution.

⁵ According to the founders of the movement, "Choufouch" has a range of meanings from 'what's up' to 'look here' to 'shouldn't we try.' The word is usually used by Moroccan men to accost Moroccan and foreign women walking in the streets.

Many Egyptian and Tunisian activists learned how to use digital technologies for cyberactivism from Eastern European activists in the aftermath of the Color Revolutions. In addition, postcolonial scholar Hamid Dabashi has argued in his recent book *The Arab Spring: The End of Postcolonialism* (2012) that the Iranian Green Revolution marked the beginning of the Arab uprisings. These examples reveal the transnational exchange of digital technologies and cyberactivism tactics that enabled the Tunisian, Egyptian, and Moroccan activists to effectively mobilize protests during the Arab Spring.

1.2 *The Revolution Will Be Twittered*

Launched in 2006, Twitter founders Jack Dorsey, Evan Williams, Biz Stone and Noah Glass intended the microblogging⁶ site to function as a social network, similar to Facebook. To use the site, members post status updates limited to 140 characters using various websites, mobile internet devices and SMS (i.e. text messages) (Murthy, 2011). These updates could be anything from what someone ate that night to a message to communicating a public emergency, for example @MayorRTRyback tweeted on December 4, 2013, “We have 35 crews out plowing and treating city streets. Please drive safe, stay clear of the plows & follow @MinneapolisSnow for updates.” Twitter connects to other websites through widgets hosted on sites that post directly to Twitter. Members can also

⁶ Murthy defines microblogging as, “an internet-based service in which (1) users have a public profile in which they broadcast short public messages or updates whether they are directed to specific user(s) or not, (2) messages become publicly aggregated together across users, and (3) users can decide whose messages they wish to receive, but not necessarily who can receive their messages; this is in distinction to most social networks where following each other is bi-directional” (2012: 1061).

add photos, upload videos, and paste links to their messages. Twitter facilitates interaction and connectivity between users through the ‘reply’, ‘retweet’, and ‘favorite’ buttons. Thus messages posted by one user, for example @BarackObama “I want to wish everybody a Merry Christmas and a joyful holiday season—President Obama during the lighting of @TheNationalTree” can be retweeted by 1,454 users and favorited by 1,674 users. These functions extend Twitter’s reach far beyond the original member and her/his followers.

Twitter’s usage soon expanded and transformed into an information network instrumental to numerous protests and revolutions throughout the world. In 2009, two so-called revolutions occurred which thrust Twitter and social networking into the spotlight. Civil unrest began in Moldova in April 2009 as the results of the 2009 Moldova parliamentary election were tallied. Protestors claimed election fraud and demanded a recall election. Dubbed the ‘Grape Revolution,’ demonstrators used Twitter to organize themselves and coordinate protests. Several months later, in June 2009, disputed Iranian elections led to mass youth protests, which came to be known as the ‘Green Revolution.’ Both social movements later came to be known as ‘Twitter Revolutions.’ The Moldova and Iranian uprisings informed how Tunisian, Egyptian, and Moroccan activists would deploy digital technologies and social media networks during the 2011 Arab Spring revolutions.

Moldova’s “Grape Revolution” came on the heels of the revolutions in Serbia, Georgia, and Ukraine during the early 2000s, termed the ‘color revolutions.’ On April 7, 2009, nearly 30,000 people gathered to protest the election results, spreading information via Twitter and other online networking

services (Mungiu-Pippidi & Munteanu, 2009). Although the official media refused to cover the protests, accounts, pictures, and videos emerged on Twitter and YouTube and transmitted to the international arena. While some scholars question the extent of social networking sites' involvement in the revolution, most agree that the Twitter had a role in broadcasting the original protest on April 7. Subsequent tweets and YouTube posts acted as citizen journalism, covering the protests and resulting violence when the official media remained silent. Protestors' actions in Moldova reached international attention and informed the actions of Iranian activists just a few months later.

Iranian demonstrators took to the streets of Tehran after election results named incumbent President Ahmadinejad had retained power with 60% of the vote despite reported irregularities on June 12, 2009 (Sreberny & Khiabanny, 2011). *Atlantic* reporter and blogger Andrew Sullivan wrote in a June 13 article, "You cannot stop people any longer. You cannot control them any longer. They can bypass your established media; they can broadcast to one another; they can organize as never before." News pundits and political analysts dubbed this as the first 'social media revolution,' reiterating the successes of the Obama 2008 presidential campaign's social media campaign. Twitter, Facebook, Flickr, YouTube and other social networking and information network sites can be understand as a physiological charged space (Naghibi, 2011). In the Iranian post-election protests, Twitter acted as a tool to share information, creating a sense of belonging and a virtual space perceived as removed from physical violence. Twitter organizes information and categorizes themes using a 'hashtag,' for example Iranian diasporic activists tweeted #green to symbolize their support for

the protests. By searching for the hashtag #green, Iranians could access a stream of tweets relaying information about the protests as they unfolded. During the Arab Spring revolutions, protestors employed similar tactics. They used Twitter hashtags such as #sidibouzir, #Jan25, and #Feb20 to create a sense of solidarity and momentum and to disseminate information about when and where demonstrations would be held.

As the Iranian government attempted to cut Internet and mobile connections, protestors were able to tweet by sending SMS messages to the website. On June 20, twenty-six year old Neda Solton was shot and killed in the streets of Tehran. A cell phone video camera captured her death and posted it on the video hosting site YouTube; it was then shared across various media sites—namely Facebook and Twitter. Social networking sites (re)inscribed Solton's death as a commemorative symbol for all Iranian women protesting the Iranian regime. In this instance, social network sites can be seen as an enabling space that transforms identification and belonging to political action and thought. Although the appropriation of Solton's image is problematic, its use as a symbol gives insight into how images of political protest can exist side by side with 'Foodstagram.' Thus, it is about the user's interaction with the social networking site and the ability to move freely from one virtual site and mentality to the next.

The commodification of Neda Solton's image leads to a discussion of what role Iranian women held in the protests as well as how do social networks affect Iranian women and gender dynamics in Iran. Some scholars have argued that everyday interaction on social networks—beyond using them for social movement resistance—provides a space for women to stretch the limits of Iran's

authoritarian control of women (Sreberny & Khiabanny, 2011; Dabashi, 2007; Bayat, 2007). Contemporary female bloggers bring private matters into the public domain, transgressing the virtual and physical realms. They act out of a long history of Iranian women's press, activism, and feminist movements. Web 2.0 allows for embodied discussions and, "the articulation of a more abstract 'body politics.'" (Sreberny & Khiabanny, 2010) In the post-election protests, virtual space directed embodied resistance to the gender politics of the regime, voicing a call for gender equality in addition to an election recall. Similarly, Tunisian, Egyptian, and Moroccan female cyberactivists have employed digital technologies and social media networks to transgress offline gender divides and issue claims for gender parity in the new governments.

Micro-blogging social media sites like Twitter and Facebook serve as gateways into other virtual networks hosted on Web 2.0. In addition to their rising importance in political revolutions and protest movements, they have been used to advocate for gender equality throughout the world. Although the impact of these technologies depends on the awareness of advocates using them, the political, social, and socio-economic circumstances surrounding them, and the existence of civil society, these technologies provide unique spaces for marginalized populations, such as women, to articulate and transmit oppressed ideas and identities. In Latin America, women's organizations and movements employ information and communication technology (ICTs) to create transnational networks that advocate for gender equality (Friedman, 2005). These gendered networks sometimes reasserted traditional societal divides along race, class, etc. A closer examination of online gender activism, in Latin America,

Spain, etc., leads to questions of whether ICTs have liberating potential. Does the Internet give rise to a ‘nomadic’ subject—capable of transcending digital divides and physical boundaries?

This section has demonstrated the connection between the proliferation of digital technologies and cyberactivism with political and social protest movements worldwide. Micro-blogging sites enable citizens to produce user-generated content that bypasses the biased state media and government censors. Using mobile phones to connect to online sites, take photos, and upload videos, protestors can challenge the power dynamics in their country and mobilize protests along informal, user-generated information networks. The following section argues that these technologies and their usage should be analyzed through a gendered perspective, asking does the internet provide liberating potentialities for female activists? Or are gender divides reasserted online? This thesis contends that a gendered perspective of digital activism during the Arab Spring revolutions elucidates how Tunisian, Egyptian, and Moroccan women used digital technologies and social media networks to participate in and at times lead protests, inserting their marginalized bodies and voices into the public domain.

1.3 Why Gender? “Nomadic” Subjectivity and Female Reverberations

Feminist methodology has taught us to ask about variation, difference, and conflict whenever we are presented with neatly contained entities—and not only “man” and “woman” (Scott, 78).

How does Web 2.0, specifically digital technologies and social media, create diverse subjects? What are the liberating potentialities of digital media technologies? How can we theorize gender activism and agency in virtual spaces? This thesis looks at the intersection of protest movements and digital activism in Tunisia, Egypt and Morocco. It applies a gendered analysis in order to unpack the intricate processes in which Tunisian, Egyptian, and Moroccan female cyberactivists construct their subjects online. By looking at specific instances of protest and resistance, this thesis seeks to understand how these women strategically deployed their identities through digital media technologies. Social networking and digital technologies enabled Tunisian, Egyptian and Moroccan females to participate in political protests in new ways, operating in a virtual 'third space.' Thus, this thesis examines whether these spaces ensured women's safety or exposed them to violence, asking: does cyberactivism produce new modalities of agency?

Contemporary feminist scholarship finds that Arab women have participated in the online and political activities of Arab feminism. Some, such as Sahar Khamis, argue that this prolific engagement contributes "to a new chapter of both Arab feminism and the region" (2011). Arab women use online activism for political engagement and resistance, challenging hegemonic and patriarchal norms and political oppression. Social networking sites such as Twitter, Facebook, Wordpress, Blogspot, etc. have opened spaces for women to articulate multiple points of resistance. Activists in Tunisia and Egypt, and Morocco employed cyberactivism to connect, organize, and mobilize resistance to the authoritarian regimes. Female activists also used cyberactivism to respond to

constructed gender norms, rules, and laws in their society. To understand how feminist reverberations spread online through the Arab Spring, this thesis will apply Saba Mahmood's reworking of Judith Butler's performative theory.

Employing Saba Mahmood's theoretical reasoning in *Politics of Piety*, this thesis argues that transgressing gender norms may not only take the form of challenging or effecting change in the "system of gender," (2005), but can also be realized by how female cyberactivists inhabit certain norms or gender roles. Furthermore, agency can be seen by how these subjects navigate discourses—appropriating marginalized languages and creating new spaces for diverse forms of resistance to flourish. In particular, this thesis demonstrates how Arab bloggers and female cyberactivists embodied resistance online during the Arab Spring uprisings. It is important to note that this thesis does not negate female cyberactivists who performed agency through resistance to oppressive gender norms; rather, it argues that female cyberactivists from Tunisia, Egypt and Morocco deployed multiple modalities of agency—sometimes inhabiting conservative gender roles and sometimes resisting these roles.

In applying theories of performativity, it is important to remember that the performance of gender is also the performance of the political. When using the category of 'Arab' 'woman' and 'Islamic' 'feminist,' this thesis brings into play certain political theorizations, representations and power dynamics that these words signify. It would be remiss not to mention postcolonial theorist Edward Said's text *Orientalism* (1978). Enacting a Foucauldian understanding of how power functions through discourse, Said reveals the historical production of Western representation of the Arab world. He unpacks how stereotypical

caricatures of Arabs as ‘backwards, ignorant, suppressive’ became constructed as ‘truth’ and inform scholarly work and political policy today. In the feminist movement, third wave feminist critical theory problematizes the imperial emancipatory project of first and second wave feminism that essentialized women’s struggles into universal categories. Thus, speaking of Arab women and Islamic feminists brings to the forefront the historical production of their subjectivation. In order to have a more nuanced understanding of how the Arab Spring offered an opportunity to articulate new, diverse identities, this thesis proposes a theoretical model that does not seek to ‘give’ agency or impose an emancipatory narrative on their actions. Instead, it examines the connection between online female activism to offline protests, looking at how they used this transition to embody multiple points of resistance. Viewing internet connectivity through a gendered perspective and terming it “reverberations” allows this thesis to reveal how the unstable category ‘Arab woman’ is written online in Tunisia, Egypt, and Morocco.

This thesis begins in Sidi Bouzid, Tunisia where the Arab Spring revolutions ignited on December 17, 2010. The Tunisia chapter will introduce the complex historical, political, socioeconomic, religious, and cultural processes that influenced the Tunisian revolutions. It will explore how a thriving cyberactivism community and supposedly progressive gender relations within Tunisia influenced how Tunisian women participated online and offline during the protests. In particular, the chapter will investigate the role of bridgeblogging and citizen journalism, demonstrated by Tunisian cyberactivist Lina Ben Mhenni. From Tunisia, this thesis follows female reverberations online to Egypt in

January 2011 and Asmaa Mahfouz's challenge to Egyptian men through YouTube and Facebook on January 18, 2011. The Egyptian chapter is divided into three sections, with the bulk of the chapter devoted to in-depth narrative analyses of six Egyptian female cyberactivists in this chapter. It will unpack how these women translated online activism to physical protests in the streets despite the presence of gender violence. Finally, this thesis moves to its final country case study—Morocco and the February 20th movement. While the Moroccan protests did not achieve the same dramatic regime turnovers—King Mohammed VI remained in power—they demonstrate how Moroccan women mobilized online and carved out new spaces to protest the unequal gender relations in their country. Moroccan female cyberactivists created new networks to mobilize, organize and protest gender issues such as sexual harassment, the women's status in the family legal code (the Muduwana) and women's participation in the government. In conclusion, this thesis will reflect on the rich array of female cyberactivists surveyed, comparing and contrasting the distinct ways female activists deployed digital technologies in Tunisian, Egypt, and Morocco.

By examining a diverse range of female cyberactivists in the Arab Spring—from Egyptian activist Mona Seif protesting and tweeting from Tahrir Square amidst violent confrontations with the Egyptian police from January 25 to February 14 2011, to the Moroccan women speaking in their native, marginalized languages online (Berber, Moroccan Colloquial Darija) urging Moroccans to protest on February 20—this thesis will unpack how women deployed diverse identities and articulated agency through digital technologies. It will argue that female reverberations online expanded and transformed during the Arab Spring

protests, increasing Arab women's participation online. Beginning with the Tunisian protests in December 2010, Tunisian, Egyptian and Moroccan women inhabited new spaces online and offline. This thesis will highlight how these women used digital technologies in the Arab Spring protests, creating new spaces to perform their gender in the process. In order to do so, it is necessary to first step back and assess the wide range of scholarship informing my understanding of social movements, digital technologies and feminist critical theory.

Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

This literature review is broken into four sections, documenting the intersection of scholarship on the Arab Spring revolutions, digital technologies, feminist critical theory. It will begin with an assessment of the diverse scholarship attempting to grasp, unpack and theorize the Arab Spring. These articles range from efforts to historicize the movement and compare it to the European revolutions of 1848 and the post-cold war democratic transitions in Eastern Europe to those that claim it demarcates a ‘fourth wave’ of democracy. When reading these accounts, it is important to remember that the Arab Spring is not a single event, but a long-term process of political change affecting various countries and demographics in diverse ways. Second, this review will turn to a survey of scholarship analyzing cyberactivism and digital media. These works contextualize the role of cyberactivism and digital media, offering insights into their effects on the Arab Spring protests. Third, it will discuss recent evolutions in feminist critical theory and scholarship. This section outlines prominent feminist theories, which I will incorporate in my theoretical model. Finally, this literature review will conclude with a brief summary of significant scholarship on female cyberactivism in the Middle East and North Africa published in the last two years. Throughout, this literature review contemplates several key questions: How do scholars begin to understand the nature, character, and trajectory of the Arab Spring revolutions? What key historical reference points should be used? What analytical framework should be applied? And what political themes applied to these protests that can help make sense of the Arab Spring?

2.1 Deconstructing the ‘Arab Spring’

What are the underlying causes of the Arab Spring? What economic, political, social, and cultural forces prompted Tunisian street vendor Mohamed Bouazizi to commit self-immolation? In a 2012 article, “Why was the Arab World Poised for Revolution? Schooling, Economic Opportunities, and the Arab Spring,” Filipe R. Campante and Davin Chor highlight the correlation between the Arab Spring protests and education and its connection with the economic environment. This article offers both an analysis of the causes of the Arab Spring as well as an attempt to understand it through comparisons with other similar episodes of political change.

The authors’ problematize the positive relationship between higher educational opportunities and economic opportunity, arguing that in the Middle East and North Africa it led to alienation and instability. They frame the case study as an indicator for political instability and incumbent change at the country level. Deriving data from the World Development Indicators, the authors find that the labor market prospects faced by skilled or educated workers in the Arab world appear to be especially weak. They compare this data with results from the World Values Survey, linking the, “attractiveness of the labor market returns for the skills acquired through education,” with one’s political activities. In conclusion, they find that higher education at the country level shares a positive relationship with individual propensity to protest activities and this relationship is much more likely when combined with poor labor market conditions. Their economic analysis contextualizes the demographics and environment that

triggered the protests, providing insight into why cyber space became a popular medium of protest.

At the surface level, the Arab Spring protests project a familiar narrative for Western readers. Dictatorial authoritarian leaders pulled from power by the masses in a call for democratic reforms and rights. However, beneath this common scenario, these protests have generated questions about how to interpret the implicit and embedded causes. Hamid Dabashi, who holds the chair of Iranian studies and comparative literature at Columbia University, tackles this debate in his wide-ranging theoretical book *The Arab Spring: The End of Postcolonialism*. Drawing from an extensive background in postcolonial theory and comparative literature, he proposes an analysis of the revolts that expands on Edward Said's theory of Orientalism. His book centers on his concern for what he terms the "regime of knowledge production" that has distorted our understanding of the world. He believes that the youth chanting in Tahrir Square are calling not just for an overthrow of oppressive dictatorship, but an overthrow of conceptual categories, political terminology and intellectual frames of reference that are fundamentally Western and a byproduct of colonialism. While the Arab Spring has been commonly referred to as a series of revolutions, Dabashi examines the extent to which this is true. He suggests that the Arab Spring, "offers the idea of an 'open-ended' revolt" (Dabashi, 2012: 63). This definition allows for a more nuanced analysis of the protests, refusing to historicize them as other scholars have done

His book is less about the Arab Spring than it is a critique of existing intellectual paradigms and concepts. Indeed, he uses it as a platform to attack

writers such as Bernard Lewis and Thomas Friedman. He finds that the Arab Spring is an “open-ended” revolution with transnational potential that calls for a more inclusive universalism, (de)centering the world from Western and Eurocentric geographical thought. Frequently incomprehensible and filled with unnecessary academic language, the text reads more as an enthusiastic embrace of revolution. At times, the influence of Edward Said overshadows Dabashi’s own work and theoretical assumptions. However, his work does provide a provoking framework in which to situate the Arab Spring within.

In contrast to Dabashi’s text, Peter Burgess and Costas Constantinou’s introduction to the October-November 2013 special issue of the journal *Security Dialogue* highlights the limits of liberation geography. Their article frames the articles in the issue, all of which provide diverse analyses of the Arab Spring. Security concerns and geopolitical power dynamics inform their article, as they ask:

But to what extent is this move towards an ethical recognition of global fragility truly experienced? Can we really say that this region or any subregion is no longer the middle of anybody’s East? Whose east? Whose strategic and postcolonial legacy is Dabashi brushing over with his liberation geography? Is liberation geography just emancipatory or can it also be strategic? Could it not proclaim *ethos* yet serve *ethnos*? (Burgess & Constantinou, 2013: 369).

While this approach differs from Dabashi’s, it asks a similar question: how do we begin to understand the geopolitical changes in the region? For the authors, the Arab Spring represents a challenge to previously conceived norms and terminology.

They identify several areas wherein the Arab Spring presents a threat. These are Islam/Islamism, civil conflict in Syria and Libya, violence in Tahrir

Square and the threat of military authoritarianism in Egypt. Their article also highlights the competing pressures and *ethos* vying for power in the protests. For example, they point out the unlikely partnerships formed in the beginning of the protests, challenging Dabashi's notion of a 'collective consciousness.' Thus, for the authors and the articles following their introduction, the shifting geography of the Middle East as a result of the Arab Spring presents a challenge of how to understand and react.

One of the articles included in this special edition of *Security Dialogue* applies a gendered framework to the Arab Spring and its aftermath. Written by Elisabeth Johansson-Nogués, the article focuses on women protestors and women's rights. Johansson-Nogués analyzes activism through a gendered lens, focusing on the participation of Tunisian, Egyptian and Libyan women in the Arab Spring uprisings. She distinguishes between activism during the protests and the state of women's rights after the protests apparent conclusion. While acknowledging the role of women from different generations and socioeconomic circumstances in the protests, she argues that their call for equal rights have not been heard. She questions the democratic nature of the revolutions in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya, citing gendered violence and a removal of women voices from the political transitions, and problematizes the supposed casual relation between democratization and greater social equity among citizens. Working with the assumption that gender is socially and culturally constructed, she attributes the cause of gendered violence to Arab males reasserting their masculinity in the face of shifting gender roles.

Her argument locates women in the social and political transformations in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya and can be read as a feminist critique of perceived democratic transitions in general. By applying a gendered analysis, she shows that even though women were active in the initial stages of protests, gendered violence and harassment eventually limited their presence. Her work within the gender binary reveals shifting gender roles inhabited by female protestors articulate a new femininity as well as an emerging masculine hegemony. Thus the success of women's rights depends on this new femininity as well as, "the ability of women's collectives to organize, mobilize, and expose themselves to further risks" (Johansson-Nogués, 2013: 406).

The above articles depict some of the recent scholarship theorizing, historicizing, and attempting to make sense of the causes and impact of the 2011 Arab Spring revolutions. Combined, these articles elucidate the complex historical, social, political, and economic processes that shaped the revolutions. The subsequent section examines an array of scholarship analyzing the rise of digital technologies and social media networks globally. Specifically, these articles look at the connection between cyberactivism and protest movements in the last decade.

2.2 Theorizing Digital Media and Cyberactivism

The 2011 Arab Spring revolutions have been called the 'social media revolution,' the 'twitter revolution,' the 'cyber revolution,' etc. While the presence of social media as an organizational tool and meeting place is apparent, few scholars have quantified and theorized the effects of cyberactivism on the Arab

Spring. Through a review of contemporary scholarship on the rise of digital technologies in protest movements, this section asks: What modes of analysis should be applied to cyber protests? How does socioeconomic status effect participation in digital media? What is the role of cyberactivism in the Arab Spring and can comparisons be drawn to other political protests, or is the Arab Spring truly 'revolutionary.' The following paragraphs offer discursive approaches to cyberactivism and digital media, from quantifying twitter to theorizing the relationship of digital connectivity and democratic transformation.

Created in 2006, Twitter is an online social networking and microblogging service modeled off of SMS and Facebook statuses (Lee, 2013). Members send "Tweets" limited to 140 characters, which their followers can then read. Since its launch, Twitter has grown exponentially and members can now access it online, via SMS texting or on mobile apps. It has increased the rate at which news is disseminated and transformed into a method of citizen journalism (Howard & Hussain, 2013). Bowdoin College Sociology Professor Dhiraj Murthy examines the relationship of citizen journalism and Twitter in several articles. Written in the aftermath of the Arab Spring, "Twitter: Microphone for the Masses?" (2011) and "Towards a Sociological Understanding of Social Media: Theorizing Twitter" (2012) the articles highlight the importance of Twitter in political protests, acknowledge it is not fully understood and make the case for further research to be done.

In "Twitter: Microphone for the Masses?" Murthy compares Twitter with previous modes of communication such as the telegram. By doing so, he examines how Twitter's truncated speech shapes the way in which it is used

(Murthy, 2011: 780) in social movements and disasters such as the bomb blasts in Mumbai in November 2008. Twitter categorizes tweets in larger themes, specific people and groups through the use of the hashtag (ex: #democratic) and tweets can be sent to people using the at-sign (ex: @HillaryClinton) (Lee, 2013). These tools allow any member of Twitter to disseminate information quickly, transforming citizens into journalists. However, digital divides exist that prevent marginalized populations from benefitting from this shared information. Ultimately, Murthy finds that Twitter is not displacing traditional media; rather it supplements it (Murthy 2011, 784). He asks the question, what constitutes citizen journalism? And where do we draw boundaries between professional journalism and citizen journalism online?

Murthy continues his analysis of Twitter in “Towards a Sociological Understanding of Social Media: Theorizing Twitter” (2012). This article provides a framework of methodology and literary sources to analyze Twitter with given its usage in social movements in Libya, Egypt, Tunisia and Algeria. Murthy applies a sociological approach to theorizing twitter and other emergent social media. He offers a brief description of what Twitter is, distinguishing “social media” from “social network” and defines Twitter as a social media microblog. After offering various opinions theorizing Twitter and the construction of the self, Murthy moves to a discussion of Twitter as democratizing. He asks, “whether the medium opened up access to the production of selves by tweeting” (Murthy, 2012: 1063) and discusses the shift of Twitter from an elite form of media to a more accessible one that anyone with a phone or Internet can use. This question

refers back to his previous article and whether the democratizing force of Twitter has removed the digital divide, which he argues that it has not.

Murthy's main argument examines notions of the 'self' and 'democracy' through modes of production and interaction. He discusses how the processes of tweeting and retweeting blur the boundaries between public and private, space and time. He writes that in Twitter, and an argument can be made for all virtual spaces, actors meet in time rather than place (Murthy, 2012: 1068). Therefore, microblogging sites such as Twitter can transcend certain boundaries, such as nationalities, cultures, etc. and create an online collective consciousness.

Murthy's work offers a framework for further research into the role of social media, as well as social networks, in political, social and economic transitions.

Although political activists used social media and social networks extensively before, during, and after the Arab Spring protests, the websites' design and governance often challenged activists. Communications scholars William Lafi Youmans and Jillian C. York highlight the tensions between activists' sociopolitical use of social media and the commercial interests of the site owners in "Social Media and the Activist Toolkit: User Agreements, Corporate Interests, the Information Infrastructure of Modern Social Movements" (2012). They write that, while social media proves the tools for organized dissent, it also constrains collective action (Youmans & York, 2012: 316). In other words, "Code is Law" (Lessig, 1999). Through code, companies both permit and forbid the application's functions (Youmans & York, 2012: 316). The authors argue that how companies structure their code, evolving policies, functionalities and user

guidelines affects which social media activists employ, using the Arab Spring as an example.

