



University
of Cyprus

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL AND POLITICAL SCIENCES

**‘GLOCAL’ VOICES: FEMINIST BLOGGING
RECONSTRUCTING POLITICAL
PARTICIPATION**

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY DISSERTATION

CHRISTINA KAILI

2021



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RECONSTRUCTING POLITICAL
PARTICIPATION**

CHRISTINA KAILI

**A Dissertation Submitted to the University of Cyprus in Partial
Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

JUNE 2021

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VALIDATION PAGE

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Doctoral Thesis Title: ‘Glocal’ Voices: Feminist Blogging Reconstructing Political Participation

*The present Doctoral Dissertation was submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the **Department of Social and Political Science** and was approved on the 7th of April 2021 by the members of the **Examination Committee**.*

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.....

CHRISTINA KAILI

Περίληψη

Η διατριβή παρουσιάζει μια φεμινιστική ανάλυση σκοπιάς (standpoint) για την κατασκευή της πολιτικής συμμετοχής μέσω του blogging γυναικών. Το κύριο ερευνητικό ερώτημα ασχολείται με το ρόλο του φεμινιστικού blogging στην υπέρβαση των τοπικών/εθνικών ορίων/περιορισμών για πληροφόρηση του παγκόσμιου κοινού σχετικά με τις παραβιάσεις ανθρωπίνων δικαιωμάτων και για κινητοποίηση συλλογικής δράσης. Εντοπίζω και αναλύω τους πολλαπλούς τρόπους με τους οποίους το blogging ως φεμινιστική πρακτική (ανα)κατασκευάζει, (ανα)νοηματοδοτεί και διευρύνει την έννοια της πολιτικής συμμετοχής στην ψηφιακή εποχή. Διερευνώ τις διαφορετικές στρατηγικές του φεμινιστικού blogging στον αγώνα για πρόσβαση στη δημόσια σφαίρα.

Η κριτική φεμινιστική μου ανάλυση λόγου επικεντρώνεται σε blogs δέκα γυναικών από την περιοχή της Μέσης Ανατολής και της Βόρειας Αφρικής (MENA)-Αίγυπτο, Λίβανο, Συρία, Τυνησία και Υεμένη-στο πλαίσιο των Αραβικών εξεγέρσεων του 2011. Τα δεδομένα από 269 blog posts, αποκαλύπτουν πώς το φεμινιστικό blogging παράγει φεμινιστική γνώση, ταυτότητες και πρακτικές που αμφισβητούν και διαταράσσουν τον ηγεμονικό αυταρχικό, νεοφιλελεύθερο, νέο-αποικιακό και πατριαρχικό λόγο. Συνδυάζοντας τη θεωρία της φεμινιστικής σκοπιάς και την κριτική ανάλυση λόγου ως μέρος του θεωρητικού, αναλυτικού και μεθοδολογικού πλαισίου, προβάλλω μια βαθιά κριτική φεμινιστική ανάλυση των δομικών και θεσμικών ανισοτήτων που ενυπάρχουν στα αυταρχικά και καταπιεστικά συστήματα. Αυτή η ανάλυση αποκαλύπτει τις κρίσιμες οπτικές των περιθωριοποιημένων ομάδων που φέρνουν στρατηγικά τα μικρο-μεσο-και-μάκρο επίπεδα (φωνή, χώρος και ισχύς) σε διάλογο. Αυτά τα συνυφασμένα επίπεδα στο νοηματικό μου πλαίσιο αναδεικνύουν την εναλλακτική πολιτική δύναμη του blogging από το περιθώριο στο προσκήνιο και στην παγκόσμια κινητοποίηση.

Η πρωτότυπη συνεισφορά αυτής της διατριβής έγκειται στην ανάπτυξη ενός Νέου Σχήματος Ανάλυσης των blogs για την πολιτική συμμετοχή. Το Σχήμα αναδεικνύει τη δυναμική και την στρατηγική διαδικασία στην οποία το φεμινιστικό blogging μπορεί να: οργανώνει την πολιτική δράση στο μικρο-επίπεδο, υπερβαίνοντας τους δημόσιους χώρους και τα εθνικά σύνορα, συμμετέχει σε διαδικτυακές πλατφόρμες προάσπισης στο μέσο-επίπεδο και επηρεάζει τη δημιουργία διακρατικών φεμινιστικών συμμαχιών στο μακρο-επίπεδο. Αυτό το Σχήμα βασίστηκε στην έννοια της Wendy Harcourt «glocality» την

οποία επεκτείνω στη φεμινιστική μπλογκόσφαιρα, στο πώς, από την εξορία και το περιθώριο στην πρώτη γραμμή των αλληλένδετων γλωσσικών αντιπαραθέσεων, αναδεικνύεται ο αγώνας για κοινωνική αλλαγή. Αυτό το Σχήμα μπορεί να αποτελέσει εργαλείο μελλοντικής ανάλυσης των blogs που εστιάζονται στην πολιτική συμμετοχή.