Egyptian citizens reacted with overwhelming outrage after activist Khaled Said was beat to death by Egyptian police after uploading a video that implicated the officers who murdered him in a drug deal on June 6, 2010. This reaction demonstrates the tensions between activists, companies, and government actors (Youmans & York, 2012: 318). The “We Are All Khaled Said” Facebook page made Khaled Said an Egyptian martyr. Former Google executive, Wael Ghonim who created it under the pseudonym ‘ElShaheed’, administered the account. Youman and York point out how the account was deactivated in November 2010 because it violated Facebook’s prohibition of the use of pseudonyms (Youmans & York, 2012: 318). However, Egyptian political activists disagreed with this move, saying anonymous accounts should be protected (Youmans & York, 2012: 318). Anonymity in social action is key point of tension between activists, companies and the government. Tunisian and Egyptian governments both attempted to shut down the wireless Internet services and censor online activism in order to prevent the protests from escalating (Howard & Hussain, 2013).

Philip N. Howard and Muzammil M. Hussain of The Project on Information Technology and Political Islam pursue the tensions and effects of online activism in *Democracy’s Fourth Wave: Digital Media and the Arab Spring* (2013). Their research addresses the casual relationship between digital connectivity, access to information infrastructure and democratic transformation, comparing data from Egypt and Tunisia prior to and during the protests,

examining indicators of digital civic engagement and activism in relation to physical protests.

The authors approach the question of democratic reform from its intersection with digital media, responding to the assumption that Internet freedom indicates higher levels of democracy (Schmidt & Cohen, 2013). Therefore, while the Arab Spring is the subject of analysis, their research seeks to make broader statements on the usage and effect of digital media, arguing for the causal relationship between digital media and democracy. While other countries in the region experienced digital protests and various forms of cyberactivism, the authors highlight Tunisia and Egypt because of their 'wired population' (Howard & Hussain, 2013). Both Tunisia and Egypt have a history of media usage, which is enabled by the widespread accessibility of mobile phones. Howard and Hussain argue that the Arab Spring protests resulted from technological proliferation in the area as more citizens are sharing information, exchanging SMS text messages, photos, etc. that spread awareness of injustices. Technological diffusion built up a cyber civil society, forming public and civic awareness that they contend is independent of any particular state authority. However, digital divides exist that problematize the notion of Internet freedom and online activism as an 'equalizer' (Murthy, 2012).

Online activism differs from conventional activism by creating a 'third space' (Newsom & Lengel, 2012) wherein actors from diverse backgrounds can interact and connect. Furthermore, it acts as a space somewhat removed from the threat of physical violence. These spaces offer an opportunity to analyze how gendered discourse shifts when the physical body seems removed. Two articles

published in recent years explore how gender inhabits online spaces. German sociologist Tanja Carstensen examines gender relations in social networking sites in her article, “Gender Trouble in Web 2.0: Gender Relations in Social Network Sites, Wikis and Weblogs” (2009). Her studies focus on the presentation of social networking sites, how their construction undermines or reasserts a gender binary. Victoria Newsom, professor of Communications at Olympic College, and Lara Lengel, professor of Communication studies at Bowling Green State University, build from Carstensen’s work in their article “Arab women, social media, and the Arab spring: applying the framework of digital reflexivity to analyze gender and online activism” (2012). The authors apply gender theories to analyze online activism as a third space, locating the presence of Arab women activists online in the Arab Spring.

Carstensen investigates the actions of feminist activist using the gendered design and use of Web 2.0 as well as the discourses and interventions that Web 2.0 as points of analysis (Carstensen, 2009: 106). Employing the notions that gender and technology are socially constructed, she argues that they are mutually constitutive and construct each other. She bases this claim by contextualizing the evolution of gender theory and Web 2.0, writing that, “[these changes] in technology, politics and equality have led to changed conditions for those interested in feminist politics” (Carstensen, 2009: 111). In addition, she gives examples of how social networks, wikis and weblogs both reinforce and challenge the gender binary. Popular social networking sites such as LastFM and MySpace require male or female gender designations before a member can sign up, forcing

a member to abide by gender heteronormativity. In contrast, queer activists and feminists use personal weblogs to construct multiple identities.

While Carstensen states her purpose is to search for how she searches for how social networks, wikis and weblogs present or inhibit agency, her article seems to focus more on how Web 2.0 constructs gender. In particular, she examines purported differences between offline gendered bodies and online gendered bodies, finding that social networking sites often reinforce gender norms and stereotypes. She introduces the discourse of self-reflection and self-presentation, but does offer analysis of this discourse. Newsom and Lengel take this topic of analysis further in their essay “Arab women, social media, and the Arab spring: applying the framework of digital reflexivity to analyze gender and online activism” (2012).

The authors apply a schema of what they term digital reflexivity to analyze activist engagement and citizen journalism conveys information. In particular, they analyze how various actors consume information through multiple stages of transmission and dissemination (Newsom & Lengel, 2012: 31). Their research addresses the perceived absence of a ‘gendered revolution’ during the Arab Spring as well as the media’s portrayal of online activism. Their article reads as an outline for future works, outlining a framework that reveals how information flows from local sources to, “global institutions and power brokers that act as gatekeepers of information flow”(Newsom & Lengel, 2012: 33). However, the theoretical framework of their work creates a space to research the intersection of gender, online activism, and the dissemination of power. Newsom and Lengel question the ability of online feminist activist spaces to

provide voices for marginalized persons, asking whether they re-create digital, gender and political divides (Newsom & Lengel, 2012: 32). They conduct their research from the assumption that information and information flow is gendered. This approach to theorizing digital media and online activism looks at whether digital media bridges divides, creating a ‘social media revolution’ or if it reinforces existing power paradigms. Newsom and Lengel highlight the importance of gendering cyberactivism and the Arab Spring revolutions, which the subsequent two sections will explore in greater depth.

2.3 Feminist Critical Theory and Performative Actions

The following paragraphs surveys notable scholarship on feminist critical theory, from landmark texts analyzing the intersection of Western feminism and neocolonialism to more contemporary works that pursue different modalities of agency for women. Several feminist scholars and activist have challenged the Arab Spring’s impact on promoting women’s rights and gender equality in the Middle East and North Africa (Newsom and Lengel, 2012). They cite as evidence street harassment and sexual assault of women protestors and the absence of women participating in the political transformations. In response, the purpose of this section is to examine feminist theories on gender relations and performative action, using them to contextualize women’s participation in the Arab Spring. Specifically, these articles consider questions of agency, noting that transnational and feminist scholars must analyze their role in contributing to essentialism to have a more nuanced understanding of the impact of the Arab Spring on Arab women (Newsom, Cassara, & Lengel, 2011). Chandra Mohanty addresses the role

of imperialism of Western feminist thought in her now classic generative text “Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses” (1984).

Mohanty critiques the political project of Western feminism and its construction of a hegemonic ‘Third World woman’ in the essay. She argues that feminist scholarship (reading, writing, critical or textual) is inscribed in relations of power, “—relations which they counter, resist, or even implicitly support” (334). Her work draws from Michel Foucault’s theories on power and sexuality, outlined in *The History of Sexuality Volume I* (1976). She writes:

This mode of defining women primarily in terms of their object status (the way in which they are affected or not affected by certain institutions and systems) is what characterizes this particular form of the use of “women” as a category of analysis (338).

Since Mohanty published this article, feminist scholarship has shifted to acknowledge the existence of these reductive, hegemonic categories. However, many in the public sector and media have not followed suit. For example, within the humanitarian and non-governmental organization sectors, the ‘Third World woman’ still exists. In recent years Western powers such as the United States have appropriated feminist discourse, using ‘the role of women’ to justify military interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Michel Foucault articulated revolutionary theories of sexuality and power relations in *The History of Sexuality: an Introduction* (1976). In it, he argued that the subject is discursively constructed through social practices and problematizes the assumption that power exists only in a oppressor/oppressed hierarchy (Foucault, 1976). Feminist theorists have since taken his theories and applied them to a diverse array of issues. Judith Butler, renowned sociologist

and Foucauldian scholar reworks Foucault to interrogate the gender binary and pursue the processes of biopower and performance theory, arguing gender is something that is performed and thus constructed (Butler, 1990). Recently, Saba Mahmood and Allison Weir have engaged Foucault's and Butler's work, applying their theories to a study of Islamic women's piety. Their writings further problematize Foucault's paradox of subjectivation, wherein the subject's capacity to action is enabled and created by specific relations of subordination (Foucault, 1976; Mahmood, 2005; Weir, 2013). They explore different modalities of agency, unhinging it from an oppressor/oppressed hierarchy.

Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject (2005) by Saba Mahmood unpacks the motives and practices of Egyptian women participating in the mosque or piety movement.⁷ In the beginning of the text, she reflects on the contentious role the piety movement holds in feminist scholarship, a position she also held before beginning her research. Islamic women and the piety movement has been termed fundamentalist, conservative, and reactionary and associated with the subjugation of women. However, as her writings demonstrate, normative liberal assumptions of human nature, in particular the unquestioned ideal of individual freedom, must be interrogated and questioned when applied to questions of religious and cultural difference. Engaging Foucault's analysis of ethical formation and Butler's work on performance theory, she looks at how women in the mosque movement inhabit norms and practices. While acknowledging that a lens of resistance to norms can be applied to the

⁷ Mahmood states the mosque or piety movement is part of the larger Islamic Revival or Islamic Awakening that began after the 1979 Iranian Revolution and has swept the Muslim world. It is characterized by Islamic women's revival of Islamic studies and pious practices, either in a mosque or at home.

mosque movement, she argues that such a reading is reductive. Her ethnographic interviews demonstrated how women negotiated competing norms in their piety, navigating male opposition to their movement and their desire to be active in their participation in Islamic studies. Mahmood's text lays out a new way of approaching agency in assumed marginalized subjects. Her work provides insight into how to study female subjects who adhere to patriarchal norms without assuming their freedom is restrained or that they can only exhibit agency by resisting these norms. In particular, this ethnographic and philosophical study offers a framework for analyzing agency in terms of the different ways it manifests and the conceptual language it employs.

Responding to *Politics of Piety*, Allison Weir critiques Mahmood's claim that feminist scholarship needs to question the ideal of freedom (2013). A social and political philosophy at the University of Western Sydney, Weir's work focuses on the intersection of gender, sexuality, class, ethnicity and religion in the development of individual and collective identities and the relation of identity to agency, freedom, power and solidarity. Her article, "Feminism and the Islamic Revival: Freedom as a Practice of Belonging" (2013), explores various conceptions of freedom, using the framework Mahmood applies to theorize on different modalities of agency. She critiques Mahmood for looking at only one type of relation: the relation of the self. In contrast, she argues that the "the analytical framework of relation to the self must be supplemented with an analytical framework of other kinds of relations, in this case in particular a relationship to God" (2013: 328). Thus, for Weir, freedom can be found in submission to God or when experiencing the sacred. She also examines positive

freedom, communitarian freedom, and what she terms a feminist reconception of freedom. Combined, Weir's and Mahmood's work challenge existing paradigms of liberal-secular thought, arguing for a more diverse and nuanced application of feminist critical theory in order to understand the question of the subject's construction posed by Foucault in 1976.

Turning from the theoretical writings of feminist scholars, I now look at Moroccan sociologist and feminist Zakia Salime's recent works. Salime's work examines the feminist movement in Morocco, analyzing its political, social and religious influences and its role in the Arab Spring protests. "The War on Terrorism: Appropriation and Subversion by Moroccan Women" (2007) draws correlations between Moroccan feminist discourse and neoliberal discourse. Using the 2003 Casablanca bombings by an Islamic terrorist group al-Salafiya al-Jihadiya, she demonstrates that feminist organizations (both liberal-secular and Islamist) appropriated the neoliberal agenda to advocate for women's rights and greater equality in the Muduwana, the Moroccan family legal code. Interestingly, Islamist women, rather than liberal-secular groups, faced greater hostility and government resistance after the attacks. They had to fight to prove their moderation and religious authority as a defense against Islamic extremism. This article shows an active feminist movement in Morocco, that has influence in Morocco's political, religious and social processes.

Salime demonstrates the Moroccan feminist movement's influence further in her article, "A new feminism? Gender dynamics in Morocco's February 20th movement" (2012). Salime utilizes Butler's theory of performing gender to argue that gender equality demands in Morocco's February 20th movement exist in the

virtual and bodily presence of women at all levels of mobilization and organization. Although feminist organizations were not at the forefront of the movement, Salime states that the movement appropriated feminist discourse. She cites the equal participation of women and men in the movement articulate a new feminism, one that moves out of feminism as a strictly female project. Her analysis of gender demographics in Morocco's Arab Spring give rise to questions of comparison with the movements in other countries. How does Morocco's movement differ from others? Do other movements exhibit similar feminist thought? This article provides a framework for similar studies to be applied throughout the Arab Spring.

The above paragraphs have surveyed recent scholarship analyzing the Arab Spring, contemporary works theorizing the rise of digital media technologies in protest movements, and questions of agency and subjectivation in feminist critical theory. In conclusion, the final section of this literature review will present three authors who have published articles at the intersection of these three fields: Courtney Radsch, Sahar Khamis, and Aimy Aisen Kallander.

2.4 Gendering the Arab Spring: Digital technologies and female activism

This brief section reviews three select authors who have produced or are currently producing articles exploring the presence of female cyberactivists in the 2011 Arab Spring revolutions and the role of Arab women online. These demonstrate the different perspectives and dominant trends a gendered lens to

cyberactivism in the Arab Spring reveals. Courtney Radsch⁸ and Sahar Khamis have published several articles since 2011 reflecting and theorizing on the role of female cyberactivists in the Arab Spring. Their work covers the entire MENA region and relies on data collected leading up to and during the protests from December 2010 to late 2011. A doctoral candidate at American University, Courtney Radsch argues that women mapped new territories for blogging and online activism during the protests. In an article for *Muftah*, an open source journal online, Radsch notes that digital media technologies empowered women, enabling more women to engage in cyberactivism (December 2013). Her article focuses on the actions of female cyberactivists throughout the MENA region, brining in cyberactivists from Bahrain and Saudi Arabia as well as the Middle East. Another recent article published jointly by Sahar Khamis and Courtney Radsch, "In Their Own Voice: Technologically Mediated Empowerment and Transformation Among Young Arab Women" expands Radsch's argument in her December 2013 *Muftah* article. The authors use in-depth interviews with female cyberactivists to posit that these women used social media to express themselves freely and enact new forms of agency and empowerment (2013).

In opposition to Radsch and Khamis, Amy Aisen Kallander argues that scholars need to reconsider the implications of cyberactivism in the Arab Spring protests (2013). Kallendar interrogates the role blogs had during the protests and problematizes their reach. Her article focuses on the role of what she terms "tech-savvy, middle- and upper-class, bilingual professionals" bloggers in Tunisia

⁸ Radsch is currently writing her dissertation on the topic of female cyberactivists in the Arab Spring, an excerpt of which she presented at a 2012 conference, "Unveiling the Revolutionaries: Cyberactivism and the Role of Women in the Arab Uprisings."

and their effect on the Tunisian uprisings from December 2010 to February 2011. Kallander challenges Radsch's and Khamis' understanding of the impact of digital technologies in the protests, contending that, "an in-depth examination of the Tunisian case supports the skeptical position of the limitations of online activism" (2013). The diverse positions of Kallander, Radsch, and Khamis reflect the confusion that still surrounds theorizing the connection between digital activism and protest movements. How do we measure the impact of digital activism on physical protests? What is the relationship between social media and social networking sites and revolutionary events? Do digital technologies empower women (and all marginalized peoples) or reassert unequal gender binaries? This thesis shares similarities with Radsch's and Khamis' arguments, refuting Kallander's main points. However, it is important to note that this thesis does not purport to claim that digital technologies and female cyberactivists caused the revolutions; rather, it seeks to understand how the political uprisings in Tunisia, Egypt and Morocco created new networks of female activists and enabled women to translate online activism to offline protests.

This thesis operates at the intersection of the vast array of scholarship on the Arab Spring revolutions, digital media technologies and social media, and feminist critical theory presented above. It applies a gendered lens to the 2011 revolutions in Tunisia, Egypt, and Morocco, examining how female activists deployed digital technologies to claim greater agency during the protests. The following chapter will present the qualitative research methods that were employed throughout the course of this thesis and the process of discerning and analyzing examples of Tunisian, Egyptian, and Moroccan female cyberactivism.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This thesis examined a subset of female cyberactivists in the Arab Spring from Tunisia, Egypt, and Morocco, defining cyberactivists as those who participate online in order to organize, document or participate in political protests and social movements. It focused on female cyberactivists because of the discrepancy between their marginalization in the streets and growing participation online the Middle East and North Africa. A gendered analysis of activism allowed for a more nuanced understanding of the impact of digital media in the protests as well as how female participation in cyberactivism reflects or subverts existing gender binaries in these countries. After performing initial research on female participation in the Arab Spring, I narrowed down my subjects to cyberactivists from Tunisia, Egypt, and Morocco. Tunisia, Egypt, and Morocco lead the Middle East and North Africa region in internet usage and growth. Furthermore, these countries have a lengthy history of political feminist activism and share demographic similarities due to their geographic local and previous colonial histories. Thus, this study is also comparative, examining the different ways in which female cyberactivists participated online, what identities they articulated, and what role they played in the protests.

Throughout, this thesis investigated how self-identified female cyberactivists used digital technologies to carve out new public spaces to inhabit. Therefore, when conducting my initial research, I chose bloggers and cyberactivists who specified the female gender, either by their name or in their biographic information. This gender identity was further performed in the

subject matter (women's rights, gender violence) or through the use of gendered language. I used a gendered subset of female activists in order to examine how they used the revolutions in Tunisia, Egypt and Morocco to occupy online and physical space, challenging the implicit division of public and private space in their Islamic Arab countries. It is important to note that female activists online may not be the gender they perform online—and the same for male bloggers. The internet has provided spaces for male and female genders to perform or masquerade as the other gender. The (mis)representation of gender online does not affect this thesis because it focuses on why activists identify as female, when they do so, and what impact their gender performance carries.

The research for this thesis began in the summer of 2013, prompted by my study abroad experiences in Morocco and the Egyptian protests against President Morsi. Initial research included reading online news articles and scholarly articles on the Arab Spring protests. From these sources, I expanded and began researching online for examples of female cyberactivists in Tunisia, Egypt and Morocco. These three countries lead the MENA region in internet usage and online development and share certain demographic similarities due to their geographic location and previous colonial histories. In order to find prominent female cyberactivists, I first cast a wide net, surveying over a hundred bloggers and activists from those countries. After collecting this data, I used a connective process to find highly trafficked and influential female cyberactivists, searching prominent bloggers' 'blogroll' (a list of blogs they follow usually posted in a small column on their main page). In addition, I looked at which bloggers and activists garnered international or national media attention, as that indicated their online

relevancy. By the end of November, I had compiled an extensive list of female cyberactivists—60 from Egypt, 30 from Morocco and 50 from Tunisia.

After composing this list, I narrowed down my subjects to prominent female subjects from Tunisia, Egypt, and Morocco. These female cyberactivists blogged in Arabic, English, and French, which presented some obstacles that I will discuss in greater detail later on in this methodology. I performed a subjective selection of activists, choosing female cyberactivists who had influence online (numbering thousands of followers or featured in international and national news articles). The number of followers a blog had, the number of comments on their posts, and the activists' inhabitation of multiple media platforms determines high connectivity⁹ or reverberations. Often, I worked backwards from prominent bloggers to find more obscure, but still important, female activists. Thus, for example, from Tunisian blogger Aya Chebbi's list of followers as well as her blogroll (blogs she follows online), I was able to find other Tunisian female bloggers and activists. I found a disproportionate amount of active users in each country. Egypt contained by far the most female bloggers and was the most connected country, with Tunisia and Morocco averaging about the same amount of bloggers. This disproportion may be attributed to Egypt's large population in comparison to Tunisia and Morocco. Egypt and Tunisia had more influential bloggers than Morocco. For example, Lina Ben Mhenni was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize for her coverage of the Tunisian protests in Arabic, English and French on her blog *A Tunisian Girl*. Morocco's female

⁹ Internet connectivity is defined as the process of sharing information and interacting with others online.

cyberactivists preferred Facebook, Twitter and YouTube to mobilize other Moroccan citizens during the February 20th movement.

Originally, I had planned on accessing Twitter archives from prominent activists to quantify how often they tweeted about subjects such as #womensrights or #sidibouid. I was unable to access the archives due to a change in Twitter open access policy as well as lack of computer software to process mass quantities of data. Due to these challenges, I decided to focus on 20 Egyptian female bloggers, 15 Tunisian female activists, and 10 Moroccan women involved in the 20th February movement, analyzing their gender performance and activism online. This analysis is informed by reports conducted before and after the Arab Spring, which measured the internet presence in Tunisia, Morocco, and Egypt. I primarily used the Dubai School of Government's Governance and Innovation Program 2013 Arab Social Media Report, Freedom House's 2008 and 2012 country profiles, and Howard and Hussain's research on digital activism during the Arab Spring revolutions from November 2010 to May 2011. I believe it is important to contextualize my qualitative analysis of these blogs within recent social movements and cyberactivism in these three countries. In this way, I am able to determine whether the Arab Spring protests in Tunisia, Egypt, and Morocco opened a space for more female activists to protest online or offline, or if these networks existed prior to the protests. A complete list of the blogs I used in my analysis is attached in an addendum, including demographic information retrieved from their "about" pages.

I analyzed these female cyberactivists based on the narratives they tell and the venues through which they tell their narratives. The samples I took for my

analysis stretch from December 2010 to December 2011¹⁰, but I chose to focus on the height of the protests from December 17, 2010 to March 2011. I included blogs that mention the protests as well as blogs that discuss gender rights or reflected identity politics. I coded these blogs using several categories, looking at how the bloggers self-identify, what their language reveals about their actions and identities, what online media they engage in, the extent of their influence and reverberations. From this categorical analysis and demographic information, I moved to close readings of several influential bloggers from each country. As I wrote in my introduction, each chapter structure in this thesis reflects the particular political events and gender relations for each country subset. For example, in the Egyptian I discussed gender violence at length because this was a topic many female cyberactivists ‘tagged’ or posted about in their blogs.

3.1 Categories of Analysis:

This thesis analyzed Tunisian, Egyptian, and Moroccan female cyberactivists using two different frameworks: connectivity and gender performance online. Connectivity measures the female cybeactivists’ influence online as well as the function of their blog—whether it was used for citizen journalism, political activism, personal reflections, or for all. When examining their gender performance, I looked first at how often they discuss or post about gendered issues. Then, I noted what language they articulated their message and identities with. For example, many Egyptian women employed gendered

¹⁰ This date does not indicate the end of the revolutions and protests movements as protests continue to this day. I chose December 2011 as a loose end date to narrow my data collection and focus on the actions of feminist activists during the first months of civil unrest.

language to indicate their right to participate in the protests in Tahrir Square whereas Tunisian women did not as they were already confident in their right to protest in the streets. I determined which categories of analysis to use after researching prominent hashtags used to group information, connecting the female cyberactivists posts to topics trending on Twitter and Facebook at the time of the Arab Spring revolutions. Theme categorization differed across country. Therefore, I used the categories below to conduct an initial analysis of Egyptian, Tunisian, and Morocco blogs and followed up with a country-specific analysis.

- Reasons for blogging
- Online and offline—gender performance
- Gender Identity
- Gendered issues:
- Connectivity and female reverberations online
- Political issues/demands
- Tactics

A detailed breakdown of this research and organization of these female cyberactivists is included in Appendixes A and B. Table A documents the first level of categorizations, organizing female cyberactivists according to nationality, language, political activity, etc. Table B documents the second level of categorizations and the themes used for the final analysis.

3.2 A note on translation:

Female cyberactivists have employed several languages in their online activity, including Arabic colloquial dialects, Modern Standard Arabic (MSA), French and English. One Tunisian activist also wrote posts in German. Their choice of language revealed what socio-economic position they held and their

level of education achieved. In addition, language often dictated who their primary audience was (international or local) and the purpose of their blog. In general, I found that seasoned female cyberactivists wrote in multiple languages, often posting the same article in Arabic and English or French or having an English language blog and an Arabic language blog. Similarly, activists tweeted and posted on Facebook in several languages. They switched between MSA, colloquial, French and English. When documenting abuses or performing citizen journalism, many chose to use French and English in order to appeal to international audiences and hold the government accountable. They iterated expressions of national identity, which peaked when the Tunisian president and Egyptian president stepped down, in their colloquial dialect. In Morocco, female cyberactivists used colloquial dialects and Berber to protest the regime and subvert the patriarchal authority of French and MSA.

French, English, Modern Standard Arabic, and Tunisian, Egyptian, and Moroccan colloquial Arabic language blogs are included in this data subset. It was important to use both English and Arabic blogs in order to reflect the diverse range of blogs female cyberactivists kept. As a fourth year student of Arabic, I have a working proficiency of reading and translating this language. I gained practice translating Arabic last semester in Professor Brett Wilson's Arabic and Translation class and am continuing to study the language this semester. When I could not translate colloquial Arabic dialects, I sought help from native Arabic speakers. Tunisian and Moroccan female cyberactivists posed some challenges to translation as they often posted in French and Arabic. When encountering this difficulty, I employed the online translation and dictionary tools Google Translate

and Wordreference to determine what blog posts I wished to translate. Once I gained a rudimentary understanding of the post, I advertised for advanced French language speakers from the French department. However, this subset of female cyberactivists is largely limited to Arabic and English speakers, as I could conduct a more informed analysis using those languages. Due to technological constraints, I was unable to include Arabic text in this thesis. Microsoft Office for Mac does not support right to left languages, so it is almost impossible to type in Arabic in Microsoft Word on Apple computers. Therefore, I tried to include transliterations of Arabic words and phrases in the text in addition to the English translations.

The previous three chapters have established the theoretical framework of this thesis, its position in the contemporary scholarship on feminist theory, protest movements, and digital activism, and the qualitative research methods it has employed. In four chapters that remain, this thesis will analyze examples of female cyberactivism and online protest movements in Tunisia, Egypt, and Morocco during the Arab Spring revolutions beginning on December 17, 2010. These chapters will explore how female activists embodied resistance online, comparing and contrasting the diverse ways Tunisian, Egyptian, and Moroccan female activists used digital technologies. Throughout, this thesis will contend that digital technologies and social media facilitated the emergence of new networks of female activists online and enabled female activists to carve out new spaces to articulate agency and issue demands for gender parity during the Arab Spring protests.