Η διατριβή συμβάλλει επίσης στη βιβλιογραφία για τη Φεμινιστική Θεωρία, τις Γυναικείες Σπουδές, τις Σπουδές των Μέσων Επικοινωνίας, καθώς και στην Πολιτική Κοινωνιολογία διερευνώντας νέους τρόπους αμφισβήτησης των δομών εξουσίας, ειδικά στο πλαίσιο ενός συνεχώς συρρικνωμένου περιβάλλοντος για τα ανθρώπινα δικαιώματα και αυταρχικών τάσεων που αναβιώνουν παγκοσμίως. Επιπλέον, η μελέτη συνεισφέρει στους κοινωνικοπολιτικούς και ιστορικούς αγώνες των γυναικών στην περιοχή MENA και αποδεικνύει το πώς οι δυτικοκεντρικές, ανδροκεντρικές αντιλήψεις για τη δημόσια σφαίρα αποκλείουν τις πραγματικότητες περιθωριοποιημένων κοινωνικών ομάδων. Παράγοντες όπως: ο δημόσιος λόγος και η αναγνώρισή του, η διεκδικητική ρητορική, η αφήγηση και οι γνώσεις που παράγονται από συγκεκριμένη κοινωνική θέση, επιτρέπουν την εκδήλωση εναλλακτικών μορφών πολιτικής δράσης που επεκτείνουν την έννοια της πολιτικής δημόσιας σφαίρας.

Αυτές οι «glocal» κοινότητες φέρνουν στο προσκήνιο τις στρατηγικές συνδέσεις μεταξύ των φεμινιστριών bloggers και των εργαλείων αντίστασής τους, καθώς και τη μεταμορφωτική, ανατρεπτική και επαναστατική δύναμη που έχουν στην κινητοποίηση διεθνικών φεμινισμών. Η πολιτική σημασία του φεμινιστικού blogging που (ανα)κατασκευάζει την πολιτότητα και την πολιτική πρακτική, επιτρέπει στις γυναίκες να εκφράσουν τις γνώσεις τους και να κινητοποιήσουν συλλογική δράση για τα ανθρώπινα δικαιώματα και τη δημοκρατία.

Abstract

This thesis presents a feminist standpoint analysis of the construction of political participation through women's blogging. My primary research question deals with the role of feminist blogging in transcending local boundaries to inform global audiences about human rights violations and to mobilise for collective action. I identify and analyse the multiple discursive ways in which blogging as a feminist practice (re)constructs and (re)conceptualises political participation in the digital era. I explore the diverse strategies of feminist blogging in the struggle over the public sphere.

My critical discourse analysis focuses on blogs of ten women in the MENA region—Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, Tunisia and Yemen—in the context of the 2011 Arab uprisings. Data from 269 blog posts reveal how feminist blogging produces feminist knowledge, identities and practices that challenge and disrupt hegemonic authoritarian, neoliberal, neo-colonial, and patriarchal discourses. By bringing together feminist standpoint theory and critical discourse analysis, as part of an integrated theoretical, analytical and methodological framework, I offer a deep critical feminist analysis of the structural and institutional inequalities inherent in authoritarian and oppressive systems. This integrated analysis reveals the critical perspectives of marginalised groups strategically bringing the micro, meso and macro levels (voice, space and power) into dialogue. These levels in my conceptualisation and contextualisation interweave to show the alternative political power of blogging from margin to center and global mobilisation.

The original contribution of this thesis lies in the development of a new Blog Analysis Schema for political participation. The Schema demonstrates a dynamic and strategic process in which feminist blogging can organise from grassroots political action (micro level), transcend public space(s) and national boundaries, engage in online advocacy platforms (meso level), and influence transnational coalition-building (macro level). This Schema builds upon Wendy Harcourt's concept of 'glocality' to apply to the feminist blogosphere that is, from exile and margin to the forefront of interwoven glocal counterpublics, thus driving the struggle for social change. This Schema may thus constitute a model for future analysis of blogs focusing on political participation.