Chapter 4: The Tunisian Dignity Revolution

Sidi Bouzid is Burning

Recently, the number of cases of immolation by fire has increased in Tunisia. The protagonists of these actions are generally Tunisian citizens who have lost all hope in a decent life. Unemployment and poverty are au rendezvous and have poisoned their lives. Some of these incidents are largely covered by the media – by media I mean citizen media (blogs, Facebook, Twitter) as our official media are limiting their activities to the presentation of the activities of the President, the activities of the party in power, those of the associations related to the ruling party, international news-, sport etc. Others incidents are not covered at all. I will mention

Sidi Bouzid Brule !

Dernièrement , les immolations par le feu se sont multipliées en Tunisie .Les acteurs de ces actions sont généralement des citoyens tunisiens qui ont perdu tout espoir en une vie descente . Chômage et pauvreté sont au rendez-vous et ont envenimé leur existence. Certains de ces incidents sont médiatisés- et par médiatisés je parle de médias citoyens(blogs, Facebook, Twitter) puisque nos médias officiels se contentent de nous présenter les activités du président, les activités du parti au pouvoir , celles des associations liés au parti au pouvoir , les nouvelles internationales reprises , le sport etc- d'autres ne le sont pas. Je citerai certains de ces incidents: La

“Sidi Bouzid is burning,” Tunisian female cyberactivist Lina Ben Mhenni tweeted and posted on her blog *A Tunisian Girl* December 19, 2010. Her blog post, written in French and English, accompanied a screenshot of the viral video documenting Tunisian street vendor Mohamed Bouazizi’s self-immolation two days prior. She concluded the post with a premonition for the days to come: “Faced with a government indifferent to the sufferings of the citizens, the various components of the civil society and the country’s elites should act. Talking about the matter for a few days is not enough.”¹¹ Tunisian citizens, men and women of all ages, answered her call to protest, proclaiming that they would no longer suffer degradation from the government. Bouazizi’s frustration and humiliation reflected the grievances many Tunisians felt and their anger with President Ben Ali’s government. Following Mohamed Bouazizi’s self-immolation, protests

¹¹ “Sidi Bouzid is burning.” *A Tunisian Girl*. 19 December 2010. Web. Accessed 15 November 2013. <<http://atunisiangirl.blogspot.com/>>

spread throughout Tunisia calling for the return of Tunisian dignity. They demanded basic human rights and dignity; thus, the revolution was self-named the Tunisian Dignity Revolution. On January 14, 2014, Tunisian President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali fled the country after more than two decades of authoritarian governance. His departure seemed to indicate that the protests—offline and online—had achieved their goals and reclaimed dignity and agency for the Tunisian people. Thus, this chapter asks: what role did cyberactivism play in the Tunisian revolutions? How did female activists use digital technologies? And, did the usage of digital technologies enable Tunisian women to participate in the online and offline protests in new ways and in new spaces?

Lina Ben Mhenni illustrates the instrumental role female cyber activists held in the Tunisian Dignity Revolution¹² (also known as the Jasmine Revolution). Writing under her own name, Mhenni spent the weeks following Mohamed Bouazizi's immolation participating in and documenting the protests on her blog *A Tunisian Girl*. Using Twitter hashtags such as #sidibouزيد and #dignity and #revolution, she connected with Tunisian activists and extended to an international audience. Mhenni used multiple platforms to disseminate her message, with over 80,000 followers on her Facebook page and 40,000 followers on Twitter. In many ways, Ben Mhenni acted as the spokesperson of the Tunisian revolution, connecting cyber activists with international journalists and protestors on the ground. She ensured that the government and state media could not censor the events occurring within Tunisia. Bloggers from Egypt,

¹² Reflecting the wishes of Tunisian female bloggers and activists I interviewed, I will refer to the Tunisian protests as the Dignity Revolution in this chapter.

Bahrain, Yemen and Libya followed her posts, taking notes on the tactics she used and the descriptions of the protests. Egyptian activists responded with solidarity protests in Cairo and Alexandria (*Egyptian Chronicles*, January 2011). Many tweeted back at her or responded to her posts with the #SidiBouزيد and #Tunisie or #Tunisia. Lina Ben Mhenni is one of the many examples of the many Tunisian female cyber activists who participated in the Tunisian Dignity Revolution from December 17, 2010 until a new government and constitution was formed in February 2011. Their protests online translated into offline activism and carved new public spheres for women to inhabit.

This chapter introduces my first country case study, focusing on the role of Tunisian female cyber activists from November 2010 to May 2011. It reflects the specific events that occurred and the roles and identities women alternately inhabited and deployed in the Tunisia Dignity Revolution, differentiating these protests from those that occurred in Egypt and Morocco. In response to the questions asked above, this chapter contends that Tunisian female activists used digital technologies to document the protests, mobilize activists, and build from existing cyber and feminist movements to create new networks of female activists online. This chapter is divided into three sections: Digital Activism in Tunisia, Gender Relations Offline and Online, and Tunisian Female Cyberactivists. The first two sections inform and enrich my discussion of Tunisian female cyber activists in the final section, connecting their actions to the historical, political, cultural, and religious discourses within Tunisia. I begin by establishing a brief overview of Tunisian women's presence online before December 2010 and gender relations within Tunisia. Then, I locate the Tunisian feminist movement

historically and in the present day, connecting Tunisian feminism with the participation of Tunisian females online. Finally, I move to a close reading of several female cyberactivists, among them Lina Ben Mehnni. I examine how Tunisian female cyberactivists translated online activism into physical protests, inhabiting new public spheres during the revolution. In particular, I look at how they differed from or compared to female cyberactivism in Egypt and Morocco. By situating female activism within the larger context of Tunisian gender relations and the Tunisian feminist movement, I hope to understand how their actions reflected or subverted Tunisian gender norms and whether or not the dignity revolution created a new space for women's voices and performance of agency. Within the context of this thesis, Tunisian female cyberactivists illustrate the diverse ways female activists deployed digital technologies, show how the constructed gender binary manifested online, and introduce the importance of blogging and tweeting in French, English, Modern Standard Arabic and colloquial Arabic to speak to a multilingual, international audience. Furthermore, Tunisian female cyberactivists documented and disseminated Tunisia's revolution, influencing the ways Egyptian and Moroccan activists used digital technologies to protest.

4.1 “Hacktivism”: Digital Activism in Tunisia

In the past decade, digital media technology and social networking sites have infiltrated everyday Tunisian life. While digital divides continue to exist,

separating disconnected rural areas¹³ from internet hubs in the urban centers, mobile phones have begun to bridge this communication gap in the last decade. In 2010, 33.9% of Tunisia's population possessed internet access, which ranks higher than the world average of 30.2% and the Middle East average of 31.7%.¹⁴ The most recent internet data survey in 2012 estimated that 39.1% of the Tunisian population is online, indicating a rapidly growing internet population. Social media and social networking sites in Tunisia remain the most popular websites despite persistent government censorship. At the time of the protests in late December 2010, an estimated 18% of Tunisian's population had Facebook accounts. Philip Howard and Muzammil Hussain collected data during the protests with The Project on Information Technology and Political Islam, utilizing the Twitter archiving service TwapperKeeper to capture tweets from the Twitter Search API (2013). The data Hussein and Howard collected provides an image of Tunisian participation online preceding and during the protests. Their focus on tweets rather than twitter users allowed them to follow the connective flow or reverberation of information across country borders. They analyzed more than 3 million tweets with the hashtags #Tunisia, #sidibouzid, and #egypt. This data documented the location as well as the participants tweeting. They determined that the metropolitan cities of Tunis and al-Hammah transformed into blog and twitter hubs during the protests—i.e. most Tunisians tweeted and logged online from those cities. From these results, Howard and Hussain have

¹³ It should be noted that Tunisia is considerably smaller in size than Egypt and Morocco. Thus, the population is concentrated in urban centers and smaller discrepancies separate the urban and rural areas.

¹⁴ *Internet World Stats: Tunisia*. Minwatts Publishing Group; 2012. Web. Accessed December 18 2013. <<http://www.internetworldstats.com/africa.htm#tn>>

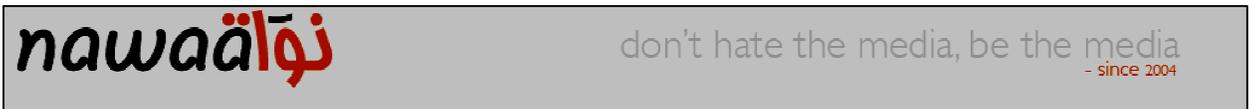
concluded that Tunisia's revolution was 'cognitive liberation'—in other words, that Tunisian digital communication networks were beyond state control.

In addition to the social networking sites Facebook and Twitter, Tunisian men and women turned to blogging services such as Wordpress, Tumblr, and Blogspot during the protests (Kallander, 2013). Gender divides affected Tunisian women's participation on these blogging services before the revolution in 2010. A comprehensive report published in 2009 by Bruce Etling, John Kelly, Robert Faris, and John Palfrey at the Internet and Democracy project mapped the Arab blogosphere's connectivity by identifying active cybercitizens and tracing their interactions with other cybercitizens and websites. Using Arabic language speakers to code the thousands of blogs they surveyed by demographic information (age, gender, etc.), they found that a large percentage of the Maghreb/French Bridge (or Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia) bloggers self-identified as male (almost 90%) (Etling, Kelly, Faris, & Palfrey, 2009). In addition, their research suggested that blogs in the Maghreb focused on political and civil society subjects, "this cluster [themes discussed in the blog] calls attention to human rights more than any other topics, although poetry, art, and literature are also important" (Etling, Kelly, Faris, & Palfrey, 2009). Their findings differ from Howard and Hussein's study, which found that an estimated 41% of Tunisians on Facebook were women and women made up 30% of all Tunisian Twitter accounts (2013). These differences can be explained by the greater accessibility of Facebook and Twitter in Tunisia, the increases of Tunisian female participation online during the 2010-2011 protests, and gender underreporting or misreporting on the blogosphere. Despite persistent gender

divides online, many women, such as Aya Chebbi of *Proudly Tunisian*, created blogs during the revolution and turned their Facebook and Twitter pages into online platforms for activism.

Tunisians deploy three principle languages online—primarily French and Arabic with some English as well. In general, the language Tunisians bloggers use online denotes their audience as well as their educational background. As noted by Krista Moore, French colonial policy influences the Tunisian language landscape (Moore, 2010). Thus, Tunisians prioritize French over Arabic and demarcate French as ‘sophisticated’ and ‘educated,’ whereas Arabic is ‘Islamist’ and ‘backwards.’ Diasporic bloggers tend to prefer French and English to Arabic. This limits the audience of Tunisian blogs and social networking sites, skewing external perceptions of the country according to the bloggers who write in French and English. Foreign Western journalists will often choose secular sources who write in English or French over Islamic bloggers who blog in Modern Standard or Tunisian colloquial Arabic. On the other hand, Al Jazeera prefers Islamic sources and has shown bias towards the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, showing the influence of the Qatar government. Lynch writes that, “Most Western attention to Arab blogging has focused on what Ethan Zuckerman has termed ‘bridge-bloggers’” (2007). Arabs participate in bridge-blogging when they write in English and act as interpreters of their communities to Western audiences. Therefore, language acts as digital divide both in and out of the country, determining what information foreign governments and news organizations pick up.

Starting in the late 2000s, Tunisians began utilizing four primary types of social networking sites and blogs for political activism and grassroots organizing. **Traditional Blogs** encompass a vast array of genres (personal, political, travel, etc.) and internet sites, not limited to Wordpress, Tumblr, and Blogspot. Most Tunisians in this study post on Blogspot or Wordpress sites. **Microblogging** sites such as Twitter post small pieces of digital content such as texts, pictures, links or videos. Activists generally use microblogging as a snapshot of their blog or Facebook page, linking posts from their blogs to Twitter. **Aggregate blogs** are blogging communities composed of various bloggers.



From the header of their website, it reads: **Nawaat: *don't hate the media, be the media.***

The Tunisian site Naawat (www.naawat.org) founded in 2004 contains more than 300 posters and 50 active bloggers sharing and exchanging ideas about Tunisian politics (El-Nawawy & Khamis, 2012). Established in 2006, Tunisieblogs (<http://tn-blogs.com>) gathers blog posts published on hundreds of Tunisian blogs, organizing them chronologically in a steady stream of information. From December 2010 to March 2011, Tunisieblogs aggregate blog posts rose from 1607 per month to 2444. Global Voices (<http://globalvoicesonline.org>) is an international blogging community featuring voices marginalized by the mainstream media, which many Tunisian bloggers post on. They have a vast international audience, with contributors posting in over 35 languages from 167 countries. Tunisian activists created Tunisia Live (<http://www.tunisia-live.net>) in the aftermath of the Dignity Revolution to

connect Tunisia to the world by providing “accurate, verified and balanced information about Tunisia in English.” **Facebook Pages** can also be classified as a microblog or a social network. After Mohamed Bouazizi’s self-immolation, Tunisian Facebook pages such as Takriz (<https://www.facebook.com/takrizo>) practiced discursive activism and served as a platform to organize marches and events.

Grassroots digital activism in Tunisia rose to prominence in the decade preceding the revolution. Blogger, activist, and founder of the Arab Techies Collective and co-Organizer of The Arab Bloggers Conferences, Sami Ben Gharbia discussed on Nawaat the impact of digital activism in Tunisia on September 17, 2010, three months before Bouazizi’s self-immolation. His words highlight the importance digital networks held before the thought of revolution or the so-called Arab Spring existed:

In the Arab world, the use of digital tools for social and political change was not driven by hype or a professional or media interest. On the contrary, it was the result of needs driven by a strong commitment to defending Human Rights. Those needs are a direct result of an established authoritarian environment and a lack of an open space where activists could practice their citizenship. Digital activism has been “invented” and rose out of necessity to fill the very gap that was left by traditional civil society constituents (Gharbia, 2010).

In the article, Gharbia noted the complex dilemma of Arab bloggers caught between authoritarian regimes filtering and repressing content and growing attention from Western public agencies and NGO’s such as the International Republican Institute, the National Democratic Institute, and Freedom House hosting training workshops. Led by the U.S. State Department’s U.S.-Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI), Western governments and the NGOs named

above funded digital activist trainings prior to the Arab Spring.¹⁵ For example, the Middle East and North African Bloggers Network launched by the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs was loosely affiliated to the U.S. Democratic Party (Gharbia, 2010).

During the protests, government censorship corresponded to important political events.¹⁶ For example, after Mohamed Bouazizi's death and when President Ben Ali fled the country:

Before Ben Ali resigned, more than a thousand people in Tunisia were Tweeting each day about political change in that country. Immediately after his resignation, Twitter service declined precipitously, with activists in the country reporting that security forces were interfering with communication networks. When the service returned to normal, Twitter activity peaked again, with a thousand Tweets a day in Tunisia and street protests drawing tens of thousands of people. (Howard, Duffy, Freelon, Hussain, Mari, & Marzaid: 2011: 13)

Many Tunisian online activists faced physical threats for their activism, demonstrating how the physical world can infiltrate and impact virtual space. Internationally renowned Tunisian blogger Slim Amamou was arrested for his internet activity on January 6, 2011. He alerted his followers of his arrest by checking in at the Ministry of Interior on Avenue Habib Bourguiba using the geolocation app FourSquare.¹⁷ Lina Ben Mhenni of *A Tunisian Girl* also experienced government censorship, posting on her blog that her Facebook page had been taken down and her email hacked on January 4, 2011. According to

¹⁵ Nixon, Ben. "U.S. Groups Helped Nurture Arab Uprisings." *The New York Times*. 14 April 2011. Web. Accessed 18 November 2013.

¹⁶ The government blocked Twitter pages about Sidi Bouzid after the hashtag #sidibouid spread among Tunisian users and became netizens in neighboring countries and through the world.

¹⁷ Five days later, Amamou accepted a position in the government as the Minister of Youth and Sports.

Reporters Without Borders¹⁸, the Tunisia government blocked more than 100 Facebook pages about the protests on that day, including the popular Facebook page “Mr. President, Tunisians are setting themselves on fire” that had over 12,000 members when it was blocked. Cyber activists worldwide responded to the restrictions. The international hacking website Anonymous (www.anonnews.org) responded by launching coordinated attacks on various government sites. In early January, they posted a declaration supporting the Tunisian’s dignity revolution and cyber activists:

Anonymous has heard the claim for freedom of the Tunisian people. Anonymous is willing to help the Tunisian people in this fight against oppression...This is a warning to the Tunisian government: attacks on the freedom of speech and information of its citizens will not be tolerated (Anonymous).

Anonymous’ support of Tunisian bloggers demonstrates the spread of information via social networking sites and blogs as well as the importance of these technological tools in connecting the international audience with events happening within Tunisia.

As the above paragraphs demonstrate, digital media, specifically social networking and media sites, rose in importance in Tunisia in the years leading up to the protests. In general, men have dominated the blogosphere and on social media and networking sites. Today, more Tunisian women are blogging than before the revolution, but their online and offline marginalization needs to be further understood and deconstructed. By unpacking the historical, cultural, and social constructions of gender in Tunisia, this chapter investigates whether the

¹⁸ “Internet censors move into top gear in response to widespread unrest.” *Reporters Without Borders*. 4 January 2011. Web. Accessed 10 February 2014. <<http://en.rsf.org/tunisia-internet-censors-move-into-top-04-01-2011.39213.html>>

Revolution of Dignity encouraged women to participate and facilitated space for female activism online. The subsequent section explores the gender binary in Tunisia, examining how offline gender divides have emerged online.

4.2 Gender Relations Online and Offline:

Tunisian gender relations on social networking and media sites reflect the complex gender binary permeating Tunisian society. This section unpacks the relationship between gender relations online and the Tunisian gender binary, arguing that gender divides become more permeable online, blurring the boundaries of what is deemed acceptable Tunisian gender performance. Postcolonial studies highlight the influence of French colonial policies on the present-day Tunisian gender binary. Until 1950, French colonial gender relations demarcated separate spheres and Islamic women. This binary relationship constructed a hierarchy of secular, French culture over Islamic, Tunisian culture. The transition to a sovereign state in 1956 complicated these relations, as President Habib Bourguiba led the Tunisian government in establishing a policy of state feminism and political emancipation for Tunisian women. In 1956, Tunisia adopted the Personal Status Code (PSC), which abolished polygamy and established women's equality in marriage, divorce and child custody. These represented the most advanced legal rights for women in the Arab world at the time; however, the government's emphasis on women's rights was a political strategy. During his rule from 1957 to 1987, President Bourguiba used women's rights to strengthen the nation and secure the regime's political, civil and cultural power. He marginalized Islamic discourse in the process, portraying the state as

progressive against allegedly backwards Islamic thought. State feminism under Presidents Bourguiba and Ben Ali deployed the issue of women's rights to silence the regime's critics, internationally and nationally (Johansson-Nogués, 2013). The state absorbed women's rights and feminist organizations, refusing to let autonomous organizations exist and discriminating against them when they did by withholding funds, police harassment, censorship, etc. For example, Khadija Cherif, a long-time feminist activist, secretary general of the International Federation of Human Rights and a former president of the Association tunisienne des femmes démocrates, spent time under house arrest for her activism in autonomous women's rights organizations.¹⁹

Although state feminism advanced the legal rights of women in the family code by highlighting the importance of female and male citizens to the state, it failed to ensure economic autonomy for women and gender parity in political, social, and cultural rights. A 2009 comparative study of Arab countries conducted by Freedom House ranked Tunisia first in the major categories that contain women's rights, such as "autonomy, security and freedom of person," and "political and civic voice." Nonetheless, women continue to remain underrepresented in the political sphere and higher ranks of Tunisian businesses. At the end of Ben Ali's rule in 2011, there were four women in the 45-member government and 27.6% of the members elected to Parliament in 2009 were women; in 2010, women represented 27% of judges and 31% of lawyers. It should be noted that despite significant growth, this is percentage of women's

¹⁹ Bennhold, Katrin. "Women's Rights a Strong Point in Tunisia." *The New York Times*. 22 February 2011. Web Accessed 1 February 2011.
<http://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/23/world/middleeast/23iht-letter23.html?_r=0>

participation in politics is high for the region and more than the current percentage of women elected to Congress in the United States according to the Center for American Women and Politics (18.5% in the House and 20% in the Senate). Despite demands of gender parity in government by women's rights organizations and protestors during the 2010-2011 Tunisian Dignity Revolution, in 2013 women only held between two and three posts in government and 27.2% of members of Parliament are women—under the 30% quota established by the new constitution.²⁰

State feminism complicated gender relations implemented under colonial rule. By emphasizing nation-building and the citizen-women, the government created a national ideal for women and a valued femininity of secular, professional and highly educated women of middle or higher classes. These women spoke French and aspired to professional jobs, but only in accordance with the state's policies. The state often stigmatized Islamic women, demonstrated when Ben Ali banned the *hijab* in government jobs and at the universities. Tunisia's feminist movement remains divided along the constructed binary relationship between Islamic and secular. Post-revolution, feminist organizations and radical feminist groups such as Femen adopted an anti-Islamist and anti-Islamic stance. Islamic feminism is in its infancy in Tunisia, unlike other countries in the MENA region; consequently, the binary between Islamic and secular dominates the gender relations in the Tunisia.

²⁰ International Federation for Human Rights. "Tunisia." *Arab Women Spring*. 13 August 2013. Web. Accessed 13 January 2014. <<http://arabwomenspring.fidh.net/tunisia>>

The Tunisian legal code continues to block Tunisian women's access to justice in incidents of gender violence. Cultural stigmas and blaming the victims for gender violence (including rape, domestic violence and sexual harassment) lead to under-reporting and prosecution (Freedom House, 2009). Several women's rights organizations and bloggers documented an increase in sexual harassment and gender violence by the regime after Mohamed Bouazizi's death on January 4th. In the final days of the protest, security forces responded to women's participation in the protests with systematic sexual violence (Association tunisienne des femmes démocrates, FIHD). Johansson-Nogués argues that the presence of women in the streets pitted the state's idealized femininity against state masculinity, thus resulting in the implementation of state sanctioned gendered violence (2013).

The target for the gendered violence was mostly (devalued) women in poorer areas, but it can be inferred that the regime was trying to send a clear, systematic message of dissuasion to the emphasized woman lest they be next in line for such acts. However, the speed at which the regime unraveled perhaps explains the fact that the phenomenon did not become more widespread inside Tunisia (Johansson-Nogués, 2013).

Female bloggers noted the rise of gender violence in mid to late January, culminating in sexual harassment after the January 29 march for women's rights. According to the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), Islamist men harassed the women protesting, chanting at them "return to their kitchens." This altercation increased Tunisian women's fears that the absence of Ben Ali created a vacuum for Islamist parties to retract many of the political equalities they had gained.

The Tunisian gender binary shifted online as digital technologies empowered women to protest the regime removed from physical gender violence. At the beginning of the protests in December 2010, females made up an estimated 41% of Tunisia's Facebook population and accounted for 30% of users on Twitter (Howard & Hussein, 2011). It is difficult to approximate how many of those females participated in cyberactivism, using Facebook, Twitter and the blogosphere to organize protests and spread information online. Furthermore, women may represent more than the figures presented above, disguising their gender with male pseudonyms or posting anonymously. A majority of male and female cyberactivists speak in the language of gender parity and human rights, emphasizing the idea of a liberal, progressive Tunisia. Aggregate blogging sites, such as Nawaat (<http://nawaat.org/portail/>) function as a platform for men and women to post information about the political situation in Tunisia. Such sites enabled greater participation of women bloggers online. Exiled four years prior to the revolution for her activism, Amira Yahyaoui used her Twitter (@Mira404) to protest during the revolution. During and after the revolution, Yahyaoui demanded the need for gender parity in the constitution, a common theme among female bloggers. After Ben Ali fled Tunisia, she was one of the few women who contributed to drafting the 2011 constitution. Her NGO, Al Bawsala, utilizes Twitter and Facebook to monitor the constitutional assembly and advocates for human rights. In a October 14, 2011 interview with *Jadaliyya*, Amira Yahyaoui stated that women participated as organizers and demonstrators and placing gender equality as central to discussions of Tunisian politics.²¹

²¹ Benoit-Lavelle, Mischa. "From Blogging to Writing the Conversation." *Jadaliyya*. 14 October

The preceding paragraphs inform the subsequent analysis of the subset of Tunisian female cyber activists. Due to a recent history of prolific online activism and a thriving civil society, feminist activists expanded existing networks and create new ones during the protests. The Tunisian gender binary manifested online and was complicated by the delineating dialectic between Islam and secularism in Tunisia. However, this binary evolved in different ways online, as women carved out greater spaces for them to articulate and perform agency. In many ways, the gender binary became permeable, allowing women to act with greater freedom and power despite government censorship. The next, and last, section of this chapter applies this argument to inform an analysis of female cyberactivism during the Tunisian dignity revolution.

4.3 Tunisian Female Cyberactivists

The remainder of this chapter turns to the role of Tunisian female cyberactivists during the Tunisian Dignity Revolution from November 2010 to Mid-May 2011. This analysis will be enriched by the previous discussion of Tunisian online activism, the use of digital technologies in Tunisia, and the historical, cultural, religious and political history of Tunisian gender relations. A subset of seven Tunisian female cyberactivists and bloggers will be analyzed, including *Wallada*²², *Didon*, *Mon Massir*, Aya Chebbi of *Proudly Tunisian*, Khedija Arafaoui, *Arabasta*³, and Lina Ben Mhenni of *A Tunisian Girl*. In addition, this section discusses the actions of Tunisian feminist organizations

2011. Web. Accessed 13 December 2013.

²² The italicized names indicate the titles of blogs. Many of the female activists I surveyed did not give their full names.

online, organizing protests, and documenting gender violence perpetrated by the government and by Islamist demonstrators. The activists named above deploy several languages online—Modern Standard Arabic, French, English, and Tunisian colloquial Arabic—performing multiple identities through language. In many ways, online activism allowed Tunisian female cyberactivists to perform their gender and protest without fear of gender violence experienced in the physical protests. This analysis is organized into four subsections: 1) Creating New Feminist Networks and Reverberations Online; 2) Tactics: Citizen Journalism and Discursive Activism; 3) Gendered protests; and 4) Negotiating Multiple Identities Online. These subsections ask: Why did Tunisian female activists turn to online activism? How did they utilize social networking and microblogging sites? And, how did online activism transform into the physical protests that brought down Tunisia’s long-standing authoritarian president?

Tactics: Citizen journalism and discursive activism

Activists expressed a range of motivations for blogging. Many female activists, among them Tunisian cyberactivist Lina Ben Mhenni, acted as citizen journalists and spread information to regional actors and international news sites. Others documented the protests with video, photos and short posts and alerted Tunisians about protests and marches or when and where violence was occurring. Blogs replaced news sites when the Tunisian media and international news sources failed to document the unfolding protests. Citizen journalism, or the collection, dissemination, and analysis of news and information by the public online, proliferated as activists took it upon themselves to act as watchdogs of the

regimes abuses. The actions of these Tunisian female cyberactivists, exemplified by Mhenni, elucidate a question Dhiraj Murthy has posed, “whether twitter has transformed ordinary individuals into citizen journalists whom the news reading public follows or whether their voices are merely subsumed by traditional media” (2011: 2). The remainder of this chapter will contend that the subset of Tunisian female cyberactivists surveyed became citizen journalists that the public and international journalists followed for updates on the Tunisian protests. Lina Ben



Mhenni operated multiple media platforms, including *A Tunisian Girl*²³, a Facebook page²⁴, and a Twitter account (@benmhennilina).

She demonstrated discursive activism and acted as a citizen journalist online, uploading photos, videos and summaries of the protests onto her media sites. On December 25, 2010, Mhenni summarized the first protests in English and French, “After what happened in Sidi Bouzid, calls were launched to organize demonstrations and protests in different regions in Tunisia.” Thousands of Tunisians and international actors accessed her page during the peak of the revolution between January 4th and 14th (Howard and Hussain, 2013). Tunisians activists and foreign journalists dubbed Mhenni a “Twitterati” for her prolific postings online despite government attempts to hack her Facebook, Twitter and blog.

²³ *A Tunisian Girl* <http://atunisiangirl.blogspot.com/>

²⁴ Facebook Page for *A Tunisian Girl* <https://www.facebook.com/atunisiangirl/>

Traffic increased on Lina Ben Mhenni's blog *A Tunisian Girl*, her Facebook profile, and her Twitter page as the protests continued, spiking in early January 2011. After January 4th, comments and responses to her blog ranged between five and 20 comments; more followers responded to her posts when they she shared them on Facebook and Twitter in addition to hosting them on her blog *A Tunisian Girl*. The format of her blog does not document page views unlike other blogging websites, but by comparing responses to her blog posts with likes, comments, and reshares on her Facebook and Twitter pages, it is clear that viewership increased as the protests in Tunisia grew and news of the uprising reached regional and international news sites. A blog post on January 16, 2011, two days after President Ben Ali fled the country, demonstrates the influence of her posts. Foreign journalists, Tunisian human rights organizations, and fellow bloggers responded to this post on her blog, numbering 19 comments in total.



The screenshot above illustrates the content of this post, written and entitled in English “The Future is Ours,” with the list of comments following it. After the image of the young man killed in protests the day before, Mhenni wrote, “Tunisians are protecting their country. Tunisians are protecting each other.

Tunisians fought to obtain their freedom and I believe that Tunisians won't let anyone steal this victory. So let's work together. The future is ours.” She posted a link to this entry on her Facebook page and on Twitter, ensuring that it reached the largest audience. This entry is an example of ‘bridge-blogging,’ which Mhenni intersperses with posts in Arabic and French on her blog.

Mhenni was one of the few Tunisian bloggers who used his or her own name, thus she was one of the first to be censored during the protests. The Tunisian government hacked her Facebook and Twitter page in early January. Undeterred, she posted a screenshot of her hacked Facebook page to her blog under the title *You Can't Stop Us From Writing*. In an interview with *Voice of America* on January 4, 2011, she stated in English, “Everything is blocked here...I use a proxy to access my blog, my Facebook profile, and...they censored my Twitter account. It is not accessible in Tunisia.” As the revolution progressed, cyberactivists and bloggers appeared less concerned with censorship and fighting “Anmar” the government hacker, than with protesting against Ben Ali. *Arabasta3* posted in Tunisian colloquial Arabic on *7elblog* on January 14, 2011, urging the blogging community to start writing and speaking out on radio and television, “our martyrs did not die only to end censorship on the Internet....Are you Tunisian?...then speak up.” Her post marks the transition from cyberactivists attacking the government online to their physical participation in the streets of Tunis, Sidi Bouzid and many other Tunisian cities.

Digital technologies enabled Tunisian female cyberactivists to insert their voices into new spaces during the Dignity Revolution. Before the revolution, a female identified cyberactivist writing as, “*Mon Massir*” discussed Arab feminist

literature (such as the works of Fatima Mernissi) on her blog interspersed with her personal reflections on culture, society, philosophy and art. However, during the revolution, her posts changed tenor from personal to political activism. She urged Tunisians to log online and join the protests, writing in Arabic on December 28, 2010, “Go to Facebook and twitter to be informed about the events in Tunisia.”²⁵ As one of the 17 most influential bloggers according to Howard and Hussein (2013) based on her widespread audience and influence online, *Mon Massir* took the opportunity the protests offered to mobilize her audience to protest.

Creating New Feminist Networks and Reverberations Online:

New feminist networks and cyberactivists emerged to take prominence during the revolution. Young Tunisian activist Aya Chebbi saw the protests as an opportunity to begin blogging and to expand her Twitter and Facebook activity. She kept a photo journal of the protests on Flickr, explaining that she wanted to document the protests with images and contribute to the revolution in any way she could.²⁶ Entitled “La Femme Tunisienne au cœur de la Révolution,” the photos depict women of all ages in the streets, demanding democracy and government free of corruption. In the months following Ben Ali’s removal from power, she created an English and French language blog entitled *Proudly*

²⁵ Transl. from French: “Rendez-vous sur facebook et twitter pour être informés sur les manifestations en Tunisie.” <http://massir.typepad.fr/mon_massir/2010/12/index.html>

²⁶ Aya Chebbi told me in an interview February 5, 2014 that she was unable to publish a blog under Ben Ali’s rule because her father was a general in the Tunisian army.

*Tunisian*²⁷, believing the revolution opened new spaces for women to protest and voice their opinions without fear of gender violence. Her blog has risen in popularity, numbering over 35,000 page views at the end of 2013 with her most viewed posts discussing the revolution and gender equality in Tunisia. She noted that before the revolution, she was unable to keep a blog online for fear of political reprisal against her and her family. The photo on the following page demonstrates the role Chebbi held in the protests, documenting women's participation and blogging about women's rights online.



In this photo posted on Chebbi's flickr page, two veiled Tunisian women wearing fashionable, conservative Muslim dress raise their fists in the air during a march in Tunis. Chebbi focused on portraying women of all ages in the Dignity Revolution, fighting against their daily degradation and subjugation at the hands of a corrupt government alongside Tunisian men. This photo portrays how information flowed between the streets and the web, opening a two-way exchange where women could inhabit the streets and the internet simultaneously. Chebbi

²⁷ Although Aya Chebbi posts in French and English on her blog, the name of her blog is only in English.

documented Tunisian women's participation, using the web to project her interpretation of the protests.

Discursive activism online engendered new networks of connectivity during the revolution. Female activists used blogs, twitter and Facebook to rally Tunisians to participate. They organized marches and protests demonstrating against the regime and for women's political enfranchisement. This activism engendered social movements and protests online and offline, illustrating the expansion of physical space into the digital realm. Online movements such as "7ellblog"²⁸ (translated from Tunisian colloquial to "Launch a blog") launched by female blogger *Arabasta3* in November 2010 encouraged Tunisians to begin blogging in Tunisian colloquial Arabic despite the regime's censors:

This makes, for those who love statistics, 13 blogs in one day: Yes the Tunisian youth have things to say. They want to speak and to express themselves! We encourage this group of pioneers and we are longing to see this number becoming bigger and bigger (*Arabasta3*, November 17, 2010)²⁹.

A Tunisian Girl's Lina Ben Mhenni also participated in this movement, posting a link to *Arabasta3's* page on Facebook, her blog and twitter with the hasthag #7ellblog. This movement helped increase female participation online despite government censorship, providing women a space to continue articulating protest as gender violence increased on the streets. From the time the movement began in November to the end of the protests in February 2011, *Arabasta3* had posted lists encompassing several hundred new blogs.

²⁸ Transliterated Arabic is often written with numbers to symbolize letters that do not exist in English. For example, the 7 indicated in "7ellblog" can be both the soft "ha" (ح) letter and the hard "kha" (ك) in Arabic.

²⁹ Translated from French. "Ce qui fait, pour les doués de calcul, 13 blogs en une journée: oui, la jeunesse tunisienne a des trucs à dire, elle veut parler et s'exprimer! Nos encouragements à ces pionniers et en attendant de voir ce nombre se multiplier encore et encore."

Feminist activists and organizations primarily used Facebook, Twitter, and email to communicate when and where protests would be held. Khedija Arafaoui, a women's rights activist, stated in French in an interview with Campaign for Equality:

Civil society also used Facebook to send information. Although civil society had no access to the media, it never stopped addressing the issues, organizing meetings to discuss them, looking for ways to help, informing the world about the situation, getting in touch with the families, sending petitions to the government, providing help.

Arafaoui's statement echoes the sentiment *Arabasta3* posted on January 14, reflecting the limitations of blogging. Blogging and cyberactivism was effective when it translated into physical action, transcending the spatial divisions of cyber space. Feminist activists used the web as a tool to communicate and connect with regional and international feminists, spreading female reverberations online. However, as with the case of cyberactivism and blogging, their discursive activism targeted traditional media and was used to organize physical protests.

These examples represent a sample of the increased participation of women online. They depict the diverse ways Tunisian women protested online, why they turned to digital activism, and the flow between online activism and offline activism. As the uprising continued from December 2010 to January 2011 and female cyberactivists subverted government censorship, local, regional, and international viewership increased. In Egypt, female activist and blogger Zeinab Mohammed posted links to Lina Ben Mhenni's blog *A Tunisian Girl* in early January, encouraging Egyptian activists to protest outside the Tunisian embassy in solidarity. Furthermore, as the uprisings continued and local, regional, and international audiences grew, female cyberactivists and feminist activists began

devoting more posts to gender violence and demands for gender parity in the new government. The following section analyzes the gendered issues Tunisian female cyberactivists posted, Tweeted and wrote on Facebook about as the revolution unfolded.

Gendering the protests:

As the protests grew and gender violence in the streets increased, Tunisian activists online increased their discussion of gender issues. Posts from Lina Ben Mhenni's *A Tunisian Girl* and the feminist organization Tunisian Association of Democratic Women indicate gendered violence in the streets began on January 14. Mhenni wrote in English:

It all started with the horrible assaults on the peaceful people who were on sit-in in la Kasbah outside the Prime Ministry. The peaceful people who were simply asking for democracy and dignity were beaten, violently chased away from the sit-in area and even arrested (*A Tunisian Girl*, February 2, 2011).

Blog posts also documented the harassment of women during the January 29th march. *Proudly Tunisian* devotes more space to gender issues in her blog. She noted the rise of gender violence two years after the revolution, "Following the departure of the former president Ben Ali, Tunisia has entered an emergency situation. A few days after he left, we started hearing about rape, kidnapping and violence against girls and women." Mhenni wrote on *A Tunisian Girl* in English that she was attacked on the streets during the January 29th protest:

My group and I was attacked by unknown persons holding sticks and shouting: you destroyed the country, our houses are smelling tear gas because of the people of the sit-in of la Kasbah....The police was violent too...(A *Tunisian Girl*, January 29, 2011)

By writing in English, she directed her post at the international audience and journalists following her blog, posting a link to this blog post on her Facebook page and Twitter account. Her account of the protests attempts to raise awareness over the ongoing violence in Tunisia when the world had turned its attention to the Egyptian revolutionaries occupying Tahrir Square. *Mon Massir* also took part in the march, writing on January 30, 2011, “They [Islamist men] shouted, cursed, and were racing towards us screaming and attacked the demonstrators. Some men who accompanied us made a barricade.”³⁰ These protests and the reaction to them are noteworthy because of the relative absence of any mention of gender violence and sexual harassment in the Tunisian blogosphere before. In addition, they speak to the perceived binary between Islamists and feminism or women’s rights in Tunisia discussed in the previous section.

Women’s rights in Tunisia did not appear tagged in posts until after Ben Ali left the country. Feminist leaders such as Khadija Cherif begin organizing and



protesting for women’s equal rights in the new constitution after the return of banished Islamist leader, Rachid Ghannouchi, from Paris. Similarly, there was little mention of protesting being a transgression of the public/private divide associated with the gender binary in other Islamic countries like Egypt. A

³⁰ Transl. from French: “Ils criaient, insultaient, et fonçaient vers nous en hurlant et se sont attaqués aux manifestants. Certains hommes qui nous accompagnaient leur ont fait barrage.”

Tunisian Girl mentioned the presence of women and men in the streets from the outset of the protests, and women are visible in the photo albums of the protests she posted on her Facebook page, shown in the image above.

A comment by Organisation de l'État libre et laïque de la Tunisie (Organization for a Free and Secular Tunis) on *A Tunisian Girl's* February 2, 2011 blog post stated only in English, "We are foremost Tunisian Women and Men who stand for peaceful & tolerant coexistence with every political, social, religious and sexual orientations! We STAND and DEMAND ABSOLUTE Equality between genders!" The Tunisian feminist NGO's comment was directed towards the same international audience that frequented Mhenni's blog. Written on February 4, 2011, this comment was a call to solidarity and draws attention to the duality between liberal-secular feminism and Islamic feminism, reflecting the uncertainty over women's rights in a post-Ben Ali post-state feminism Tunisia. Posts by Tunisian female bloggers at the beginning of the protests carried a tone of solidarity and "insann" or humanness. They wrote about "our future" and "our Tunisia." In addition, #womensrights and #genderequality did not trend online in Tunisia in comparison to #sidibouazid, #Tunisia, and #optunisia, demonstrated by the lack of significant data on #womensrights and #genderequality. On the other hand, Howard & Hussain note that #sidibouazid and #Tunisia began trending after Mohamed Bouazizi's self-immolation on December 17, 2010 and spiked when Tunisian President Ben Ali stepped down on January 14, 2011 (2013). From the subset of Tunisian female activists this thesis has analyzed and Howard and Hussain's quantitative research on the Tunisian protests, it appears as if the concern over government censorship and protests against Ben Ali's

regime, which affected bloggers of all genders, received more coverage and blog posts than women's rights and gender issues.

Negotiating Multiple Identities Online:

Tunisian female cyberactivists performed multiple identities on the web and on the streets. The Dignity Revolution provided them a space to articulate these often conflicting identities in solidarity with their fellow protestors. On January 23, 2011, Tunisian female blogger *Didon* asked on her blog³¹ in Modern Standard Arabic, "What do the Tunisian people want from the revolution?" Her question reflects the uncertain hope activists felt in the weeks following Ben Ali's departure. After detailing the many reasons Tunisians wanted and celebrated the revolution, she concludes, "I am Tunisian and I do not speak Arabic and I am not Muslim, but this day is enough, enough for me so that I will proud of all criteria to belong to this special people."³² *Didon* demonstrates how the revolution challenged and changed her perceptions of what it meant to be Tunisian.

Johansson-Nogués' understanding of how state feminist policies discursively constructed Tunisian femininity can be used to provide a more nuanced analysis of Tunisian female cyberactivists' gender performance. She states that secular, professional and highly educated women of middle or higher classes symbolized the valued Tunisia femininity. The female bloggers surveyed in this chapter reflect this valued femininity and uphold Johansson-Nogués' theory that gendered violence resulted from this femininity, challenging the

³¹ *Didon*: <http://didonzahra.blogspot.com/>

³² Translated from Modern Standard Arabic.

government's hegemonic and patronizing masculinity. Tunisian female bloggers performed first as Tunisians. That is not to say that their female identity was secondary to their national identity. Rather, that they articulated diverse identities at different points in time, responding to changing protest dynamics and gender relations. When perceiving a threat to their progressive identity as Tunisian women—leading the Arab world in legal and political rights—they would position themselves as female Tunisians. Reflecting on the Dignity Revolution, Aya Chebbi wrote in English on her blog *Proudly Tunisian*:

....I am proud to say that Tunisian women were and still actively participating in the revolution. Women were among the first who rise up high revolutionary slogans and have been part of all crucial moments. We have been the protesters, the journalists, the photographers, the volunteers, the elections observers, the bloggers, the campaigners...despite the violence we go through from the bus station till arriving to the demonstration square (*Proudly Tunisian*, December 4, 2012).³³

This excerpt describes the diverse identities women articulated besides their gender in the revolution—protestors, journalists, photographers, volunteers, election observers, bloggers, and campaigners. Thus, similar Tunisian female bloggers did not so much as attempt to subvert existing gender norms as to perform them—acting out the valued femininity and using it to take a stand and protest in solidarity together.

4.4. Conclusion: Disseminating the Revolution

³³ This post was also published in similar formats by Aya Chebbi on WLUML (Women Living Under Muslim Laws), Safe World for Women, and World Pulse.

Wallada, who is ranked as the second most influential blogger in Tunisia by Howard and Hussain's 2013 study³⁴, posted in Tunisian colloquial Arabic on January 20th, 2011, "The people made the revolution." Her words, shown in this



screenshot,

echoed the thoughts of countless Tunisian female cyberactivists, expressing their elation at the change of government and the perceived shift of power from the government to the people. Tunisian female cyberactivists represented a diverse group of citizens. They spanned from within Tunisia to the diaspora, posting in French, English and Arabic. They were activists, citizen journalists, feminists, academics, etc. Their audience ranged from local to national and international actors. Feminist activists and organizations were also prolific online, specifically on Facebook and Twitter organizing their followers. More Tunisians were active on Facebook and Twitter than on the blogosphere; the most prominent activists posted on all three media formats.

This chapter has contended that Tunisian female cyberactivists played integral roles in the Tunisian revolution, which began after Tunisian street vendor Mohamed Bouazizi committed an act of self-immolation in the city of Sidi Bouzid on December 17, 2010. Female cyberactivists built from existing networks of online activism protesting government censorship and a prolific

³⁴ Howard and Hussain identified 17 of the 450 blogs as the main information gateways for the Tunisian blogosphere ; 3.6 percent of the Tunisian national blogosphere (2012: 129)

history of feminism to organize demonstrations, mobilize protestors, and articulate resistance to President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali's regime. Throughout, this chapter has argued that although social media may not have caused the revolutions, it created a space and provided the tools for female activists to generate content and insert themselves in the protests. After the fall of President Ben Ali, female cyberactivists and feminist organizations used the new spaces they had carved out to articulate demands for gender parity in the creation of a new constitution and government.

In response to Amy Aisen Kallander's article questioning the role of cyberactivists and bloggers in the Tunisian revolution (2013), this chapter argues that even this small subset of seven Tunisian female cyberactivists demonstrates the importance of digital networks in providing a platform for offline activism to be launched. Tunisian women played a central role in the creation of a virtual public sphere as well as demanded greater access, representation, and participation in the physical public sphere (Radsch & Khamis, 2013). Digital activism and documentation of the protests by activists such as Lina Ben Mhenni was the reason that Egyptian and Moroccan activists had live footage of the protests and the strategies the Tunisian activists used. Importantly, today more women utilize digital technologies than before the Dignity Revolution, and independent feminist networks have grown in the absence of state governed organizations—from the radical international feminist group Femen to the Association tunisienne des femmes democrats. Aya Chebbi stated in a recent interview that after the revolution, spaces opened in blogging and allowed young

Tunisians to discuss issues like the constitution.³⁵ Her words demonstrate that blogging and posting online can be a way of bringing marginalized voices into the forefront of political action, acting as a catalyst for the future. The subsequent chapters on the Egyptian and Moroccan uprisings will explore how the experiences of Egyptian and Moroccan female cyberactivists paralleled or differed from the experiences of Tunisian female cyberactivists.

³⁵ Patel, Khadija. "The Voices of Young Africans: Aya Chebbi." *Daily Maverick*. 20 November 2013. Web. Accessed 15 December 2013.

Chapter 5: Embodied Resistance: Continuing the Revolution in Egypt

I walked the streets with men and women, of all sorts of backgrounds. Never have I felt as sense of belonging like then, like now. I was happy just to be in the streets sitting in close proximity with thousands of strangers, snuggled in a warm cocoon, liberating Tahrir Square, marking it as ours (Mona Seif, January 30, 2011).

In May 2010, a group of 15 Arab female bloggers met through two workshops in Cairo and Amman.³⁶ They agreed to each write one post under the same theme each month.³⁷ For the first post entitled ‘My City’, Egyptian journalist and cyberactivist Mona Seif wrote about Cairo on her blog *ma3t*. On July 23, 2010 she wrote, “I wanted to walk you through the streets of crazy downtown, share you with you my music as i blur out everything on our way and turn it down into hazy spots of colors.” But, she continued, “I can’t do this now. My city is different, my city is mourning, and I can only share this with you. Khaled Said, a young Egyptian, was tortured and murdered by the police.” Six months later, Seif joined millions of other Egyptian women and men in the streets of Cairo chanting in the streets and demanding the end of the regime “Ash-shab yurid isqat an-nizam³⁸.”

³⁶ Group of Arab women bloggers who met in July 2010 created a shared Twitter account to continue virtual interactions @women bloggers. Accessed 10 December 2013.

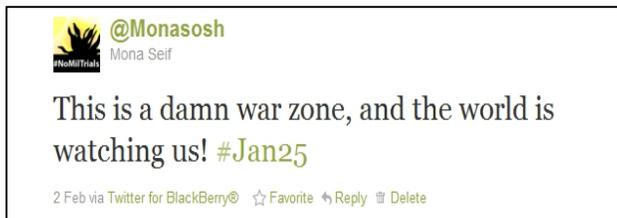
<<<https://twitter.com/womenblogs>>>

³⁷ Pryds Helle, Merete. Transl. Bell, Andrew. “Women Bloggers Meet in Cairo.” *WoMen Dialogue*. 7 July 2010. Web. Accessed 10 December 2013.

<<<http://www.womendialogue.org/magazine/women-bloggers-meet-cairo-0>>>

³⁸ Transliterated from Egyptian colloquial Arabic, meaning “the people demand the end of the regime.”

The evening before the protests, Mona Seif posted, “We participated in January 25th.” Her blogpost, written in Egyptian colloquial, urged Egyptians to take to the streets, invoking the memory of Khaled Said and countless other Egyptian citizens humiliated, beaten and killed by the police. At the bottom of the post, Seif provided links to the #Jan25 page on Twitter, Wael Ghonim’s appeal posted on the “We are all Khaled Said” Facebook page, and to the mission statement of the Front to Defend Egyptian Protesters³⁹. She encouraged her followers to follow her and other activists on Twitter (@monasosh) for updates on the protest and its locations in Alexandria and Cairo. Mona Seif continued to blog, tweet, post on Facebook and participate in the revolution.



Screenshot of Mona Seif’s tweets on February 2, 2011 from Mona Seif’s blogpost *My Revolution: Bloody Wednesday* on December 31, 2011.

During this time, her followers increased and she drew the attention of international journalists who began following her twitter for updates on the

events occurring in Tahrir Square. Her actions online and offline demonstrate how online activism multiplied and grew to occupy the heart of Cairo in Tahrir Square. The actions of Mona Seif and her fellow female cyberactivists during the Egyptian Revolution from January 25 to February 14, 2011 elucidate questions into the relationship between digital technologies, protest movements, and gender in the Arab Spring. This chapter seeks to understand how Egyptian

³⁹ Egyptian Google executive Wael Ghonim was the anonymous admin of the “We are all Khaled Said” Facebook movement. In his autobiography, *Revolution 2.0* (2012), he discusses how he wrote the appeal and posted it online to encourage Egyptian citizens to protest. Egyptian youth activists created FDEP with Ghonim’s support to monitor the protests and provide legal support to protestors subject to police brutality.

female cyberactivists deployed digital technologies, asking: What was the influence of their digital activism. And, did social media networks and digital technologies facilitate Egyptian women to claim greater agency in the public sphere?

This chapter will examine the role of Egyptian female cyberactivists in the Egyptian revolution. Through a qualitative analysis of female reverberations online, it will conduct close readings of six Egyptian female cyberactivists' online profiles during the height of the Egyptian revolution from January 2011 to March 2011. In doing so, this chapter locates the actions of Egyptian female cyberactivists within the theoretical framework and argument of this thesis, examining how female cyberactivism in Egypt differed from or reflected female participation online in Tunisia and Morocco. The chapter begins with a brief background of the gender relations and the growth of the feminist movement in Egypt, unpacking the gender binary. Then, it turns to a discussion of women's participation online leading up to the revolution. Finally, it concludes with an analysis of six Egyptian female cyber activists who participated online and offline in the Egyptian protests beginning January 25th 2011. These close readings ask: how did female cyberactivists utilize digital technologies? Did online activism transition to offline protests, and if so, how? What identities did these female cyberactivists perform and on what digital platforms? Did digital technologies and social media networks create liberating potentialities for Egyptian women during the revolution and after? In response to these questions, this chapter will argue that during the Egyptian revolution of dignity from January 25 to February 14, 2011, Egyptian female cyberactivists transcended gender divides online and

offline and carved new spaces to articulate agency in the public sphere through their online activism. Specifically, this chapter will contend three main points: 1) Egyptian female cyberactivists inhabited multiple digital platforms to articulate specific gendered messages using English, Modern Standard Arabic and Egyptian colloquial Arabic; 2) Egyptian female cyberactivists used digital technologies to share information between cyber space and the protests in the streets, connecting online activism to physical demonstrations; 3) Egyptian female cyberactivists used virtual space to simultaneously mobilize followers to protest and reflect on their own experiences of revolution.

5.1 Unpacking the Egyptian Gender Binary

As mentioned in the introduction of this thesis, the unstable category gender is discursively constructed in and through language (Butler, 1990). Thus, when examining the gender binary and roles in Egypt, it is important to unpack the intersecting discourses constructing Egyptian masculinity and femininity. Egypt's Sunni Muslim population follows the Salafi school of thought with a minority of Muslim Egyptians identifying as Shi'a or Sufi. Islamic values shaped Egyptian culture and women's place in society. British colonialism in the 1800s challenged Islamic values and displaced Islamic gender roles with a British understanding of masculinity and femininity. Colonial hegemonic masculinity dislocated Egyptian men, Muslim and Christian, creating an opposing narrative that reasserted Islamic masculinity. This narrative reified the 'Muslim woman' as a symbol. On one hand, colonial powers fetishized the 'Muslim woman' and saw her veil as sign of Islamic oppression, barbarism, and intolerance. In contrast,

Islamic forces saw the 'Muslim woman' as a symbol of piety, a barrier to the corruption of secularism. An Egyptian lawyer Qasim Amin, considered by many in the Arab world to be the first feminist, wrote influential several texts including *Liberation of Women* (1899) at the beginning of the 20th century. His work outlined the position that President Nasser and later President Mubarak would adopt in their state feminism, believing that the political rights of women were necessary to "bringing the nation out of darkness" (Ahmed, 1992).