This thesis also contributes to the literature on feminist theory, media and women's studies, as well as political sociology by exploring new ways to challenge power

structures, especially in the context of an ever-shrinking human rights environment and the current resurgence of authoritarianism across the globe. In addition, this study contributes to the socio-political and historical accounts of women's struggles in the MENA region and furthermore it demonstrates how Westernised, male-centred understandings of the public sphere exclude the realities of marginalised social groups. Factors such as: greeting and public address, affirmative rhetoric, narrative and situated knowledges, enable alternative forms of political action to expand the notion of political public sphere.

These glocal communities bring to the forefront the strategic connections between feminist bloggers and their vehicles of resistance, as well as the transformative power they hold for mobilising transnational feminisms. The political importance of feminist blogging reconceptualising citizenship and political practice allows women to express their situated knowledges, and mobilise collective action for human rights and democracy.

CHRISTINA KAY

Acknowledgements

This thesis is the result of eight years of work that would not have been possible without the encouragement, guidance and support of my supervisors, Dr Kalliope Agapiou-Josephides and Dr Alexia Panayiotou. I feel deep gratitude for the great amount of time they spent listening, reading and responding to my work and questions; supporting me to develop my ideas and theoretical and analytical skills; and guiding me along the writing process on a subject in a region that has not received enough academic attention and socio-political acknowledgement. With their belief in the importance of my research, as well as in my theoretical approaches, experience and abilities, I was able to build my confidence, develop my independent voice and persist until the end.

My involvement in the “Women’s Rights During Democratic Transitions” research commissioned by the European Parliament in 2012, and led by Dr Agapiou-Josephides, was a turning point for my interest in the subject of this research. Dr Panayiotou, always willing to hear my concerns, and with her continuous and constructive feedback on my writing, gave me invaluable lessons in discovering my own academic voice. But this process went even beyond than that. It was a journey of finding my own voice, agency and authority. A journey that I believe never ends.

It would be a great omission not to thank Dr Maria Hadjipavlou, my intellectual mother and feminist mentor, who deserves special mention not only for providing valuable comments on my work, but also for introducing me from a young age to feminist theory and activism, which served as great incentives in my academic and professional life. Without her long-term teaching and mentoring, not only I would not have reached this point, but I would not be the woman I am today. Her feminist love and encouragement will always guide me to share these values with other women.

I would also like to thank the members of the PhD defence committee for their constructive comments.

I am grateful to the Department of Social and Political Sciences for awarding me with the merit-based Evagoras Scholarship 2020-2021 during my final stages of writing this thesis. The financial breathing room was much appreciated at a time when I needed to focus on

completing my work in a climate of uncertainty due to the COVID-19 pandemic, all while raising a three-year-old.

I am also privileged to be surrounded by a great team of women at the Mediterranean Institute of Gender Studies (MIGS), where I was provided with the platforms to engage in feminist debates and better connect with women in the MENA region during the 2011 Arab uprisings. My participation in EuroMed Rights, working in solidarity with Arab women from and during the 2011 revolutions until today, shaped my understanding of transnational sisterhood and the universality of women's rights. For that, I will always be grateful to my colleagues at MIGS and our feminist sisters with whom I continue to develop in my journey as a feminist scholar and activist.

This thesis would not have reached fruition without the love and confidence in me from my close friends who supported me and spent hours discussing my concepts and ideas, providing insightful comments and advice throughout the process. I cannot thank enough my friend and editor Lara Bastajian for editing my work.

I am incredibly thankful to my parents, sisters and my husband Nektarios Vilanidis, who stood by me even when health issues, and frustrations of combining parenthood, work and writing a PhD threatened to terminate this journey. Their patience, unwavering love, and encouragement enabled me to keep on keeping on. I am also thankful to my son, Iasonas for 'forcing' me to slow down, to play and accept his hugs when I felt that these were a luxury in my troubled mind.

Last but not least, I dedicate this work to the Arab feminist activist women bloggers who are featured in this work, and in particular, Lina Ben Mhenni, who passed away in January 2020. Her courage and dedication in the defence of human rights will always be an inspiration to me. Without the passion, courage and commitment of the bloggers who shared their stories, testimonies and insights in their blogs, this thesis would not have been possible. Their fierce writing and blogging – in which they persisted against all odds – were a great source of knowledge, motivation and duty in writing this thesis. Not only by enriching the scope of this research but also helping me to be reflexive and ask critical questions. I owe them my deepest thanks. They are a revolutionary force already changing the world one voice at a time, online and offline. It is these voices that make this work original and special.