Even though Egypt achieved independence in 1956, the question of 'Egyptian women's rights' and oppression under Islam continued to be shaped by the conflicting discourses of secular Western thought and Islamic thought (Ahmed, 1990). Women gained political emancipation at independence in 1956 under the rule of President Abdel Gamal Nasser and his Arab Socialist Union party. Nasser also attempted to reform the Egyptian Personal Status Law (PSL) to give women more rights; however, Islamic clergy opposed his moves and saw this as the further erosion of Western colonialism and secularization. Over time, this tension between liberal-secular and Islamic discourse in Egypt constructed a gender binary that blends Western patriarchal thought and secularizing values with Islamic piety and traditional ideals. Postcolonial Egyptian nationalism further complicated this binary, making a model Egyptian citizen-woman. The valued Egyptian femininity evolved to be a middle-to-upper-class, pious, respectable university student or mother-worker employed in the country's export industries (Johansson-Nogues, 2013). Thus, under Nasser and subsequent Egyptian presidents, the intersection of Islamic thought and the Egyptian government's so-called secularism created a valued femininity that

merged Islamic and neoliberal values. This combination of Islamic patriarchal values with Western patriarchal norms subjugated women, yet at the same time, expected them to participate in the economic workforce.

Egyptian feminism negotiated these conflicting yet intersecting discourses, often reasserting the gender binary in this process. Until the last thirty years, feminism remained an elite discussion. Starting in the first decade of the 1900s, the dialogue between the Egyptian Feminist Union and the Muslim Women's Association reflected the struggle to articulate a cohesive Egyptian feminism. Influenced by Western feminists, Huda Sharwai founded the Egyptian Feminist Union in 1923, a political feminist organization that advocated secular reforms and women's political enfranchisement. Zeinab al-Ghazali formed the Muslim Women's Association in 1935 after disagreeing with many of Sharwai's views, specifically in her preference of Western secular thought over Islamic practices. Al-Ghazali opposed Sharwai's embrace of Western culture as superior to Islam, searching for an alternative feminism that articulated female subjectivity and affirmation within a native, vernacular, Islamic discourse (Ahmed, 1992).

These two organizations shaped Egyptian feminism until the 1940s, when a new generation of young Egyptian women challenged the elitism of the Egyptian Feminist Union. It is important to note that this divide paralleled socioeconomic lines, with upper class, educated Egyptians supporting secular reforms and Western ideals and lower class women choosing a path of female subjectivity within Islam. In 1951, Doria Shafik, who was one of the first women to receive an education at the Sorbonne in 1920s paid for by the Egyptian Ministry of Education, led a demonstration of over a thousand Egyptian women

into the Egyptian parliament (Ahmed, 1992). Once there, she stopped proceedings and implored parliament to consider the issues and demands of Egyptian women. Her actions caused the Egyptian government under British protectorate to grant women the right to vote and run for parliament in 1951 (Nelson, 1996).

Since the 1970s, the secular-liberal/Islamic binary and the gender binary has been challenged in the theoretical and political project of feminism.⁴⁰ While some political feminist activists continue to pursue their goals in opposition to Islam, many Egyptian feminist activists and scholars have problematized the unquestionable universality of Islamic patriarchal oppression. Contemporary feminist scholarship examines how feminist projects have adopted religious discourse to achieve gains for political and legal equality (Abu-Odeh, 2004). The Islamic Revival⁴¹ changed the dialogue surrounding women's role in Islam, as Muslim women from Iran to Morocco took more active roles in their religious traditions. In the last three decades, Egyptian feminist organizations have turned to Zeinab al-Ghazali's vision of female subjectivity formed through Islamic practice. Many Muslim women now practice what they term 'Islamic Feminism' or the marriage of Islamic ethics to feminist discourse and ideals. A prominent Egyptian NGO, Women and Memory Forum, aims to reread Arab tradition and cultural history in order to create a new cultural and social awareness that supports women's social roles. It conducts research, programs and events such

⁴⁰ Chandra Mohanty's article "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses" (1984) led to a shift in feminist theory and the emergence of third wave feminism that moves away from the colonizing aspects of first and second wave feminism.

⁴¹ Islamic Revival refers to a revival of the Islamic religion throughout the Islamic world that began sometime in the 1970s. It is characterized by greater religious piety and a growing adoption of Islamic culture.

as a conference held in spring 2012, *Feminism and Islamic Perspectives: New Horizons of Knowledge and Reform*. This conference sought to merge women's demands with the Islamic perspective, as the founders write on their website, "The main incentive behind Islamic feminist research is the activation of Islam's 'just' and 'fair' principles for the production of gender-sensitive knowledge within an Islamic frame of reference."⁴² Women and Memory Forum is one of many examples that erode the division of liberal-secular and Islamic, through the creation of new modes of feminism and understanding of Egyptian woman's gender roles.

On the eve of the 2011 Egyptian protests, the constructed roles of Egyptian masculine and feminine identities in society remained divided between notions of what it meant to be an Islamic Egyptian versus a secular Egyptian. Despite Egyptian men's assertion of Egypt as a modern state, they still treated women's presence in the streets as a transgression. Gendered violence, in particular street harassment and sexual assault, reminded Egyptian women of this supposed transgression daily. Men owned the street; women were allowed to do business in the street but not to linger. Renowned and controversial feminist writer and journalist Mona Eltahawy attacks rape culture and sexual harassment in Egypt on her twitter (@monaeltahawy) and in her articles.

Digital technologies such as social networking sites and mobile phones have offered a way for women to protest and combat these issues. For example,

⁴² "Feminism and Islamic Perspectives: New Horizons of Knowledge." *Women and Memory Forum*. March 17-18 2012. Accessed Nov. 4, 2013.
<<http://womenandmemory.org/islamicfeminism/>>

the organization, Harrasmap, devised a method to use crowd source⁴³ technology from mobile phones to map sites of sexual harassment. They identified highly trafficked spots, contacted business owners around the area, and constructed a safety network for women. The following section will examine the proliferation of digital technologies and social media in Egyptian social movements over the past decade. It asks, how do Egyptian gender relations manifest online? Do Egyptian women enjoy greater agency and freedom of movement through their usage of digital technologies and social media networks? In response to these questions, the following section will argue that Egyptian female cyberactivists have used digital technologies and social media networks to engage in discourse online and create new spaces for women to perform their gender and express agency in the public sphere.

5.2 Gendering Online Activism in Egypt: We Are All Laila

Under President Hosni Mubarak's thirty-year rule, government censorship silenced political protest against the regime; however, in the past decade several social movements emerged online and offline that created an active and engaged protest culture by the eve of the so-called Arab Spring revolts. Social networking sites served as a space semi-removed from state violence and censorship. The grassroots coalition for change Kefaya⁴⁴, the April 6th Movement, "We Are All Khaled Said" Facebook page and other civil society organizations laid the

⁴³ Crowdsourcing refers to the practice of obtaining needed services, ideas, or content by soliciting contributions the online community. Harrasmap relies on texts, tweets, and emails from victims to document areas where sexual harassment is prevalent and perpetrators of sexual harassment.

⁴⁴ Kefaya (Egyptian Arabic for "enough") is the unofficial name for the Egyptian Movement for Change that began in 2004 and gained national attention in the 2005 constitutional referendum and presidential election campaigns.

foundation for the revolution through their discursive activism online. Egyptians have cultivated one of the most prolific web presences in the Middle East. 12 million Egyptians subscribe to Facebook using an Arabic interface launched in 2010 (around 15% of the population.) An estimated 37% of the 80 million population have internet access (30 million people), and Egyptians represent 13% of MENA twitter users (Internet World Stats 2012; Arab Social Media Report 2013). Social media enabled opposition leaders to shape their discourses of contention, frame issues, and distribute unifying symbols (such as the image of Khaled Said) and transition protests from virtual spaces to physical spaces (Lim, 2012). Wael Ghonim, the Egyptian Google executive who created “We are All Khaled Said” Facebook page and movement, highlights the importance of online activism for organizing and mobilizing the #jan25 protests in his autobiography *Revolution 2.0* (2012). With these social networking tools, and the decades of activism that preceded the #jan25 protest, Egyptian activists united under one demand, “The people demand the end of the regime.”

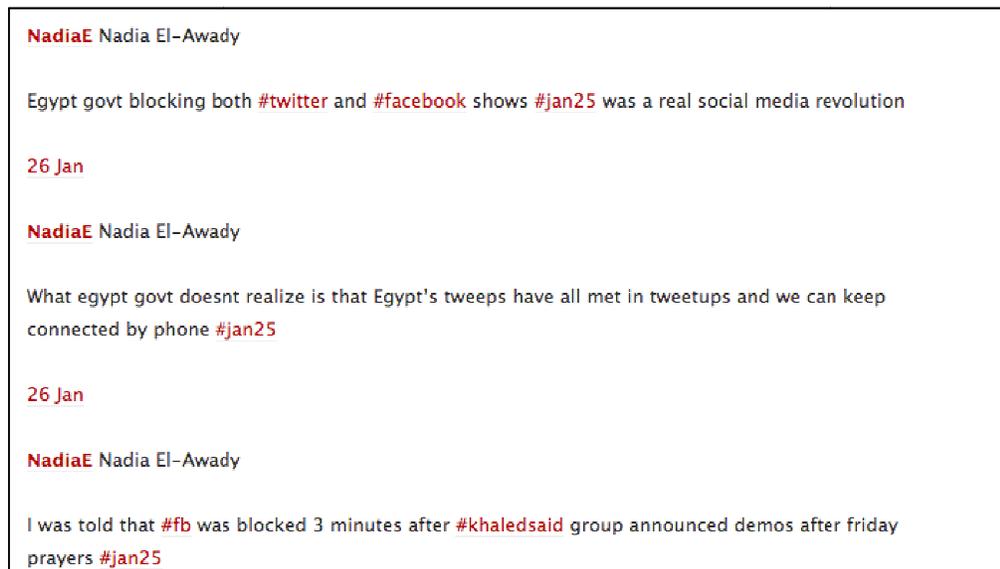
As early as 2006, female bloggers gathered on the Egyptian blogosphere to interrogate the nature of feminism, cultural and religious gender roles, and to discuss how to transform traditional notions of femininity and masculinity in the virtual and physical world. Egyptian bloggers created the “We Are All Laila” campaign in 2006 to dedicate one day each year to raising awareness and discussing the concerns of women in Arab society. The name “Laila” comes from the landmark novel *The Open Door* (1960) by Egyptian writer Latifa Al Zayat and represents all contemporary Egyptian women and the struggles they endure in a

repressive society that elevates the dreams and desires of men over women.⁴⁵ A 2007 study conducted by Dr. Mohamed Hossan Ismail has labeled the participants of the campaign as ‘cyber-feminists’, a term many of the bloggers identify with. Members of “We Are All Laila” discuss a range of topics each year, from practicing Islamic feminism to a critique of previous feminist projects (Ismail, 2007). In 2007, the study showed cyber-feminists focused on strengthening solidarity and relations between bloggers, rather than mobilizing the masses. The Arab Spring protests shifted the purpose of women activists, from looking at creating feminist new networks to urging all Egyptians—men and women to protest.

The shift from static web pages to dynamic or user-generated content and the growth of social networking has provided liberating possibilities for Egyptian women to perform their gender, challenge the hegemonic Egyptian construction of femininity, and demand gender parity. As noted the previous chapter on the Tunisian protests, writing anonymously or under pseudonyms can hide the gender identities of men and women. Egyptian cyber forums and online chat rooms have emerged as spaces for women to challenge and transgress traditional norms regarding gender and sexuality. Howard and Hussain argue that digital media in the Arab world allows citizens to learn about gender relations in other countries, debate specific gender issues, renegotiate and restructure gender relationships, and support women-only online communities (2013). This is particularly true for Egypt and its prolific history of feminism. Courtney Radsch

⁴⁵ Admin. *We are all Laila*. 10 September 2006. Web. Accessed 10 December 2013. <<http://laila-eg.blogspot.com/2006/09/1.html>>

notes that digital media also fostered connectivity and solidarity for women, providing them a space and tools for gender politics. Specifically, the social networking sites and microblogs Twitter and Facebook enabled activists to iterate revolutionary language and protest through retweets, sharing, favoriting etc. They increased the reach of the original post, disseminating it throughout the web, at news media sites, and international journalists.



Egyptian female cyberactivist Nadia El-Awady tweets about the importance of social media while protesting in Tahrir Square on January 26, 2011.

Nonetheless, digital divides exist in Egypt today. In the Arab world women represent only a third of users (Arab Social Media Report 2013), whereas worldwide women outnumber men 58% to 42% on Facebook. (Internet World Stats). In Egypt, roughly one third of the five million Facebook users are female. The 2013 Arab Social Media Report produced by the Dubai School of Government's Governance and Innovation program notes some of the factors constructing gender digital divide. The online survey conducted from mid August to mid October 2011 targeted men and women from all 22 Arab countries and

received 469 full responses with 60% of those from women. According to their research, survey respondents in Egypt identified ‘societal and cultural limitations’ as the top barrier, with privacy and security, ICT literacy, access to ICT, confidence in social media and education as secondary barriers. Respondents demonstrate some ambivalence in the report; 78% of Egyptians agreed that social media can advance women’s rights yet at the same time 40% of respondents at the regional level believed social media can present new concerns for women at the civic level. However, the report also argues that despite the gender digital divide, social media and online activism can empower women to be active participants leading and organizing protests.

It is also important to note that Egyptian female participation online is not limited to political protest and activism. Egyptian women also use blogs as diaries to share personal stories. These sites also provide spaces women to perform their sexuality and gender in a way physical space had not allowed them too. Young men and women bloggers often posted under pseudonyms on Facebook, skating censorship and creating new opportunities for sexual exploration that would not be traced back to them. Often, the purpose of the blog can be discerned from which networking site and what language the subject uses. For example, Egyptian women using colloquial Egyptian Arabic on a Tumblr blog generally use their blog for personal reflection and thought, including personal pictures or online images and reposts. Many of these women participate in what the blog aggregate and citizen journalist website Global Voices Online⁴⁶ has

⁴⁶ York, Jillian C. “Hijablogging in Vogue.” *Global Voices*. 1 March 2009. Web. Accessed November 29 2013. <<http://globalvoicesonline.org/2009/03/01/global-hijablogging-in-vogue/>>

termed “Hijablogging,” which is an international blogosphere movement where women discuss online veiled fashion, lifestyle, experience, and the political and religious issues surrounding veiling. Egyptian women posting in the English language participate in what Ethan Zuckerman as termed “bridgeblogging.⁴⁷” These women tend to be academics or journalists targeting international audiences and news sources. They use blogs as spaces to publish their perspectives on political issues or to act as citizen journalists circumventing the state media.

This section has argued that the proliferation of digital technologies and social media networks have blurred the boundaries between public/private space in Egypt and enabled Egyptian women to articulate diverse identities and to demand political, social, cultural, and religious gender parity. The following section will examine whether this argument also applies to the actions of Egyptian female cyberactivists during the Egyptian revolution beginning on January 25, 2011. Through an in-depth analysis of six Egyptian female cyberactivists who participated in the Egyptian dignity revolution, it will contend that Egyptian female cyberactivists used digital technologies and social media to insert their voices and bodies into the public sphere, subverting the Egyptian gender divide and exhibiting multiple modalities of agency.

⁴⁷ As discussed in the previous chapter on Tunisia, Arab female cyberactivists employed bridgeblogging to draw international attention and news media to the protests. This was a strategy to communicate and subvert government censorship and state media.

5.3 Embodying Gendered Resistance Online

The remainder of this chapter will focus on close-readings of six Egyptian female cyberactivists. These female cyberactivists represent a rich array of viewpoints, political activity, and online presence; however, they are by no means representative of all Egyptian female cyberactivists. Among the bloggers omitted include Dalia Ziada, Mona Eltahawy, Mona Seif and Nadia El Saadawi. Dalia Ziad is a political and human rights activist who co-founded an Egyptian political party and ran for parliament after the revolution. She has won numerous awards for her blogging from the news organizations such as the Daily Beast and Newsweek. Feminist writer and journalist Mona Eltahawy used her twitter and clout as an internationally respected journalist to highlight sexual harassment and gender violence during the protests. News journalist Mona Seif braved the protests every day to capture, document and upload content online providing hourly updates of the protests. Renowned feminist writer and physician Nawal El Saadawi, 79 years old at the time of the protests, camped out in Tahrir Square day and night, providing coverage of the protests for international news media sources such as Democracy Now. These women held instrumental roles in the Egyptian dignity revolution, mobilizing Egyptians to protest via Facebook, documenting the clashes between the police and the protestors in Tahrir via Twitter, and highlighting the incidents of gender violence and sexual harassment that occurred in blogs and news articles. However, due to space and time constraints, this chapter will limit its analysis to the six Egyptian female cyberactivists described below.

This section will begin with April 6th activists Asmaa Mahfouz and Esraa Abdel-Fattah, examining their role as Egyptian “Facebook girls” organizing for the January 25, 2011 National Police Day demonstration (#Jan25). From Mahfouz and Abdel-Fattah’s demonstration of female discursive activism online, this section will turn to an analysis of internationally renowned bloggers Zeinab Mohammed, Nadia El-Awady, and Arwa Saleh Mahmoud. Mohammed, El-Awady, Mahmoud used their blogs to document the protests through citizen journalism, live-tweeting and blogging the revolution. Finally, it will conclude with Islamic feminist and cyberactivist Fatma Emam, unpacking her experience protesting and the role of Islamic feminism in the revolt. These female cyberactivists witnessed diverse experiences protesting, blogging and posting in Egyptian colloquial Arabic, Modern Standard Arabic and English to perform multiple identities online.

Throughout, these close-readings ask: How and when do these female activists use digital technologies and social media? What gendered messages do they transmit? How do these Egyptian female cyberactivists articulate agency online and offline? And, what comparisons can be made with the actions of Tunisian and Moroccan female cyberactivists? In response to the questions posed above, this section will bring in the previous discussions of Egyptian gender relations and the rise of digital technologies to inform the analysis of these six Egyptian female cyberactivists. Ultimately, it will argue that digital media technologies and social networking sites enabled women to inhabit new spaces offline and online during the Egyptian revolution, transcending the demarcation of public and private in Egypt. In these spaces, they deployed

diverse identities and articulated multiple modalities of agency that inserted their presence into the public sphere.

A Call to Action: Asmaa Mahfouz and Esraa Abdel-Fattah

Many Egyptian female activists realized the significance of their bodily presence and used their presence to challenge and rally Egyptian citizens. As founding members of the Egyptian April 6th protest movement⁴⁸, Asmaa Mahfouz and Esraa Abdel-Fattah have interacted on all forms of media—Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, blogs, etc. International media sites such as Al Jazeera, BBC and Open Democracy dubbed Mahfouz and Abdel-Fattah “Facebook Girls,” for their prolific online activism leading to the #Jan25 protest.



Esraa Abdel-Fattah’s Twitter Profile @Esraa2008 with 328,000 followers.

Their movement participated in creating the #Jan25 protest in Egypt with the “We are all Khaled Said” Facebook page. In addition, they issued their own calls to protest on Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. Asmaa Mahfouz posted her first

⁴⁸ On April 6, 2008, Mahfouz and fellow bloggers Ahmed Maher and Ahmed Salah organized support for a workers strike in the industrial town of El-Mahalla El-Kubra. They turned to Facebook to mobilize Egyptian citizens to protest. The movement became known as the April 6th movement and continued to be active online until they collaborated with Wael Ghonim and Kefaya to hold the National Police Day protests January 25, 2011.

video blog (vlog)⁴⁹ on January 18, 2011, a week before the protest was to occur on January 25. Esraa Abdel-Fattah identifies as an Egyptian political activist, although she took a brief hiatus after her detainment by the police in 2006. In an interview with *The Cairo Review of Global Affairs* January 27, 2011, she stated, “We used social media to organize ourselves in a very active way. To publicize the event the way we want, and to make coverage for the events that happened in the street. And when we broadcast what happened, at the same time we encouraged them to join us in the street.” Besides her activism, Esraa acted as a bridge between Al Jazeera and the protests, tweeting updates as the protestors moved to occupy Tahrir Square after the January 25th protests.

In her first video posted to her Facebook page on January 18, 2011, Asmaa Mahfouz appeared in the fashionably conservative attire of professional Egyptian Muslim women and wearing a hijab. Mahfouz spoke in impassioned colloquial Egyptian Arabic and challenged her audience to participate in the protests, stating, “If you think yourself a man, come with me on January 25th. Whoever said women shouldn’t go to protests because they’ll be beaten, let him have some honor and manhood and come with me on January 25th.” Egyptian activists, including among them Wael Ghonim (creator of the “We are all Khaled Said” Facebook page) credit Mahfouz with inspiring Egyptian citizens to take to the streets on January 25th and march to Tahrir Square. In the days following, her video circulated online on Facebook, YouTube and Twitter. Egyptian viewers from within and without the country responded to her Facebook post

⁴⁹ Asmaa Mahfouz vblog January 18, 2011. *YouTube*. Accessed November 7, 2013. <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SgiIgMdsEuk>>

with reshares, likes, comments and images of themselves, their family or even their children with the words “I will go to Tahrir on #Jan25.” On January 24, Asmaa Mahfouz reiterated her call to arms in another vlog posted to her Facebook page.



**Asmaa Mahfouz’s vlog on January 18, 2011
urging Egyptian women and men to protest in #Jan25 demonstration.**

By facing and speaking to the camera, Mahfouz projected a feminine image on the protests, inscribing her body as the “Egyptian revolutionary woman.” Lasting four minutes and thirty-two seconds, the January 18th video shows a veiled Mahfouz holding a sign to her chest saying that she would go out and protest to bring down Mr. Mubarak’s regime. In a 2011 interview with the New York Times, she stated that her desire to be visible and reach as many people as possible inspired her to produce the video. Importantly, her ‘desire to be visible’ translated as her desire to be visible as a Muslim, female subject, demonstrated by her *hijab*. Mahfouz located her position as a girl—rather than a woman—in the opening lines of the video, “I posted that I, a girl, am going to Tahrir Square and I will stand alone.” Her use of the identifier ‘girl’ rather than ‘woman’ can be read as both a challenge to Egyptian men and notions as well as an appeal to

cultural notions of ‘the mother’ or ‘daughters.’ By identifying as a female, Mahfouz revealed her conscious desire to transgress the separation of private ‘women’s space’ and public ‘men’s space.’ Articulated via the Internet, her message transcended spatial boundaries, reaching beyond the Tahrir Square, to the rest of Cairo and all of Egypt through Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter. International news organizations such as Al Jazeera and Democracy Now took her video, translated her message into English, and posted subtitles on the video, making it accessible to English speakers as well.

Throughout the video, she directed her message at Egyptian men, using gendered language with the Arabic masculine ‘you.’⁵⁰ This choice of subject iterates Mahfouz’s gendered message and her challenge to Egyptian men. Halfway through the video, she stated, “If you think yourself a man, come with me on January 25th. Whoever said women shouldn’t go to protests because they’ll be beaten, let him have some honor and manhood and come with me on January 25th.” She reiterated the challenge to male masculinity in the following sentence, “If you have honor and dignity as a man, come. Come and protect other girls in the protest.” These statements complicate a Western feminist analysis connecting agency with subjectivity. As Mahmood asks in *Politics of Piety* (2005), how can a challenge that reasserts traditional gender roles (such as masculinity, men as the protector) articulate the feminist subject? In many ways, the examples described above iterate a hyperperformance of Egyptian gender roles and norms. Mahfouz over-emphasized her own femininity while at the

⁵⁰ While I consulted a YouTube clip with subtitles and the Democracy Now news transcript, I also listened to Mahfouz’s vlogs and transcribed them in Arabic then translated the quotes I chose to use into English. I did so in order to ensure I analyzed her language with accuracy.

same time insinuating it has more ‘honor’ and ‘duty’ than male masculinity. Thus, her actions can be read as subverting the gender binary from within it.

When viewing Asmaa Mahfouz’s vlogs and reading her blogposts, Twitter posts, Facebook, etc, it is important to view her as responding to and inhabiting multiple discourses. She articulated resistance to state power (represented by Mubarak) through her deployment of feminist activism within the constructed Egyptian and Islamic gender binary. When she identified as the ‘daughter of Egypt’ or as a ‘mother,’ she expressed resistance through appropriating these norms and saying ‘Look, here I am, in the streets’ and challenging the separation of public male spaces and private female spaces. When she stated, “let him have some honor and come with me,” she appropriated the religious and cultural discourse surrounding Islamic values of honor to encourage Egyptian citizens to protest. On the surface, her videos seem to only protest Mubarak’s regime; however, a closer analysis reveals their embodied resistance to constructed categories of gender in Islamic Egyptian culture.

Asmaa Mahfouz and Esraa Abdel-Fattah transgressed the boundary between public/private space through their online activism. Employing activist language, they used digital media as a tool to inform and convey messages as well as challenge certain gender perceptions. In their activism, they articulated multiple identities, resisting both President Hosni Mubarak’s authoritarian regime and Egyptian and Islamic gender roles. Mahfouz claimed the right to stand in the streets next to her fellow Egyptian citizens, male and female, in her video blogs—a claim Abdel-Fattah echoed in her Facebook posts and Twitter accounts. By using Facebook to upload a vblog, Mahfouz projected her body and

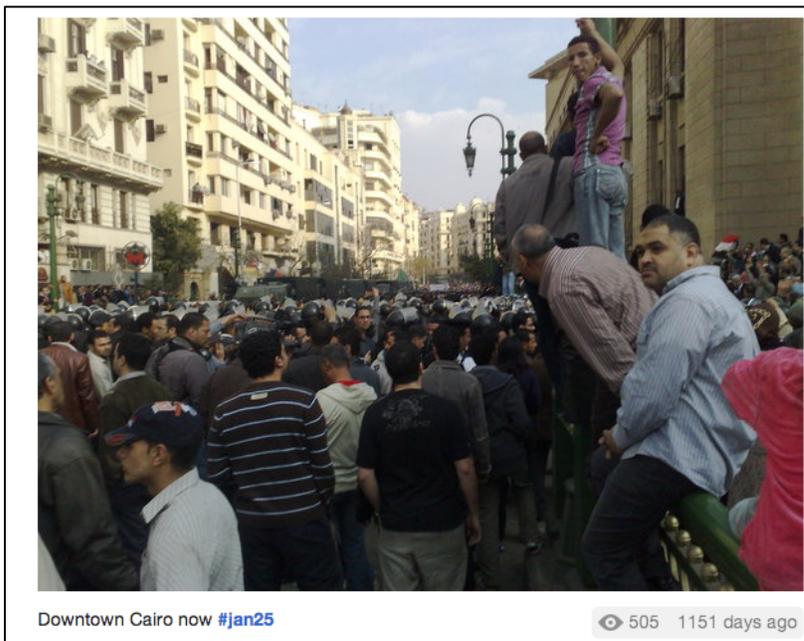
marked it as a revolutionary symbol, similar to the images of Khaled Said beaten body on the “We are all Khaled Said Facebook” page and video of Tunisian street vendor Mohamed Bouazizi self-immolation. However, she emphasized her role as a living feminine symbol, calling herself the ‘daughter of Egypt’ or the ‘Facebook Girl.’ Esraa Abdel-Fattah and Asmaa Mahfouz claimed their place in Tahrir Square and in Egyptian society through these digital technologies, transmitting their message to all Egyptians online. The following sections introduces Egyptian female cyber activists Nadia El-Awady and Arwa Saleh, moving from calls to action issued by feminine bodies online to female experiences and narratives of protest.

Narratives of Protest: The Inner Workings of My Mind and Al Hurr

Nadia El-Awady created the Wordpress blog *The Inner Workings of My Mind* in 2009. She used it as a space to post science journal articles she had written, to document her travels and to reflect on the role of Islam in her life. An Egyptian raised in America, El-Awady discussed the conflicting identities she navigated growing up in her blog posts. In her video blogs, she appeared in a hijab, but also mentioned that she had distanced herself from her conservative Islamic background. Her posts have ranged from discussions of faith—she wore the face veil for 8 years—to asserting her independence and the independence of all women within and through Islam. At the time of the revolution in 2011, she was living and working in Egypt after attending university there. While aware of the #Jan25 event created on Facebook by the “We are all Khaled Said” page, El-Awady and her friend and fellow blogger Arwa Saleh Mahmoud of *Al Hurr*

doubted the turn-out as well as the ability of those she describes as “privileged, educated activists” to affect change. Mahmoud reflected in English on her blog on February 20, 2011 “As I later found out, we were like many other skeptical Egyptians who were going out of a fading sense of duty. We knew there was nothing else we could do if we wanted any change.” Yet, on January 25th, 2011, Nadia El-Awady found herself in a taxi heading to the protests in downtown Cairo with Arwa Saleh Mahmoud.

She documented her experiences in English with photos and videos uploaded to YouTube via her blog and includes links to both her blog post and her YouTube account on her Facebook page. In addition, she also archived all of her tweets from January 25 to February 12 2011 on her blog. Individuals from all



over the globe followed El-Awady’s twitter account and blog; one Filipino living in the Netherlands even wrote a blog post about the impact her twitter narrative had on him and the 8100 other followers

she had.⁵¹ El-Awady's tweets and videos depicted the protests' escalation from January 25th-29th. The picture below was uploaded on January 25th via twitpic with the tweet, "Downtown Cairo now #jan25;" the image had five retweets, 2 favorites, one Google Plus share and two Facebook likes. These videos compose the majority of her initial posts, with an average of several thousand views for each video by December 2013. Taken from a mobile phone, the videos captured her voice and reaction to the protests and exhibitions of violence she witnesses. A video she uploaded on January 25th 7:02 pm depicts the women's participation in the protests; it films a crowd of people chanting [indiscernible, but something like 1,2, the people want...]. In this 48-second clip, the fist of a veiled woman in front of her shoots into the sky next to blue screens from mobile phones and cameras capturing the moment. The camera shakes slightly as El-Awady's voice joins the Egyptians around her chanting in Egyptian colloquial Arabic, "Ash-shab yurid isqat an-nizam" (the people want to bring down the regime).

Nadia El-Awady's videos and posts from the Egyptian Day of Rage on January 29th, 2011 exposed the rising violence of the protests, caused by police forces firing with real and not rubber bullets. El-Awady and Mahmoud first encounter tear gas on the march to Tahrir when the police use it to prevent protestors to entering the square:

Already our faces are covered with scarves to protect as best as possible from the gas. Arwa seems to yell, "RUN!" I run away from the police and through the horrid cloud of gas forming behind us. As I run, I need to take deeper breaths, but I can't because that means breathing in the tear gas. When I do breathe, it feels like acid

⁵¹ Butalid, Carlo. "The Egyptian Revolution from Nadia's Eyes." *Carol's Think Piece: Reflections of a Filipino in the Netherlands*. 11 February 2011. Web. Accessed 26 February 2014. <<http://butalidnl.wordpress.com/2011/02/11/the-egyptian-revolution-from-nadias-eyes/>>

is being poured down my throat. When I hold my breath as I run, I almost black out and faint. I continue on, my heart pounding (*The Inner Workings of My Mind*, March 11, 2011)

Another time, Arwa Salah Mahmoud and her took shelter from the tear gas and the shooting in a building with many other people. El-Awady filmed Mahmoud in Arabic and English explaining the events going on around them as others protestors seeking refuge add commentary, “People are taking shelter. Police and protestors are both taking shelters. Where is the enemy here? I really don’t know.”⁵² The next videos showed El-Awady and Mahmoud running from tear gas and gunshots; the camera lens pointed towards the ground and shaking back and forth as they ran down the streets amidst yells and the ricocheting of gunshots and the sirens screeching. Although the two Egyptian women experienced various forms of violence in the streets, El-Awady continued to videotape and protest until street thugs broke her camera in the first days of February.

Both Arwa Saleh Mahmoud and Nadia El-Awady emphasized their ability to slip in-between the police forces and protestors, switching identities in order to pass through unmolested:

...Nadia and I were able to penetrate even to the side of the police, changing our occupations and purposes of being in the street as we went along depending on who asked us. One minute we were journalists, the other we were trying to get home (*Al Hurr*, February 20, 2011).

Their freedom of movement during the daytime protests did not carry over into the night. El-Awady wrote that it was still necessary to walk home at night escorted by several male friends as a curfew was instated and random acts of

⁵² El-Awady, Nadia. *The Inner Workings of My Mind*. “Arwa explains whats happening in building” 2 February 2011. Web. Accessed January 29 2014.
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=S3jeoYwYlzE>

looting and violence began occurring in downtown Cairo. However, those acts of violence differed from the prevalence of gender violence and street harassment directed at women before the revolution began. The women noted the absence of sexual harassment for those 18 days in their blogs. In the tweet shown below, El-Awady applauds the lack of gender violence on January 25, “Thousands of young men and no harassment to be seen. I love you Egypt #jan25.”



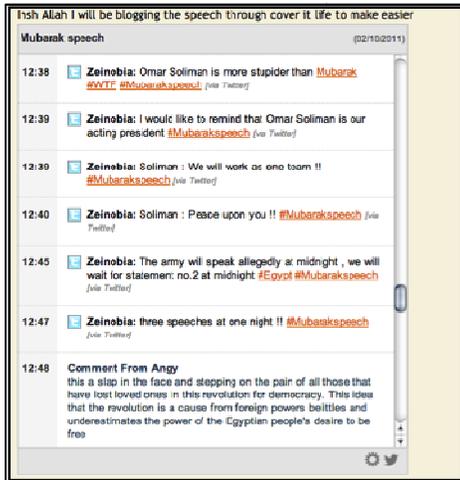
Nadia El-Awady and Arwa Saleh Mahmoud articulated multiple identities in their online narratives. Acting simultaneously as journalists, protestors, women, and Egyptian citizens, they witnessed first-hand the power that the crowds gained as they marched towards Tahrir Square. Writing in her reflection on February 20th, Mahmoud recounted, “The crowds were finally able to enter Tahrir....The further the protesters advanced the more cheerful they became, and soon they were joined by thousands more coming into Tahrir from all directions. Tahrir had become theirs” (*Al Hurr*, February 20, 2011). Their blog posts and reflections marked the transition they underwent in those 18 days—from skeptical observers and archivists of activism they became active participants. El-Awady’s video translated into citizen journalism and kept her followers (numbering 70,000 in 2014) informed of the protestors’ advances. Arwa Saleh Mahmoud acknowledges the power shift the protests engendered in the final

words of her reflection, “Something very big had happened in my country. The people were no longer afraid, the regime was” (*Al Hurr*, February 20, 2011).

Nadia El-Awady and Arwa Saleh present detailed narratives of their participation in the Egyptian Revolution protests from January to February 2011. Their use of digital technologies while protesting enabled them to document and share the events as they were happening online. They acted as citizen journalists to move in and out of the protests and participated in the demonstration marches to Tahrir Square. For example, El-Awady’s 8,100 Twitter followers used her as a source to know when and where the protests were occurring. The next section offers a different example on the use of digital technologies and social media for citizen journalism in the Egyptian revolution. Egyptian cyberactivist Zeinab Mohammed live-tweeted (@zeinobia) and blogged (*Egyptian Chronicles*) her participation in the revolution, documenting the events unfolding in Tahrir Square and the streets of Cairo when the state media refused to do so.

Citizen Journalism: Egyptian Chronicles (Zeinab Mohammed)

On January 19, 2011, Zeinab Mohammed of *Egyptian Chronicles* wrote, “Anyhow after a week we shall see what is going on the 25th of January 2011 and whether it will be remarkable like the 25th of January 1952.” An Egyptian journalist, Mohammed’s blogposts intertwined citizen journalism and discursive activism, interspersed with videos, tweets, and links to other bloggers’ sites and news articles. Later, on, she included the applications Twitter and Google created specifically for activists in the Arab revolutions “Speak to Tweet” and “Cover it



Live,” shown in the image on the right. These apps uploaded a live stream of her tweets simultaneously to Twitter, Blogspot, and Facebook. She identified as, “just Egyptian girl who lives in the present with the glories of the past and hopes in a better future for herself and for her country.” Writing in both English

and Arabic, her blog reached a diverse audience with 76,009 views as of February 13, 2014.

Zeinab Mohammed demonstrates both the importance of citizen journalism to the Egyptian Revolution as well as the necessity of inhabiting multi-media platforms to disseminate information—posting on twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Flickr, and traditional media sites. Her connectivity traced across the blogosphere and expanded into the streets, reflected by the images of protests she posted and the reception her blog posts and tweets received. By posting in Arabic and English she appealed to international, regional, and local audiences. Her language reveals that she is conscious of the impact of the Tunisian revolution and the power structures her discourse disrupts. She wrote in English and Arabic on January 25th, 2011:

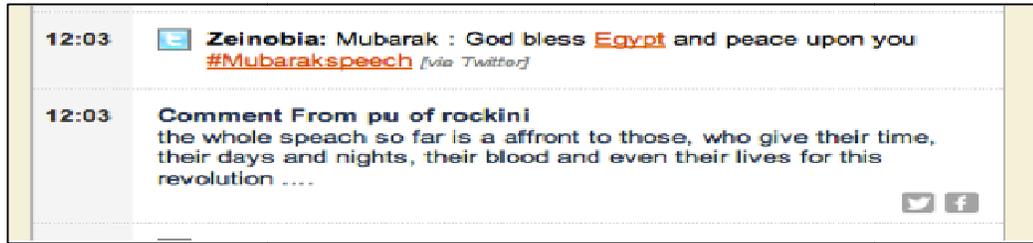
The protests have not started but I will say that the day is successful “Insh Allah” [Godwilling] because it showed how much the regime is scared from the people, the regime freaked out after knowing that thousands accepted the protest invitation online not even offline. Thanks to our Tunisian brother our regime began to fear us more and more. That scared regime is actually a weak one that has no confidence in itself, sooner or later it will fail (*Egyptian Chronicles*, January 25, 2011).

In the statement above, she identified a power dichotomy between the regime—Mubarak’s government—and the ‘people.’ However, the Egyptian citizens occupying virtual and physical space disrupted the power dichotomy—revealing that the people can and do have power. Thus, for Mohammed, the impending #Jan25 protest in Tahrir Square threatened the hierarchy of political and governing power in Egypt as the Tunisian protests in the cities of Sidi Bouzid and Tunis destabilized the Tunisian regime’s power.

Mohammed, like many cyberactivists, believed in the power of Facebook and online activism for inciting protests. She referenced the January 25th protests invite created by the “We are all Khaled Said Facebook” page several times, writing three days before protest began:

The January 25th protest is getting serious attention more and more. More Facebook pages and groups are calling for the #25 Jan and more political groups are going to participate in the huge event. They are about 17 groups. Many are praying that it be the start of a new thing in Egypt. Now if you are interested in following the protest on twitter to know its updates then follow this hash tag [#jan25] (*Egyptian Chronicles*, January 22, 2011).

In the above quote, Mohammed connected the upcoming protests to online activism and grassroots organizing, using the hashtag #jan25 on Twitter and in her blog and posting about the Egyptian Facebook pages organizing the protests. She also noted earlier in the post that thousands of Egyptians had joined the event created by the “We are all Khaled Said” Facebook page. Multiple digital media platforms appeared in each of her posts, reflecting the importance of deploying many digital technologies to reach as many people as possible.



Zeinab Mohammed live tweeted Mubarak’s speech addressed to the revolutionaries February 10, 2011.

From January 25th to February 11th, Mohammed narrated the protests in Tahrir with photos and video, documenting the events as they happened on her blog, twitter, Facebook page and email. Her posts reflected the fervor unfolding events, as hundreds of thousands of Egyptians thronged the streets of Cairo, clashing with police and thugs hired by the government. She attempted to describe the sounds, smells, and passion of the people—repeating the universalizing word ‘we’ or ‘ours.’ Her voice flowed back and forth from first person to third person as she reflected on her own experiences or appeals to the ‘Egyptian’ ‘us’ experience. Videos of couples marrying and famous singers performing protest songs interspersed her political dialogue. Yet, as February 11th approached, her language and the frequency of her posts reveal that the revolution was approaching an apex, writing on February 10th, “a possible coup in the way!!” Using the “Cover it Live” app, she live blogged Mubarak’s speech on February 10, 2011; this app includes the comments and responses to her tweets as well. Thus, when Zeinab Mohammed tweeted, “Mubarak: God bless Egypt and peace upon you #Mubarakspeech,” a commenter responds, “the whole speech so far is a affront to those, who give their time, days and nights, their blood, and even their lives for this revolution...” The screenshot above depicts this interaction. At the end of this live blog, Mohammed announced that February 11,

2011 will be a 'Day of Rage' in Tahrir Square in response to Mubarak's speech and urged everyone to protest.

The actions of the Egyptian female cyberactivists Asmaa Mahfouz, Esraa Abdel-Fattah, Nadia El-Awady, Arwa Saleh Mahmoud and Zeinab Mohammed depicted in the previous three sections illustrate how Egyptian women used their blogs, Facebooks and Twitter accounts to document the protests and to encourage Egyptian citizens to protest. They posted in Egyptian colloquial Arabic, Modern Standard Arabic, and English to connect with Egyptians in the country and to inform the international audience of the unfolding uprising. The final section of this chapter shifts from narratives of protest and citizen journalism. It introduces Fatma Emam, an Egyptian women who blogs under the name *Brownie*. Emam turned to her blog to reflect on the challenges the protests placed to her identity as an Islamic feminist. Her internal struggles depict the conflicting identities Egyptian women deployed online and in the streets throughout the revolution.

Narratives of Protest, Gender and Islam: Brownie

As stated in the previous three sections, digital media can foster connectivity and solidarity for women, enabling them to inhabit private, public, and cyber space simultaneously. This final close reading analyzes Fatma Emam's blog *Brownie*, examining how her cyber activism during the Egyptian 2011 revolt created a space for women to perform multiple, conflicting identities and forge coalitions between secular and Islamic feminists. As a research assistant for Cairo NGO Nazra for Feminist Studies, Emam writes within the context of

Egyptian feminism and gender politics. Her blog posts explore the intersection of faith and gender that shape her life. For example, on her first day Emam participated in the protests, she wrote about her experience afterwards:

I was very self-conscious, I found it too hard to unite with the masses. One example when the prayer time came, I did not pray, because I was afraid that the prayer were lead by the Muslim brotherhood, which was proved that the prayers were not political and felt annoyed by the chants of the seculars calling to the prayer because it is Islamisation of the revolution (*Brownie*, February 9, 2011).

In this post, Fatma Emam expressed her sense of displacement and alienation within the protests. Her response to the protests differed from the expressions of overwhelming nationhood felt by female bloggers such as Zeinab Mohammed of *Egyptian Chronicles*. Emam pointed to the confusion over prayer's place in Tahrir, highlighting her uncertainty over the role of political Islam represented by the Muslim Brotherhood in the revolution.

On February 9th, 2011 Fatma Emam wrote in English how she believed that the revolutions in Egypt were not just a revolution against Mubarak and the status quo, but a revolution against the patriarchy embedded within the regime and reflected in Egyptian culture:

The revolution is not only in Tahrir, it is in every Egyptian house, it is the revolution of fighting the patriarch as Hind said. In this revolution the women fought for their private and public life and this is the core of our feminist struggle as Mozn said (*Brownie*, February 9, 2011).

Her post referenced the historical and cultural division of private and public life. It noted that, while no longer explicit, this division continues to permeate Egyptian society. In many ways, Fatma Emam's posts echo Asmaa Mahfouz's challenge to Egyptian masculinity in her January 18 and January 25 vlogs.

Although Mahfouz does not identify as a feminist, she employed similar language about gender parity. Both women claimed their right to protest in the streets and challenge the relegation of Egyptian women to the home. Emam implicated the Muslim Brotherhood for enshrining these patriarchal values dividing society and subjugating women, thus explaining her uneasy feelings towards their presence in Tahrir Square before Mubarak stepped down. But at the same time, she identified as an Islamic feminist, “As an Islamic feminist, I disagree with this, I believe in a secular state...in this state everyone express his/her beliefs” (*Brownie*, February 9, 2011). Consequently, she refuted the Muslim Brotherhood for their distortion of the Islam she practiced and viewed as complementary to feminist ideals.

Throughout the protests, Fatma Emam used her blog to unpack her experiences during the Egyptian revolution rather than employing it for citizen journalism, documenting human rights violations, or organizing for events. Her posts reflected her encounters with the protests in Tahrir Square as well as the participation of the women and men around her. On February 4th, nine days after the protests began, she professed her surprise with the participation of women in the protests—not that they were present—but the ways in which they participated:

...I am proud to say that The Egyptian women are playing an extraordinary role in the revolution, they are fighting for private and public rights, they are claiming their rights as equal citizens in this country.

When I was in Tahrir, I saw young and old women, veiled and non-veiled women, and political oriented women and non political women.

I saw them side to side to the men, they did not listen to the traditional calls that Tahrir is not a place for women.

I saw the Egyptian women doing untraditional roles in organizing, strategizing. Spreading the information and leading the revolution. They were everywhere writing new line of the herstory of women (*Brownie*, February 4, 2011).

In the excerpt taken from her blog above, Fatma Emam located the Egyptian uprising as a revolutionary event for Egyptian women and their “herstory.” Again, she noted that women were fighting for “private and public rights” and were issuing claims for gender parity in Egyptian politics and society. Echoing Mahfouz once more, she highlighted the presence of women in a place—Tahrir Square—not traditionally demarcated for them.

Emam’s experience of the Egyptian revolution from January 25, 2011 to February 14, 2011 reflect the fears, anxieties, excitement, and anticipation that faced Egyptian female cyberactivists. Her posts provide an insight into the complex and conflicting emotions that guided these women in their actions. Her voice shifted in the post illustrated above on February 4th, from wary of the role of political Islam in the protests to proud of and inspired by the actions of the Egyptian women protesting throughout Cairo. Fatma Emam’s blog demonstrates how Egyptian female cyberactivists merged the personal and political in their lives, carving out new spaces in the public sphere to protest and voice their agency—both online and in Tahrir Square.

5.4 Conclusion: Revolutionary Echoes

The above sections offer only a snapshot of the vast and dizzying array of the Egyptian blogosphere and the role Egyptian female cyberactivists played in the Egyptian dignity revolution from January 25 to February 14, 2011. These six female cyberactivists, Asmaa Mahfouz, Esraa Abdel-Fattah, Nadia El-Awady, Arwa Saleh Mahmoud, Zeinab Mohammed, and Fatma Emam, represent but a few of the myriad Egyptian women who participated in the revolution.

Employing a wide range of digital technologies, they participated in diverse ways in the online and physical protests. Some, like Asmaa Mahfouz, Esraa Abdel-Fattah, and Zeinab Mohammed, were involved with the organization of the #Jan25 protest on the National Police Day. Others, such as Nadia El-Awady and Arwa Saleh Mahmoud, found themselves headed to the protest reluctantly and with the certainty that January 25, 2011 would be like any other demonstration in Egypt—crushed by the police. And many, such as Fatma Emam, wrestled with their decision to protest, inhibited by fear of the violence and suspicious of how to perform their feminist piety in the midst of secular Egyptians and political Islamists.

Despite these differences, this chapter has argued three main points: 1) Egyptian female cyberactivists inhabited multiple digital platforms to articulate specific gendered messages using English, Modern Standard Arabic and Egyptian colloquial Arabic; 2) Egyptian female cyberactivists used digital technologies to share information between cyber space and the protests in the streets, connecting online activism to physical demonstrations; 3) Egyptian female cyberactivists used virtual space to simultaneously mobilize followers to protest and reflect on

their own experiences of revolution. Thus, this chapter concludes that the digital media technologies and social networking sites these six Egyptian female cyberactivists used enabled them to inhabit new spaces during the Egyptian revolution, transcending the demarcation of public and private in Egypt. Cyberactivism provided them with liberating and emancipatory possibilities, as Radsch notes, “...cyberactivism was fundamentally about linking virtual dissent with physical protest, influencing the mainstream media, setting the media and public policy agenda, and framing the debate about political rights and civil liberties, including the role of women” (2012). Thus, through Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Wordpress, Blogspot, etc., Egyptian female cyberactivists claimed their place to participate in the Egyptian revolutions and carved new spaces to articulate agency. These women deployed a multiplicity of femininities and identities throughout the protests, from the revolutionary woman depicted by Asmaa Mahfouz, the citizen journalist illustrated by Nadia El-Awady, to the Islamic feminist demonstrated by Fatma Emam.

Although the Egyptian revolution differed from its predecessor, the Tunisian Dignity Revolution from December 17 to January 14, 2011, the actions of Egyptian female cyberactivist parallel their Tunisian female cyberactivists counterparts. Through digital technologies and social networking sites, these Egyptian and Tunisian women connected physical protests with online activism, bringing marginalized discussions of sexuality, gender, sexual harassment, women’s political power, social, cultural, and religious gender norms to the forefront. Facebook and Twitter connected women, enabling them to share other websites and information, to organize information using hashtags (#), and to

direct information towards outside sources, such as international media, journalists, etc using the @ sign. Tunisian and Egyptian female cyberactivists deployed their identities online, subverting established gender roles, and embodying resistance to the regime as well as the patriarchal norms embedded within its discourse.

The subsequent chapter will introduce the final country case study of Morocco. Protest movements in Morocco differed greatly from those in Tunisia and Egypt. From the millions storming the streets and demanding the overthrow of the regime in Tunisia and Egypt, Morocco's temperate demands for civil reform and end to government corruption seem small in comparison. However, the 2011 Moroccan protest movement achieved significant gains for women's rights and saw the emergence of new networks of feminist activism and female reverberations online and in the streets. This chapter will argue that Moroccan female activists used digital technologies to carve new spaces to articulate agency and demand gender parity, echoing the actions of Tunisian and Egyptian female cyberactivists.

Chapter 6: Morocco: The 20th of February Movement

Image removed for copyright reasons.

Moroccan female protestors holding the letter 'F' to symbolize the importance of Facebook in the protest movement in Rabat on March 20, 2011, photo taken from Reuters/Adam Tanner

As millions of Tunisians and Egyptians took to the streets and political upheaval reverberated across North Africa in 2011, toppling Tunisian President Ben Ali in January and Egyptian President Mubarak in February, Morocco's young political activists and thriving civil society groups gathered online and in the streets to challenge the ruling government. The 2011-2012 Moroccan protests differed from the violent upheaval experienced in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya, focusing on moderate civil society action and constitutional reform. Although Moroccan activists did not demand the end of the regime or the removal of King Mohammed VI, they succeeded in drawing attention to government corruption,

highlighting political, social, cultural, and religious gender inequalities, and bringing marginalized voices into the public sphere. Prompted by the Facebook group “Freedom and Democracy Now⁵³” created on January 27, 2011, a group of women and men youth activists issued a statement and posted a video directed at King Mohammed VI. Among other demands, the thirteen activists stated on their Facebook page: “We declare to organize a demonstration on February 20th, 2011 beginning at ten in the morning in all Moroccan cities, stand in front of the states representations of central authority⁵⁴.” In the video they posted on the “Freedom and Democracy Now” Facebook page, Moroccan women and men faced the camera and appealed to Moroccan citizens to protest government corruption on February 20. Echoing Asmaa Mahfouz’s challenge to Egyptian citizens on January 18, 2011, these Moroccan activists projected bodily images for Moroccans to identify with and rally around. Thirteen female and male activists speak in their native Darija (Moroccan colloquial Arabic)⁵⁵ or Amazigh (Berber), “I am a Moroccan and I will take part in the protest February 20th.” The video circulated online, garnering hundreds of thousands of views on YouTube. Thousands of Moroccans responded to this video and advocacy campaign, joining a coalition of university students, youth groups, women’s right groups, and other civil society actors protesting throughout the country on February 20, 2011.

Unlike the preceding Tunisian and Egyptian chapters, which analyzed the online activity of individual female cyberactivists, this chapter will focus on the

⁵³ Translated from Modern Standard Arabic, the language of governance in Morocco. I will unpack this relationship further later on in this chapter.

⁵⁴ “Freedom and Democracy Now.” Translated. Web. Accessed January 20 2014. <<https://www.facebook.com/groups/MLEDM/>>

⁵⁵ Mouvement20fevrier. “Campagne 20 février.” YouTube. 13 February 2011. Web. Accessed January 20 2014. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A_LFOJqnMzw.

role of Moroccan female activists in the 20th of February movement and the creation of new networks of online female activism from this movement. In addition, this chapter will also examine the influence of Moroccan feminism and the relationship between language and power in the Moroccan 2011 protests. As Moroccan sociologist Zakia Salime has argued in a recent article exploring the role of Moroccan feminism in the 20th of February movement, “feminism has not only penetrated the social imagery of a new generation of activists, but has also informed their practices” (2012). Therefore, this chapter will also investigate whether Moroccan female activists’ language expressed, as Salime argues, feminist terminology and observe the ways in which gendered language and feminist terminology affects Moroccan female cyberactivists’ demands for political, economic, social, and cultural rights. Thus, this chapter poses several key questions: How did Moroccan women perform their activism and demands for gender parity in the 2011 protests? What role did digital technologies play in their activism? What languages did Moroccan female cyberactivists deploy and for what purpose did they do so? And, what conclusions can be drawn about the role of female cyberactivism during the 2011 protests given the previous evidence presented on Tunisian and Egyptian female cyberactivism?