Being born and raised professionally in the NGO/civil society sector meant that I have worked in my most important projects collectively and collaboratively with my feminist sisters striving for social justice and change in the lives of women. With this thesis, one of my biggest challenges and lessons was to get out of my comfort zone and sit with my own ideas, findings and writing processes for extended periods of time. It was at times a lonely journey, which often took a toll on my mental health and wellbeing, but now I understand how it all contributed to finding my own independent voice for a research project that became even more dear to me. For me, this is an exciting moment, to share and discuss what preoccupied my mind for so long, with a feeling of curiosity and openness.

Christina Kaili,
June, 2021

Dedication

To Lina Ben Mhenni, Tunisian blogger
22 May 1983 – 27 January 2020

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CHAPTER ONE – INTRODUCTION: WOMEN, BLOGGING AND FEMINIST POLITICS

And where the words of women are crying to be heard, we must each of us recognize our responsibility to seek those words out, to read them and share them and examine them in their pertinence to our lives.

Lorde, 1977¹

She never stopped writing. She misses her readers, and she is still writing. Writing is life. Writing is being. Writing is everything about her life. She never understood why they want her to stop from doing it. Now, bereft of her words, writing has become a fight! She's fighting using either her pen or her keyboard... Giving up? You must be joking!!

Ben Mhenni, 2010

In her seminal 1977 speech “The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action”, civil rights activist and feminist Audre Lorde warns us of the dismissal and absence of women’s voices in the public sphere and reminds us that women must be heard and taken into account. Almost three decades later, Lina Ben Mhenni, a Tunisian activist, in her blog *A Tunisian Girl*, raises her own voice, stating that “writing has become a fight!” and that she will fight “using either her pen or her keyboard”. Following her blog being censored at the beginning of the Tunisian Revolution in 2010, she rebels against the oppressive system that systematically wants to silence her. She shows that expressing her opinions and thoughts has become a struggle she is not willing to give up because writing is not only personal but also political.

The rise of the Internet,² and the many waves of technological change it brought, has offered women an unprecedented platform to express their thoughts and opinions. The Internet has had a tremendous social impact and has been inextricably linked to social and

¹ Audre Lorde originally delivered this line as part of her speech, “The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action”, while participating in the Lesbian and Literature panel at a meeting held by the Modern Language Association on 28 December 1977. It was then re-published in many of Lorde’s books, including *The Cancer Journals* and *Sister Outsider* (2007 [1984]).

² I use the term ‘Internet’ in a broad way to refer to both the hardware and software of this technical infrastructure, and to include new media technologies such as mobile phones and the various platforms of social media.

political processes globally, and specifically in the context of the Arab uprisings of 2011. It has revolutionised the way (silenced groups of) people can communicate alternative information, knowledge and visions for social change and democracy, as well as to be mobilised to take political action. Digital new media technologies, including social networking sites, for example Twitter, Facebook, YouTube and blogs, enable new forms of individual expression, altering the parameters of political engagement. In addition, there has been an increase in people's ability to share information, publish, cooperate, and take collective action outside the framework of traditional institutions and organisations, overcoming the limits of space and time (Bauman, 2000; Coleman and Freelon, 2015; della Porta, 2013, della Porta et al., 2006; Schuster 2013). Decentralisation and diversity are being fostered, interactivity and individual communication are being facilitated, contributing to what open access pioneer Tim O'Reilly calls "an architecture of participation" (Dahlgren, 2015, 2005; Shirky, 2008).³ This 'counter-democracy' which enables participation and deliberation, has brought up radical new democratic approaches through global justice movements and has offered important critiques of conventional politics (della Porta, 2013, 2009).

Thus, what we loosely call 'alternative politics', enabled by the Internet and new digital media, challenges the traditional way of political participation. It expands political engagement to encompass action outside the traditional confines of political party structures and representative democracy. In this practice, the political becomes more closely linked to the personal (Rosanvallon, 2008), blurring the lines between public and private, local and global (Baksh and Harcourt, 2015; della Porta and Tarrow, 2005; Harcourt 2000; Youngs, 2009).