In order to response to the questions detailed above, this chapter first locates its analysis of Moroccan female cyberactivism in the history of protest culture and political reform and the use of digital media in Morocco preceding the revolution, focusing specifically on women’s rights issues. Then, it moves to (de)construct the gender binary in Morocco through a linguistic analysis guided by the Moroccan feminist theorist Fatima Sadiqi, examining how the gender

binary has been constructed through language, religion, and the division of urban/rural and public/private space. This section connects the Moroccan gender binary and political, cultural, linguistic, and religious gender inequalities with the pervasive sexual harassment and gender violence Moroccan men perpetrate against women in the streets. Finally, this chapter turns to an analysis of the role of Moroccan female activists in the February 20th movement from February 2011 to January 2012. This final section has two main arguments. First, it contends that online activism, specifically videos, subverts the demarcation of languages with power (French and Modern Standard Arabic) and languages without power (Moroccan colloquial Darija and Berber) in Morocco. Second, it argues that the 2011 Moroccan protests facilitated the creation of new networks of female cyberactivism, projecting marginalized Moroccan female bodies and voices into the public sphere. In conclusion, this chapter locates the role of Moroccan female activists in the February 20th movement and the growth of female networks online during the 2011 protests within the context of this thesis, comparing and contrasting it to the actions of the Tunisian and Egyptian female cyberactivists discussed in the previous two chapters.

Throughout, this chapter will argue that digital technologies and social media enabled Moroccan female cyberactivists to subvert constructed gender and language divides and create new networks of female reverberations online during the 2011 Moroccan protests. Furthermore, their use of digital technologies and social media paralleled the actions of Tunisian and Egyptian female cyberactivists despite the modest scope of the Moroccan protest movements.

6.1 Protest Culture and a History of Reform

Morocco has suffered from government censorship and restricted freedom of speech since the beginning of King Hassan II's rule in 1961. The government's restrictive policies extended into the reign of his son, King Mohammad VI ((Zaid & Ibrahim, 2011). From 1999 to 2009, the Moroccan government imprisoned approximately thirty journalists for writing articles criticizing the regime or documenting human rights abuses in the Western Sahara. However, supporters of King Mohammad VI contended that under his rule, reforms have been implemented democratizing Morocco. Protest culture in Morocco directs its attention to limiting the scope of the King's powers and increasing the implementation of democratic reforms. Similar to Tunisian activists, many educated Moroccans express a sense of superiority about the progressive state of their country in comparison with the rest of the MENA region or Africa overall. Over the last 10 years, four political campaigns have emerged to dominate the protest culture: human rights and transitional justice for victims of political repression; promoting the rights of women; officially recognizing the Amazigh language and culture; and demanding independence for the Western Sahara (Desrués, 2013). King Mohammad VI has responded to these campaigns with varying levels of reform, the greatest of which reformed the family law code known as the Muduwana, described below.

Collective activism at a local level and coalition building with a diverse array of actors has characterized protest culture in Morocco. These civil society actors shape the conversation around protest culture and political activism, acting as an intermediary between the government and the local populations.

Consequently, while public protests about the high cost of living, unemployment for recent graduates and government corruption occur, they do not have as great of a grassroots impact (Desrues, 2013). Political activists have taken a greater role in managing and organizing protests in the past decade, acting as an interpreter of the people's demands and working to coordinate with civil society networks. The active yet limited character of Moroccan protest culture explains why the February 20th movement did not escalate to an overthrow of the regime, as occurred in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya.

Morocco's February 20th movement differed from the revolutions unfolding in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Algeria. Youth activists responded to similar root causes, such as high unemployment and persistent government corruption; however, the protests took the form of collective civil action. This can be attributed to Morocco's hybrid political regime, where legal restrictions and authoritarian power govern an active civil society and thriving democratic institutions. In addition, under the reign of King Mohammad VI, who has ruled since 1999, Morocco has witnessed a growth in protest culture (Salime, 2011; Rahman, 2013). Many Moroccans welcomed the reign of King Mohammad VI after the death of his father Hassan II, who oversaw the transition of Morocco from a colonial protectorate to nation in 1961. Mohammad VI promised to close the secret prisons and end the repressive practices and human rights persecutions of his father. Desrues notes (2013) that the case of Morocco during the Arab Spring raises several issues, such as the conditions for the possibility of collective action within authoritarian regimes and the reciprocal influence created by the interaction between collective action and political regimes. The

February 20th Movement activists demanded a series of reforms in the government, including democratizing the political regime, an end to corruption, governance of public affairs, and access to health services, education and employment for the population.

Following the initial protests, spontaneous marches and protests continued throughout 2011. King Mohammad VI addressed the protestors' demands on March 9th, announcing constitutional reform and pledging to relinquish some of his prerogatives to elected representatives. February 20th activists saw the king's concessions as far short of their demands, and renewed the protests in March. Record protests occurred in the streets throughout the country on March 20, numbering around 37,000 according to the Moroccan Ministry of Interior. Moroccans for Change posted a video of the march in Casablanca, showing the main avenues thronged with people calling for reform of the regime.⁵⁶ The Moroccan people elected a new parliament that instituted political reforms and drafted a new constitution checking the King's power in the summer of 2011 (Moghadam, 2013). Activists remained unconvinced of the reforms and continued to organize protests, using mobile phones and digital media to monitor the elections and uploading videos of government officials tampering with the ballots.⁵⁷ Large marches and protests occurred until the end of 2011, with smaller protests continuing still today. Moroccan activists continue to debate the long-standing effects of the reforms and the 20th February

⁵⁶ Moroccans for Change. "Casablanca protests March 20." YouTube. 20 March 2011. Web. Accessed. 21 January 2014.

<<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Okz1Profps0&feature=plcp&context=C31bb132UDOEgsToPDskL4f4cldGfZRpwRm4KNhiFS>>

⁵⁷ Mamfakinch. "Referndum Maroc." YouTube channel. Web. Accessed 21 January 2014.

<<http://www.youtube.com/user/ReferendumMaroc/videos>>

movement due to persistent government corruption and slow implementation of governmental reforms.

Minority protest movements, such as the LGBTQ movement, atheist movements (Council of ex-Muslims in Morocco) and radical feminist organizations like Femen encounter political suppression in Morocco. During the spring semester of my junior year in 2013, I conducted an independent study project in Morocco. I spoke with several activists who chose to remain anonymous. They expressed skepticism as to the lasting results of the February 20th movement and the government's promises. Members of the Moroccan Femen organization remain marginalized and criminalized by the government. One male activist who I spoke to reiterated his fear for the safety of his life as the founder of the Council of ex-Muslims in Morocco and role as a male supporter of Femen⁵⁸. To subvert the government, he posts under pseudonym on Facebook and Twitter. Young activists from the February 20th movement created SlutWalk Morocco, later renamed Woman Choufouch (Choufouch is transliterated from Moroccan colloquial Darija and is the saying commonly used by Moroccan men harassing women in the streets), to continue protesting for gender parity and to address sexual harassment and gender violence. They note the failure of feminist events such as SlutWalk Morocco to be held in May 2013 and the persistence of street harassment and sexual assault.

As the proliferation of digital technologies and social media flooded Morocco, activists increasingly turned to online platforms in order to subvert

⁵⁸ Hinda Pres. "Moroccan men support Femen Activists-Imad Iddaine Habib." YouTube Arabic/English. 21 April 2013. Web. Accessed February 10 2014. <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1mpyXcPwKNw>>

government censorship, reach out to activists across the Moroccan countryside, and mobilize demonstrations against the government. The following section depicts the rise of digital technologies in Morocco in the past decade and connects this increased use to Morocco's active civil society and history of protest culture. Combined, these sections contend that the intersection of new digital technologies with a thriving activist network and an established civil society and feminist movement propelled the February 20th movement forward, creating the largest protests Morocco had seen since the end of the French protectorate in 1957.

6.2 *Social Media and Digital Technologies in Morocco*

According to Freedom House, Moroccan access to the internet grew from 21 percent of the population in 2007 to 55 percent in 2012 (2013). Mobile phones and smart phone usage has also increased, with a penetration of 119.7 percent in 2012⁵⁹. Digital divides exist between the urban and rural populations, and surveys note the coverage discrepancies between these areas. Although rural inhabitants constitute over a third of Morocco's overall population, most do not have access to phone lines and high speed internet and struggle with a high illiteracy rate. The government has introduced internet subsidies to keep internet relatively affordable, and cybercafés abound in the country. In 2011, the international Open Society Foundation published a comprehensive report

⁵⁹ Percentages over 100 are common when used to measure mobile phone penetration, accounting for individuals who own multiple phones. Owning multiple phones is common in Morocco and easily achieved as Moroccans can buy cheap phones and minutes from any street vendor.

documenting the persistence of digital divides in Morocco.⁶⁰ The report highlights the geographical distances limiting rural communities access to digital technologies as well as the marginalization of Berber language speakers online. However, digital media technologies also provided spaces for Berber and Moroccan colloquial language speakers to protest the regime and carve new spaces for their voices to be heard.

Before the Arab Spring protests, government censors monitored online content, frequently blocking YouTube, Facebook and Twitter or websites adopting controversial or minority views. An anti-terrorism bill passed after the Casablanca 2003 bombings armed the government with the power to arrest journalist and filter websites indiscriminately (Salime, 2011). Issues such as Sub-Saharan migration, the Western Sahara, and atheism triggered government monitors. In addition, many online users employed self-censorship on topics considered 'sacred' and thus untouchable, such as the King and Islam. After the February 20th movement, the Moroccan government began a concerted effort to remove blocks to pages for the Amazigh minority, Islamists and the disputed territories of the Western Sahara (Freedom House). Online users profess suspicions about the neutral role of internet providers such as Maroc-Telecom, believing they may cooperate with the government and use their service to gather intelligence about Moroccan citizens online (Global Voices). Although the government no longer blocks major sites such as Google Earth, it has begun to

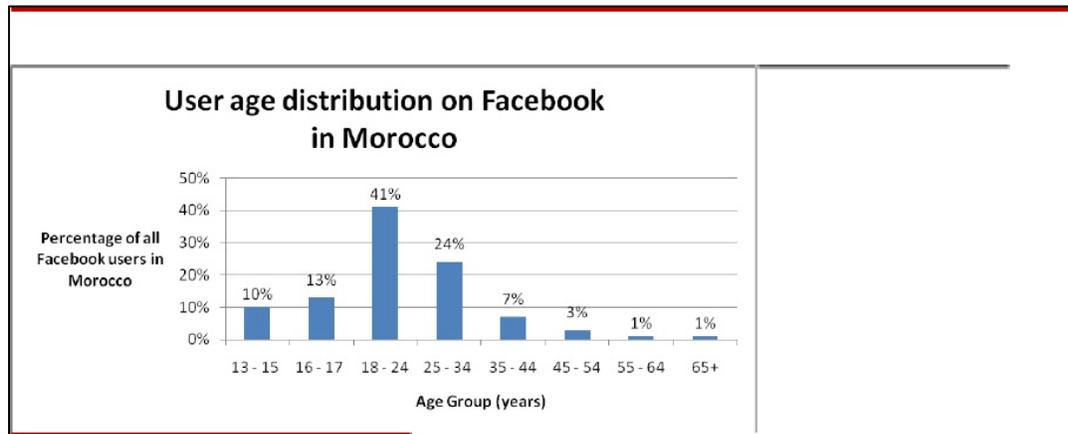
⁶⁰ Zaid, Dr. Bouziane & Ibrahine, Dr. Mohamed. "Mapping Digital Media: Morocco." *An Open Society Foundations Report*. May 30 2014. Web. Accessed 26 January 2014.

prosecute online activists and bloggers for their posts (Open Net Initiative⁶¹).

Social media and social networking sites have made substantial in-roads in Morocco. Moroccan youth use them for everything, from finding romantic partners without parental supervision to political activism. An interesting trend emerging online is the practice of Moroccan men and women adopting pseudonyms online and creating several Facebook profiles in order to meet multiple partners, thus subverting conservative, social and religious norms restricting sexuality. Facebook is the most visited website in the country, and users grew by 490 percent from 860,000 to more than 5 million users from 2009 to 2012 (Freedom House). According to the Open Net Initiative, blogs grew in popularity in 2006 due to government subsidies of internet access and the greater availability of Arabic-language blogging platforms such as Maktoob and Jeeran.⁶² In 2011, the Open Society Foundation report mentioned above estimated that the local blogosphere contained around 30,000 blogs at the time of the February 20th protests. While this estimate seems small in comparison to Morocco's population (over 33 million), it reflects the prevalence of Facebook and Twitter over blogs as well as the difficulty to assess all but the most active blogs online. The graph below depicts the user age distribution of Facebook users in Morocco, with 65% of Moroccan users ages 18-34.

⁶¹ OpenNet Initiative. "Internet Filtering in Morocco." 6 August 2009. Web. Accessed 26 January 2014. <<https://opennet.net/research/profiles/morocco>>

⁶² Mahdi, Adam. "Blogs becoming increasingly popular in Morocco." *Magharebia*. 9 November 2006. Web. Accessed 26 January 2014.



Spot on Public Relations, “Middle East & North Africa: Facebook Demographics,” May 2011

During the protests, bloggers offered a controversial view differing from pro-government traditional state media. Mobile phones and cameras helped activists document the events on the streets and upload them online, challenging the state’s version of the events. For example, although the July 2011 constitutional referendum passed with 98% of the vote, Moroccan activists videotaped government officials tampering with the ballots and uploaded these videos online to Facebook, YouTube and the website Moroccans for Change. Social media and networking sites took on the role of watchdogs of the regime, replacing the traditional media as fact-checkers (Global Voices Online). Civil society members and social movements (including feminism and Islamism) turned to social media and networking sites to inform, mobilize, and build coalitions. Thus, political activism increasingly turned to digital media platforms to disseminate information and rally support (Zaid & Ibrahim, 2011). However, as was mentioned above, digital divides restricted the impact of these technologies to Moroccans with access.

Since Web 2.0’s launch in the 1990s, activists have increasingly turned to

blogs and online forums and petitions to create momentum for campaigns. Organizations used websites to post petitions raising awareness about human rights issues such as Morocco's occupation of the Western Sahara. The One Million Signatures campaign in 1992 was a prominent web petition for women's rights in Morocco, seeking to gain support for proposed legal and constitutional reforms (Salime, 2011). As social networking sites increased in popularity and accessibility, activists turned to Facebook and Twitter to create pages, connect with activists and start online campaigns. In 2009, youth activists created the "I'm Moroccan, I'm a 9%" Facebook page and campaign responding to government censorship of a poll measuring Moroccans' support of the king. Even though the poll results stated 91% supported the king's rule, the government censored the results because the Moroccan Arab and Berber ethnic majority⁶³ and the ruling government consider King Mohammed VI, whose spiritual title translates as the "Commander of the Faithful⁶⁴," to possess divine authority derived from the Prophet Mohammed that should not be polled or measured in any way (Rahim, 2012). Moroccan university students created a similar Facebook online movement in late 2009, this time to organize a public Ramadan fast break in the city of Mohammedia entitled the "Alternative Movement for

⁶³ Arab Moroccans and Berber Moroccans make up 99.1 percent of the population, with the remaining .9 percent composed of Sub-Saharan African migrants, European immigrants, and a small Sephardic Jewish population. Although the Berber population has been largely assimilated into the dominant Arab culture, they are an indigenous people and their culture is often marginalized within Arab Morocco.

⁶⁴ Interestingly, King Mohammed VI's title "*Amīr al-Mu'minīn*," which translates to "Commander of the Faithful" affects the legal definition of a Moroccan citizen. The monarchy defines the "faithful" as Muslim and Jewish subjects and excludes all other religious and non-religious subjects from citizenship.

Individual Freedoms.”⁶⁵ In both movements, women took an active role online, although gender issues did not dominate the pages’ dialogue or the mission statements. The online network of activism facilitated the 20th of February movement’s birth on the “Freedom and Democracy Now” Facebook page.

These online protest movements grew out of Morocco’s history of reform and thriving protest culture described above, which I also witnessed while studying abroad and conducting my independent research project in Rabat and Casablanca Spring 2013. The next section builds from the intersection of digital technologies and protest movements to contextualize the role of gender relations in Moroccan society. It looks primarily at the interaction of gender, language, and space in Morocco, arguing that Moroccan hegemonic masculinity imposed by French and Modern Standard Arabic in public spaces marginalizes Moroccan women speaking colloquial languages in private spaces. When considering that digital technologies and social media create a third space, separated from the public/private divide, this section asks: how do women deploy their language and gender online? And, do digital technologies and social media provide liberating possibilities for Morocco women to subvert the public/private and demarcation of urban/rural languages?

6.3 Gender Relations: Unpacking the Gender Binary and Sexual Harassment in Morocco

The intersection of the post-colonial nationalist movement, Islam, Sufism, economic development policies and feminism created complex and pervasive

⁶⁵ “Threats for Breaking Morocco fast.” *BBC News*. 19 September 2009. Web. Accessed 17 February 2014.

gender divide in Morocco. For a nuanced understanding of these gender relations and their impact on protest culture and the 20th of February movement specifically, it is necessary to focus on the interaction of language, gender, and urban/rural space. Renowned Moroccan feminist and sociologist Fatima Mernissi has written extensively on this subject, marking the transition from a clear public/private divide of space in women's lives to the feminization of the public sphere and workforce (1988, 1992 & 1995). Her work informs contemporary scholarship on gender relations in Morocco and the Maghreb region, including Moroccan Berber Fatima Sadiqi's article "Language and gender in Moroccan urban areas" (2008). As a Senior Professor of Linguistics and Gender Studies at Sidi Mohamed Ben Abdellah University in Fez, Sadiqi's work exposes the marginalization of the Berber language and colloquial Arabic in Morocco. This section engages Sadiqi's work and references my previous research on Moroccan feminist discourse to unpack Moroccan gender relations at the time of the 2011 protests. It connects the erosion of the gender divide with the rise of invasive sexual harassment and persistent gender violence in the streets of Morocco.

Sadiqi interweaves a linguistic analysis of the relationship of language and the distribution of power in Morocco with the cultural representation of gender. While globalization and development policy blurred the dichotomous relationship between urban/rural and public/private, the remnants of these dichotomies persist in the cultural representation of Moroccan women and language. She notes the demarcation of languages of power associated in the urban spheres and institutions--Modern Standard Arabic (MSA or Fus'ha) and

French—and those deprived of power in the rural settings: Moroccan Arabic (MA or Darija) and Berber (Amazigh) (2012). Importantly, these geographic divides exist within the city as well, with the traditional sectors of urban populations known as the Medina kadima (old city) coded as “rural” and “private.” As women began to appropriate the urban languages in the public sectors, she writes that, “languages that were historically cast as male (also “urban,” “public,” and “powerful”) are being democratized and feminized (also “rural,” “private”)” (2008). Consequently, the gender binary shifted as constructed language boundaries expanded and women inserted themselves in the workforce, political and academic life.

Sadiqi bases her findings on field research completed between 1995 and 2004, using interviews, a questionnaire, and follow-up observations. These findings suggest that women will switch languages⁶⁶ when in mixed groups or when they wish to exhibit greater prestige. Women will use the ‘urban’ languages of French and Modern Standard Arabic when wanting to impress or increase their appearance of power and knowledge. Sadiqi calls this code-switching⁶⁷ a form of linguistic agency, allowing women to “manipulate the various values that are attached to each language such as education, modernity, prestige, ethnic identity and intimacy in specific contexts, in order to score “gains” in the conventional enterprise” (2012: 157). Her findings rely on her assumption that Moroccan women respond to societal circumstances in ways that exhibit rather than inhibit their agency, inserting their femininity into the dominant male

⁶⁶ Sadiqi found three gender-sensitive types of code-switching: (i) the switching of Berber and MA, (ii) the switching of MA and French, and (iii) the switching of Berber and French.

⁶⁷ In socio-cultural linguistics, code-switching occurs when a speaker alternates between two or more languages or dialects in a single conversation.

paradigm. This understanding of how women deploy language to perform their gender contextualizes the textual and video examples I will analyze later on. In addition, it highlights the choice of February 20th activists to use their native Berber or Modern Arabic in the videos and articles they post online.

However, women can also appropriate “male” languages in ways that exclude others from power as the fractured Moroccan feminist movement exemplifies. Clear language divides exist in Moroccan feminism, demarcating liberal-secular feminists who speak French and Modern Standard Arabic from Islamic feminists or Islamic women’s rights groups who speak Modern Standard Arabic and colloquial Darija. These divides originate from the interaction of religion, gender and language, “The strongest power-related aspect of Modern Standard Arabic is its intrinsic relation to Islam, the official religion of Morocco” (Sadiqi, 2008: 159). Secular feminist organizations choose to speak in French rather than Modern Standard Arabic or colloquial Darija, adopting what they term progressive stance on women’s rights that excludes Islam and thus Modern Standard Arabic and colloquial Darija. On the other hand, Islamic women’s organizations in general prefer Modern Standard Arabic and colloquial Darija. Few organizations speak or write in Berber. The demarcation of secular feminist and Islamic feminist language limits the impact of women’s rights and feminist organizations to urban, educated women, further marginalizing rural populations. Choice of language affects the rural population’s knowledge of reforms—such as the Muduwana—and cultural practices, resulting in the continued practice of child marriage and spatial segregation of women in the homes.

While studying abroad in Morocco, I conducted research on the impact of

migration and transnational ideas on the Moroccan feminist movement. I explored the flows of information and various forms of feminism that influenced Moroccan feminist discourse. I interviewed and visited several feminist and Islamic women's organizations in Rabat, Casablanca and Al-Jadida⁶⁸ as well as Islamic feminist scholar Dr. Asmae Lamrabet, speaking in a combination of Modern Standard Arabic and English. Dr. Lamrabet discussed how language reinforces the dichotomy of rural/urban in Moroccan feminism and international women's rights and development policies. Liberal-secular feminist organizations such as the Association Démocratique des Femmes du Maroc (ADFM) wrote in French on their website, pamphlets and when speaking. In fact, the women I interviewed from this organization were dismayed I did not speak French and wished to converse in MSA and Darija during our interview. My presence as a white, American woman choosing to speak languages they perceived as rural or provincial shocked them. They were accustomed to dealing with white Europeans and Americans who could only speak or chose to speak in French and occasionally English.

As noted above, the feminization of the work force has eroded the demarcation of public and private gender spaces in Morocco. Women's presence in the streets no longer transgressed cultural and religious norms. However, femininity and masculinity and male and female sexuality remain taboo topics influenced by the cultural separation of public and private. Street harassment of Moroccan women by Moroccan men has emerged from the interaction of the

⁶⁸ Al-Jadida is a small seaside town an hour and a half from Casablanca by train. The University of Al-Jadida is located there.

feminization of public space, threatened masculinities, and restricted sexuality. As in Egypt, harassment and gender violence pervades Moroccan street culture, affecting all women regardless of dress. Many Moroccan men whom I met justified their words and actions as expressions of praise and an appreciation of beauty; Moroccan women did not share this opinion.⁶⁹

Scholars such as Deniz Kandiyoti contend that sexual harassment has more to do with relationships of power than sexuality (1996). Therefore, Moroccan men take part in street harassment in response to the challenge an urban, mobile female population poses to the patriarchal family structure and male authority. Moroccan women react to street harassment in a variety of ways, from wearing modest clothing and donning the hijab when in the streets to interacting verbally with the harassers. Women's movements and campaigns began targeting street harassment through videos that portray the woman's experience of harassment after the 20th February movement. In the past year, twenty-four Moroccan female journalists produced a documentary through the international human rights organization Global Girl Media entitled in English *Breaking the Silence about Sexual Harassment: Moroccans Speak Out!*⁷⁰ Victims of rape and sexual harassment share their stories in the hopes of changing the conversation about sexual harassment, moving the blame from the women to the man and societal and governmental structures that enable such actions.⁷¹

⁶⁹ York, Jillian C. "Morocco: Four Perspectives on Sexual Harassment." *Global Voices*. 1 September 2009. Web. Accessed 30 January 2014.

⁷⁰ Sourgo, Youssef. "Moroccan women speak out about sexual harassment." *Moroccan World News*. 27 November 2013. Web. Accessed 30 January 2014.

⁷¹ Errazzouki, Samia. "Morocco's 20 February Movement: Two Years Later." *Jadilyya*. 7 March

Given that the categories of sex and gender are discursively constructed through cultural practices and language (Butler, 1990), Moroccan women can be understood to deploy specific languages at select times and in certain spaces to alter the performance of their feminine gender. This can result in a subversion of gender binaries and an appropriation of “male” power, or it can (re)inscribe the dichotomy of rural/urban established during colonization and post-colonization. Thus, the women in the rural areas are marginalized from the political power of language and the progression of women’s political and cultural rights. For the purpose of this chapter and this thesis as a whole, Sadiqi’s argument illuminates the power dynamics implicit in the languages Tunisian, Egyptian, and Moroccan female cyberactivists deployed online during the Arab Spring revolutions. Digital technologies and social media provide a space that blurs the boundaries between public and private spheres, allowing marginalized languages, bodies, and voices insert themselves in the dominant discourse. The following section applies this understanding of the intersection of language, gender, social media, and digital technologies to an analysis of the February 20th movement.

6.4 The February 20th Movement and Woman Choufouch

The February 20th movement broke from previous exhibits of protest culture in Morocco, moving away from established NGOs and civil society actors. Youth activists and university students powered the movement. Salime argues that despite the absence of feminist and women’s rights organizations presence in

2013. Web. Accessed 14 November 2013.

the 2011 protests, feminist terminology informed the February 20th movement's demands and language. In order to explore this claim, this section presents an in-depth analysis of a video produced by 13 Moroccan activists and posted on Facebook and YouTube, examining their language and gender performance. From this analysis, it turns to an examination of the online anti-sexual harassment movement *Woman Choufouch* created by February 20th female activist Majdouline. The previous three sections on the history of protest culture and reform, the rise of digital technologies, and the construction of the Moroccan gender binary through language and space inform this analysis. Throughout, this section asks: Did digital technologies facilitate Moroccan female activists to claim greater agency and subvert the demarcation of public/private space and masculine and feminine languages during the February 20th movement in the 2011 protests?

Posted on February 8th, 2011, the YouTube video filmed by a male activist from Salé introduced the February 20th movement to Morocco through the images of 14 activists—nine young men, 4 young women, and one elderly woman. Each activist begins by saying “I am Moroccan and will take part in the protest February 20th.” They speak in their native Berber or Darija (Moroccan Colloquial, MA) describing their reasons for protesting.



First Female Activist Speaking in the February 8th, 2011 Campaign Video for the February 20th Movement

By choosing to speak in a colloquial or ‘rural’ and ‘feminine’ language, these activists iterate their challenge to the current power structure in Morocco. From his crowning in 1999 to 2011, King Mohammad VI had never addressed the nation in Darija, choosing to use French or MSA. February 20th activists highlighted the government’s suppression of these languages with their inclusive dialogue, posting in Berber, colloquial Darija, Modern Standard Arabic and French on their Facebook page and in the opening and closing sequence of their advocacy videos directed by the Moroccan male activist from Salé.

The 20th February movement’s video on February 8, 2011 opens with the first young woman, stating her reason for protesting, “I am Moroccan and I am joining the protest February 20th because I want a free and equal Morocco for all Moroccans.”⁷² The second image, a male, echoes the same sentiment, “....I am joining the protest February 20th so that all Moroccans will be equal.” Here, we can see Salime’s claim that the male and female activists performed demands of gender parity even though they did not identify as feminist. The other women

⁷² Mouvement20fevrier. “Campagne 20 février.” YouTube. 13 February 2011. Web. Accessed January 20 2014. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A_LFOJqnMzw.

share similar demands:

Second female: “...so education will be accessible for everyone not only the rich”

Third female: “...so that I can learn to read and write Amazigh.”

Fourth female: “...so I can battle corruption in my country”⁷³

With these statements and the languages they convey them in, these women deploy their identities to encourage Moroccans to protest and march for their right to vote. They speak with familiarity, confidence and ease, looking into the camera with the knowledge that they belong in the streets protesting. Their message does not challenge the citizens to vote, rather they identify with the Moroccan audience, inviting them to participate in the February 20th demonstrations in front of Moroccan government buildings because they are all Moroccan and share the same future. The activists collaborated to produce their script, guided by the director from Salé (Moroccans for Change). In this way, the video echoes the solidarity tone of voice taken by feminist organizations, yet their ‘we’ attempts to include the Islamic feminists, rural, illiterate Moroccan women, and LGBTQ Moroccans that the Moroccan feminist ‘we’ excludes.

The video advocacy campaign online encouraged supporters to post with the hashtag #Feb20 and to change their Facebook profile pictures to the memes and logos the February 20th activists created. On February 2, 2011, “The February 20 Movement” Facebook page had 3,000 users (Reuters, 2011), by February 20th the group members had risen to 20,000. Sara El Idrissi, a Moroccan blogger and political activist writes in a blog post for openDemocracy,

⁷³ For this video, I relied on translations posted by the activists and a subtitled version of the video. Although I can speak conversational colloquial Darija after studying abroad, I do not possess the skills to translate it.

“a group of young Moroccan activists, myself included, used social media to spread calls for a protest on February 20, 2011...as a democrat and a feminist, I responded to the call for the 20 February demonstration” (El Idrissi, 2012). She continues in the post, writing that female activists participated in the forefront of the 20th February movement. Women acted as the spokeswomen and contributed to all levels of organizing, networking, and protesting. Two women activists, Zeinab and the woman in the photograph below spoke in several of the campaign videos directed by the male activist from Salé (who came to be known as the Che Guevera of Salé). These women, one veiled and one unveiled, implored Moroccan citizens to protest in the weeks following the February 20th campaign. In an interview with World Review, twenty-six year old veiled Zeinab states her reason for protesting, “I believe I am here to serve and if I have the means to, it makes it that much more important to serve, it makes my responsibility bigger.”

Activists from the February 20th movement launched Moroccans for Change, an online blogging and news forum, in early February. Laila Lalami worked with them, blogging about the protests from the University of California, Riverside where she teaches creative writing. Laila has also been featured on The Nation, acting as an intermediary for the activists and the U.S. and European press. She provides an account of the protests that counters the Moroccan state media. In an article for the *Nation* written on February 27, 2011⁷⁴ that was shared via Twitter 86 times and had 176 Facebook likes, Laila compared Fadoua

⁷⁴ Lalami, Laila. “Fadoua Laroui: The Moroccan Mohamed Bouazizi.” *The Nation*. 27 February 2011. Web. Accessed 14 January 2014. <<http://www.thenation.com/blog/158878/fadoua-laroui-moroccan-mohamed-bouazizi>>

Laroui, a twenty-five year old Moroccan woman who committed self-immolation in early February, with Tunisian street vendor Mohammad Bouazizi. She bestows Fadoua with the title of a martyr, writing:

The people who remember her most today appear to be the activists of the February 20 movement in Morocco. But what does meaningful constitutional reform—the central demand of the February 20 movement—have to do with the case of Fadoua Laroui? Nothing, some people might say. And yet: in a state in which all citizens are equal under the law, Fadoua Laroui would have been able to appeal her case and receive justice.

Her account immortalizes Fadoua and attempts to position her as a symbol of the February 20th movement. Moroccans for Change, run by the Moroccans in the diaspora, and the Freedom and Democracy Now Facebook, maintained by members of the February 20th movement in Morocco, pages follow her lead. In the weeks following Fadoua's self-immolation and Laila's article, the February 20th activists invoked her name and the memory of her martyrdom in the streets and shared the video of her self-immolation online. However, their actions failed to reach beyond the network of activists, cyber activists, and human rights advocates already involved in the movement, demonstrated by the lack of knowledge populations outside of the urban centers had about Fadou's self-immolation. Fadoua does not become a Mohammad Bouazizi because the story of her martyrdom does not reach all of Morocco, unlike Tunisia, where the viral YouTube penetrated urban and rural areas. In part, this is due to Morocco's vast size in comparison to Tunisia's small geographical expanse.

Members of Moroccans for Change and Freedom and Democracy Now echoed the February 20 movement's demands for gender equality in Moroccan law and society. These female activists (and some males as well) worked with

SlutWalk Canada to create a SlutWalk Morocco campaign—which later rebranded itself as Woman Choufouch. Canadian Feminist activists founded SlutWalk in April 2011, protesting against blaming women’s appearance for rape and sexual assault and demanding an end to rape culture. Female blogger *According to Hind*⁷⁵, who was awarded the Maroc Web Award for Best Female Blogger in 2012, interviewed Majdouline, the founder of Woman Choufouch⁷⁶, in English for her blog in response to the criticism the movement received online.



Heading from the Woman Choufouch Facebook Page

According to Hind writes, “The truth is that I am supportive of the walk because my inner twenty year old thinks it is... totally... A-W-E-S-O-M-E. As simple as that!” Both Hind and Majdouline were twenty years old at the time of this interview in 2011 and define themselves as feminists and human rights activists; they took part in various levels of the February 20th movements. Their conversation, posted as a blog post on *According to Hind*, reveals the role women played in the February 20th protests as well as the impact the protests and the use of cyber activism had on furthering grassroots gender advocacy in Morocco.

⁷⁵ Touissate, Hind. *According to Hind*. Web. Accessed 20 November 2013. <<http://accordingtohind.wordpress.com/>>

⁷⁶ Majdouline. “Woman Choufouch” *Facebook*. Web. Accessed 10 October 2013 <<https://www.facebook.com/pages/Woman-Choufouch/105487879580033>>

Majdouline locates the inspiration of SlutWalk Morocco, which highlighted persistent sexual harassment and gender violence in Morocco by organizing online and offline demonstrations of Moroccan women so that they could walk in the streets regardless of their apparel, in transnational feminist movements and the open dialogue facilitated by the February 20th movement. In response to *Hind's* question about the mission of her organization, she wrote in English:

To abolish the taboo about rape, sexual assault & sexual harassment; & to spread awareness across the country. “No” means “no” and there’s a huge difference between “to flirt” with someone & between “to harass” or “to sexually assault” someone. It’s time to stop perpetrating this dangerous confusion.

Majdouline situates her work within the discourse surrounding sexual harassment and gender violence. For example, she references the pervasive rape culture in Morocco and its intersection with Islam and cultural norms, using the word “taboo” and emphasizing the distinction between flirting, harassment and sexual assault. This discourse dissipated after the 2004 Muduwana reforms but has since reemerged in the 20th February movement. Several other women’s rights awareness and advocacy campaigns followed Woman Choufouch, including Global Girl Media’s Morocco program and the campaign Breaking the Silence. While these campaigns contain feminist terminology and discourse, they are not affiliated with established Moroccan liberal-secular feminist organizations.

Hind and Majdouline both stress the importance of digital technologies, specifically social media and networking sites, for their activism. Majdouline describes the origin of SlutWalk Morocco, “...it started with me just posting a



Facebook status saying ‘Slutwalk morocco, who’s in.’” At the time of Hind’s interview in the summer of 2011, the Facebook page had registered over one thousand likes and had incited discourse on countless pages, including Moroccans for Change and Freedom and Democracy Now. Majdouline acknowledges that the page, its mission, and its name have faced criticism. In response, she discusses her plans to rebrand the page, yet expresses her reservations for changing the name, “Yes, we are working on it! We want this to be a Moroccan version of SlutWalk and we want it to be 100% Moroccan, suiting our society, our community’s beliefs & values. But to tell you the truth, it’s hard to find a name as catchy as “SlutWalk”!⁷⁷” Here, Majdouline reveals the power intertwining the relationship of language and gender Sadiqi asserted in “Language and gender in Moroccan urban areas”:

In spite of the great context-linked heterogeneity among Moroccan women, these women are far from being passive victims of patriarchal dogmas; using the various choices they are offered, various types of women express their agency by creating empowering linguistic strategies in various contexts of language use (Sadiqi, 2008: 162).

Majdouline appropriates a transnational feminist concept “SlutWalk” and imports it into Morocco, keeping its name and the signification that carries. This name challenges perceptions of women in Moroccan society. However, by modifying the name and entitling the movement the name of Choufouch, Majdouline legitimizes the movement and disrupts the idea of women’s rights are foreign—or that women transgress public spaces. Loubna Hanna Skalli wrote in

⁷⁷ Toussaint, Hind. “SLUTWALK Morocco: The Interview.” *According to Hind*. 20 August 2011. Web. Accessed 17 December 2013 <http://accordingtohind.wordpress.com/2011/08/20/slutwalk-morocco-the-interview/>

a 2012 *Jadaliyya* article that the Moroccan colloquial word “Choufouch” is a word all women walking the streets in Moroccan know, “...it is the word that harasses them in the every corner of the public space from mean of all ages. It’s meaning ranges from ‘what’s up?’ ‘look here!’ to more sexually loaded overtones of ‘shouldn’t we try?’” Their group seeks to subvert the meaning of “Choufouch,” asking in their Facebook profile picture on the previous page, “and shouldn’t we be looking for a solution?” to end sexual harassment. Majdouline and fellow members of her group post on the Woman Choufouch Facebook page in multiple languages—MSA, Darija/Ma, French, and occasionally English. They deploy these languages selectively, attracting a wide range of audiences.

The February 20th movement and Woman Choufouch illustrate how Moroccan female activists employed social media networks and digital technologies to mobilize protests online that translated into street demonstrations. Although these movements were limited to Moroccan urban centers, they demonstrate how female activists used marginalized languages online to subvert the public/private demarcation of space and languages with and without power. Moroccan women appropriate masculine words like ‘Choufouch’ to undermine and reclaim the word as their own. From social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter, and blogs, Moroccan female activists articulated diverse identities, performed a multiplicity of femininities, and demanded an end to sexual harassment and social, political, cultural, and religious gender parity.

6.5 Conclusion: *Virtual Body Politic*

What do the actions of Moroccan female cyberactivists reveal about the relationship between digital technologies, gender, and the Arab Spring protests? And, how does an understanding of the intersection of gender, language, and space in Morocco elucidate the conflicting and complex identities Moroccan female cyberactivists deployed at specific times and in new spaces during the 2011 protests? This chapter has demonstrated that despite the lack of revolutionary upheaval in Morocco, female activists took advantage of digital media technologies and social networking tools during the 2011 protests. In addition, it has argued that the February 20th movement in 2011 facilitated new spaces for Moroccan female cyberactivists to perform their gender, gain agency, and draw attention to gendered issues such as sexual harassment. Although Morocco did not experience the same drastic political upheaval as Egypt and Tunisia, the February 20th movement drew attention to government corruption and facilitated the participation of marginalized populations and identities in the public sphere. Female activists used the discourse of reform created by the February 20th movement to launch new movements such as Woman Choufouch focusing on gender parity and women's rights in Morocco. These female cyberactivists spoke in the marginalized colloquial Arabic and Berber languages (Sadiqi, 2008) to subvert Moroccan linguistic power dynamics online. Moroccan online and offline protest movements enabled Moroccan female cyberactivists to deploy diverse feminist identities and claim greater agency in their gender performance. Thus, these movements facilitated the creation of a new body politic online.

Moroccan women participated in all aspects of the February 20th movement protests lasting from 2011 to 2012. While the protests achieved mixed results and moderate levels of reform, they opened spaces for women to protest online and in the streets. They demonstrated how to capitalize on online political activism and translate that activism into demonstrations throughout the country. As the protests continued, new groups of women became inspired to participate in the revolutions both on and offline. *According to Hind*, named Best Moroccan Female Blogger in 2012 by the Maroc Web Award, launched her blog in the summer of 2011. Slutwalk Morocco, Woman Choufouch, and the Breaking the Silence anti-sexual harassment campaigns emerged from the February 20th movement headed by female cyberactivists. Moroccan women participated in the frontlines of activism and defined what languages, images, and terms they would be perceived through their use of digital technologies.

In conclusion, this chapter contends that Moroccan female cyberactivists employed digital technologies and social media in similar ways and purposes as their Tunisian and Egyptian counterparts. The events in Morocco detailed above illustrate that, similar to Tunisia and Egypt, digital technologies enabled women to insert their voices and bodies into the protest discourse, participating and often leading protests. Moroccan female activists used social media networks such as Facebook to create movements and connect with other activists inside and outside of the country. During the protests, photos depict Moroccan female activists holding the letter 'F' (illustrated in the photo at the beginning of this chapter), symbolizing the importance of Facebook and similar microblogging sites for the February 20th movement. As in Tunisia and Egypt, Moroccan female

activists used social networks and digital technologies to perform their gender and draw attention to the pervasive existence of sexual harassment in Moroccan society. The discussion of sexual harassment that emerged online during the February 20th movement and transitioned to street demonstrations with Woman Choufouch demonstrates that Moroccan women are blurring the boundaries of between public and private and articulating a new body politic in the process.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

Revolutions and Reverberations

On December 17, 2010 Tunisian street vendor Mohamed Bouazizi poured gasoline over his body, setting himself on fire in front of the governor's office in Sidi Bouzid, Tunisia. A Tunisian citizen captured his act of desperation and uploaded a video of his burning body to YouTube. The video quickly became viral online, causing Tunisian citizens to take to the streets to demand justice for Mohamed Bouazizi and an end to government corruption. Twenty-seven days after Bouazizi's public act of self-immolation, President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali resigned from office and fled the country for Saudi Arabia. Four days later, Egyptian cyberactivist Asmaa Mahfouz issued a gendered video message to Egyptian citizens, challenging Egyptian men and calling on them to follow Tunisia's example and take to the streets to demand the end of Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak's rule. On February 14th 2011, President Mubarak stepped down after thirty years of unchallenged, authoritarian rule. At that same time, Moroccan youth activists were preparing for demonstrations throughout the country, rallying around the slogan #February20.

Six months later, 20 Arab countries had witnessed various levels of upheaval, three presidents for life had been toppled, constitutional reforms had been enacted throughout the Middle East and North Africa, and Arabs across the world were ecstatic with revolutionary fervor. The dust has yet to settle from the revolutions that spread from Tunisia to the rest of North Africa and the Middle East. Propelled by grassroots activism, digital technologies, and social media, the

Tunisian, Egyptian, and Moroccan protest movements demonstrate how seemingly entrenched authoritarian regimes can be subverted and overthrown through user-generated content.

This thesis has focused on the role of female cyberactivism during the so-called Arab Spring uprisings in Tunisia, Egypt, and Morocco. It has conveyed the experiences Tunisian, Egyptian, and Moroccan female cyberactivists encountered while participating and leading protests. Working at the intersection of social movement, digital activism, and feminist critical theories, this thesis has argued that female cyberactivists deployed digital technologies and social media networks to insert their bodies into the dominant discourse and articulate claims for political, social, cultural, and religious gender parity during the Arab Spring revolutions.

What was the relationship between online activism and physical protests? With some activists, such as Egyptian Asmaa Mahfouz, Moroccan Majdouline, and Tunisian Lina Ben Mhenni, the connection was apparent. They received overwhelming responses to their posts that resulted in millions of Egyptians occupying Tahrir Square and downtown Cairo beginning on January 25, 2011, Tunisians demonstrating in the streets of Tunis and Sidi Bouzid, and thousands of Moroccan activists gathering outside the parliament in Rabat for the first Moroccan SlutWalk in 2012. However, it is more difficult to measure the connectivity and impact of female cyberactivists such as Egyptian Fatma Emam, who wrote about the struggle of being an Islamic feminist during the Egyptian revolution. She had a wide readership, but did not incite Egyptian citizens to protest nor did she issue a tweet that had thousands of favorites, retweets, or

comments. Thus, when theorizing the relationship between online female activism and political protests, it is necessary to examine what their language reveals, what events were occurring at the time of their posts, and on which digital platforms they transmitted their message in addition to looking at the response to their post. For example, in Fatma Emam's case, she began documenting her protests online after joining the millions of Egyptians in Tahrir Square, thus physical protests preceded digital activism in her case. On the other hand, Egyptian activist Asmaa Mahfouz organized the #Jan25 protests online with other April 6, Kefaya, and We are all Khaled Said activists before participating in physical protests. As these two examples show, a clear correlation exists between physical and online protests, but the exact measurement cannot be determined by a purely qualitative study or only quantitative study. Further research should be conducted that combines qualitative and quantitative measurement of the relationship between cyberactivism and protest movements.

Four specific trends have emerged in the course of this thesis that link female cyberactivists from Tunisia, Egypt, and Morocco. First, female cyberactivists live-blogged, tweeted, and filmed their experiences protesting, establishing a circular flow of information that connected online activism to protest in the streets. Second, female cyberactivists selectively deployed different languages (Modern Standard Arabic, colloquial Arabic, French, and English) to reach targeted local, regional, and international audiences. Third, female cyberactivists established new networks of activism online, creating reverberations of feminist discourse that permeated the borders of countries and

public/private space. Through these networks, female cyberactivists connected with fellow female and male protestors, reached out to international journalists, documented their experiences, demanded gender equality, and mobilized against gender violence. Finally, female cyberactivists performed a multiplicity of femininities online, from modern Western conceptions of femininity to the intersection of Islamic piety with feminist values. These trends existed in each of the countries examined in this thesis, shifting slightly depending on the specific characteristics of the revolutions and gender relations in Tunisia, Egypt, and Morocco.

In Tunisia, female cyberactivists acted as citizen journalists. They documented the protests on Twitter, Facebook pages, and personal blogs in French, English, Modern Standard Arabic and Tunisian colloquial Arabic. Some, such as international renowned Tunisian blogger Lina Ben Mhenni, acted as bridge-bloggers who posted in English to connect with international audiences and inform them of the events unfolding in Tunisia when the state media was silent. As the protests continued, feminist activists began mobilizing online and organizing demonstrations in the streets to protest gender violence. Female cyberactivists worked from these existing feminist networks in Tunisia to issue demands for gender parity in the new constitution and protest against the gender violence that occurred during the January 29, 2011 march for women in Tunis.

Egyptian female cyberactivists learned from and copied many of the tactics used by Tunisian female cyberactivists such as Lina Ben Mhenni. Inhabiting multiple digital platforms, Egyptian female cyberactivists used social media to mobilize Egyptian women and men to protest, document the demonstrations in

Tahrir Square, and to reflect on their experiences protesting. For example, Egyptian April 6th activist Esraa Abdel-Fattah tweeted and posted on Facebook in Egyptian colloquial Arabic and Modern Standard Arabic to inform the Egyptians following her on Twitter and Facebook where and when demonstrations would be held, what to do when the government tried to shut down the internet, and what was happening within Tahrir Square. In addition, as Asmaa Mahfouz's vlog emphasized, these female cyberactivists used digital technologies and social media networks to issue gendered messages and subvert the gender divide demarcating private and public space in Egypt.

Unlike Tunisia and Egypt, Morocco did not witness the same range of revolutionary violence or political upheaval; however, through the February 20th movements, Moroccan female cyberactivists echoed Tunisian and Egyptian female cyberactivists by using digital technologies and social media to insert their marginalized bodies and languages into public discourse. During the 2011 protests, Moroccan female activists created new feminist movements online that highlighted sexual harassment and gender violence and called for political and legal enfranchisement of Moroccan women. These feminist movements articulated a new body politic online, one that linked the marginalization of Moroccan women in the private sphere with street harassment and gender violence in the public sphere.

The actions of female cyberactivists in Tunisia, Egypt, and Morocco demonstrate that, despite the contentious results of the Arab Spring revolutions, female activists have gained new ground and claimed greater agency in the public domain. Digital technologies and social media networks facilitated the

emergence of female activists online and in the streets. Tunisian, Egyptian, and Moroccan female cyberactivists articulated a new body politic online that subverted established gender relations offline. They have continued to use digital technologies and social media networks to interrogate political, cultural, religious, and social gender inequalities, and they will not relinquish the spaces they inhabited during the Arab Spring revolutions.

Appendix A: Female Cyberactivists Demographics

Tunisia:

Arabasta3: <http://arabasta3.blogspot.com/>

Also blogged as *7ellblog* “Launch a Blog”: <http://7ellblog.blogspot.com>
Modern Standard Arabic, Tunisian Colloquial Arabic

Aya Chebbi

Blogged as *Proudly Tunisian*: <http://aya-chebbi.blogspot.com>

Twitter: @aya_chebbi

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/emi.toutou>

French, English, Modern Standard Arabic

Didon: <http://didonzahra.blogspot.com/>

Blogged under pseudonym Didon

French, Modern Standard Arabic

Fatma Riahi

Blogged as *Arabicca*: <http://fatmaarabicca.blogspot.com>

Twitter: @arabicca1

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/riahi.fatma.arabicca>

Modern Standard Arabic, French

Khedija Arafaoui

French, English

Lina Ben Mhenni

Blogged as *A Tunisian Girl*: <http://atunisiangirl.blogspot.com/>

Twitter: @benmhennilina

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/atunisiangirl>

French, English, Modern Standard Arabic, German

Mon Massir: <http://massir.typepad.fr/>

Blogged under pseudonym Mon Massir

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/MonMassir>

French

Wallada: <http://myblog-wallada.blogspot.com/>

Blogged under pseudonym Wallada

French, Modern Standard Arabic

Egypt:

Asmaa Mahfouz

Blogged as Wolf-Inside: <http://wolf-inside.blogspot.com/>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/asmaa.mahfouz>

Twitter: @AsmaaMahfouz

YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCUFcwuco2_pYVQxps52l8og

Modern Standard Arabic, Egyptian Colloquial Arabic

Arwa Salah Mahmoud

Blogged as *Al Hurr*: <http://alhurr.com/>

Twitter: @arwasm

Modern Standard Arabic, English

Dalia Ziada

Blogged as *Dalia Ziada*: <http://daliaziada.blogspot.com/>

Twitter: @daliaziada

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/daliaziadafan>

Modern Standard Arabic, Egyptian Colloquial Arabic, English

Fatima Emam

Blogged as *Brownie*: www.atbrownies.blogspot.ca

Modern Standard Arabic, Egyptian Colloquial Arabic, English

Esraa Abdel-Fattah

Twitter: @Esraa2008

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/EsraaAbdelFattahOfficial>

Modern Standard Arabic, Egyptian Colloquial Arabic

Mona Seif

Blogged as *monasosh*: www.ma3t.blogspot.ca

Twitter: @monasosh

Modern Standard Arabic, Egyptian Colloquial Arabic, English

Nadia El-Awady

Blogged as *The Inner Workings of My Mind*:

<http://nadiaelawady.wordpress.com/>

Twitter: @Nadiae

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/nadia.elawady>

Modern Standard Arabic, Egyptian Colloquial Arabic, English

Sarah Carr

Blogged as *Inanities*: <http://inanities.org/>

Twitter: @Sarahcarr

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/sarahmareacarr>

Modern Standard Arabic, Egyptian Colloquial Arabic, English

Zeinab Mohammed

Blogged as *Egyptian Chronicles*: www.egyptianchronicles.blogspot.com

Twitter: @Zeinobia

Modern Standard Arabic, Egyptian Colloquial Arabic, English

Morocco:

Hind Touissate

Blogged as *According to Hind*: <http://accordingtohind.wordpress.com/>

Twitter: @AccordingtoHind

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/AccordingtoHind>

French, English, Modern Standard Arabic

Sarra El Idrissi

February 20th Activist

Blogs for *OpenDemocracy*

Twitter: @pittorshka

Modern Standard Arabic, Moroccan Colloquial Arabic, French, English

Laila Lalami

Blogged with Moroccans for Change

English

Mariamemas9

February 20th Activist, uploaded videos of the protests to YouTube

Video Channel: <https://www.youtube.com/user/mariamemas9/videos>

Majdouline

Founded Woman Choufouch or Slutwalk Morocco on Facebook

Modern Standard Arabic, Moroccan Colloquial Arabic, French

Zainab

February 20th Activist

Modern Standard Arabic, Moroccan Colloquial Arabic, French, English

Appendix B: Tables of Analysis for Female Cyberactivists in Tunisia, Egypt, and Morocco

Table A: First Level of Categorization

Categories	Female Blogger A: Lina Ben Mhenni
Website	http://atunisiangirl.blogspot.com/
Nationality	Tunisian
Identities	Female, Citizen Journalist, Professor
Languages	French, Modern Standard Arabic, Tunisian Colloquial Arabic, English, German
Linked to (ex: Facebook, Twitter)	Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/atunisiangirl Twitter: @benmhennilina
Followers (measures connectivity)	Blog: Did not provide information Facebook: Over 70,000 likes Twitter: Over 40,000 followers
Began Blogging	2009
Top Five Tags	Did not include these on blog
Did they participate in physical protests?	Yes, beginning December 19, 2010
Personal/Political	Both

Table B: Themes that Emerged from the Blogs

Themes	Description
Reasons for Blogging	Citizen Journalism, Documenting and Archiving Protests, Personal Reflections, Diary-esque Accounts and Narratives of Protests, Exchange of Information
Gender Performance	Women's Rights, Private/Public Transgression, Feminism
Gendered Violence	The feeling of threats offline and online.
Bridgeblogging	Connection with international and regional audience
Political Issues and Demands	Ex: The People Want the End of the Regime, Women's Rights in the Constitution, etc.
Tactics employed	Discursive activism, mobilizing allies online, grassroots resistance to the government's regime, expressions of nationhood and belonging

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