Authors from diverse disciplines, including communication, sociology and political science, have studied the use of social media as an important resource in the success of contemporary social and political movements (Eltantawy and Wiest, 2011), but have often failed to adequately address the gender aspect. There is a growing interdisciplinary interest in academia about the renewed women's movements engaging in emerging feminist politics, through which women in their diversity express and act on their views about gender equality using everyday means (Harris, 2008, 2010). Specifically, online feminism, which makes use of blogs, online campaigns and online petition platforms as tools for marginalised individuals and groups claiming their space in the digital space, is arguably

³ The evolution of technology brings with it constant change, especially in the arena of political participation. Democracy is thus faced with opportunities as well as challenges (e.g., polarisation, radicalisation and violence) (della Porta, 2018).

the largest innovation within the feminist movement in the last 50 years (Arruzza et al., 2019; Della Porta and Mosca, 2005; Harcourt, 2000; Martin and Valenti, 2012). This “online feminist ecosystem” (Martin and Valenti, 2012) is decentralised and accessible; intersectional and community-oriented; enables rapid, large-scale action; it is very often youth-led, revolutionising the way information is shared around the world. For example, using the viral #metoo hashtag, the ‘Me Too’ movement managed in less than six months to expand local grassroots efforts to support sexual abuse survivors and end sexual violence, thus opening up a global conversation on issues of male power and the exploitation of the less powerful.⁴ In the context of the Arab uprisings of 2011, the potential of these technological advantages were at the centre of the grassroots feminist movements to influence the socio-political processes of democratic transition.

This thesis seeks to gain a deeper understanding of the construction of political participation through feminist blogging. To do this, I use the 2011 Arab uprisings as my research context. Not only marking a significant socio-political and historical moment that revealed the power of the publics occupying public spaces, those who took part also used internet technologies and social media to raise global awareness about the violations of their human rights by authoritarian regimes. As I will explain in the following pages, since the first uprising in Tunisia in late 2010, the oppressive regimes, realising the power of these tools for political engagement and organisation, suppressed blogs and/or punished those who maintained them. Within these patriarchal and authoritative contexts, women activists and human rights defenders were giving their own struggles for visibility, participation and social change. Although their role was paramount during the critical moments of socio-political transitions, establishing equal participation in decision-making processes for the political future of the country was not a given. So, my first objective is to identify and analyse the multiple discursive ways in which the practice of blogging (re)constructs political participation, despite the social, political, economic, cultural and legal constraints imposed on women bloggers. My second objective is to gain a deeper understanding of the diversification of feminist blogging in the struggle over the public sphere. I will ask the following key research question: What is the role of feminist blogging in transcending local boundaries in order to inform global audiences about human rights violations and to mobilise for collective action?

⁴ <https://metoomvmt.org/> [accessed 1 December 2020].

1.1 Focusing on women, feminism and online activism

Although the percentage of women online is currently about equal to that of men, women's voices are still under-represented on the Internet, just as they are in the fields of science and technology (Harcourt, 2000; Kennedy, 2000, Kennedy et al., 2003; Morahan- Martin, 2000; Pollock and Sutton, 2000; Sherman et al., 2000). Research informs us that online discussion has the tendency to reproduce and even perpetuate gender inequalities and hierarchies (boyd, 2006; Harp and Tremayne, 2006; Herring, 1994; Wellman and Gulia, 1999). The blogosphere is also characterised by a disproportionate number of male writers according to blog indexers. In addition, male bloggers tend to be more influential than female bloggers and the lists of top blogs often exclude women (Glaser, 2003). Given that the political blogosphere requires relatively little social, political and economic capital, one might expect a greater parity (Harp and Tremayne, 2006, p. 247). Nevertheless, women's political commentary continues to be marginalised. Johnston et al. (2011), looking at women's political commentary, showed that "there is no shortage of women blogging about politics. Rather, there is little attention paid by the mainstream media and blogosphere to women's political opinions". The same authors point to the need for more research on the topic of "women's online political commentary examining how women communicate about politics" (Johnston et al., 2011), particularly when blogs are the only domain available for expressing such opinions. I hope my own research on feminist blogging during the 2011 Arab uprisings will contribute to addressing this need, by positioning this research at the intersection of political sociology, feminist theory and women's studies. In this thesis, I propose an integrated theoretical framework that could provide a model of analysis that is based on the knowledge produced by women's multiple and intersectional standpoints as expressed via blogging as feminist practice.

Scholars from disciplines such as cultural and media studies looking at virtual feminisms and youth found that the use of online blogs and social networking sites represent new directions in activism, the construction of participatory communities, and the development of new kinds of public selves that enable new modes of feminist politics for young women (Harris, 2008; Keller, 2012, 2013, 2017). According to Keller (2013, 2017) in her feminist ethnographic study of girl bloggers, "feminist blogging functions as an activist practice through networked counterpublics, intervening in mainstream and commercial public space". Keller, positioning this activism within American feminism, analysed how participants remain in conversation with feminist history and respond to their unique cultural climate. Keller highlighted the importance of girls' feminist blogging as an

emergent citizenship practice in America that makes feminism an accessible discourse for contemporary teenage girls. This work has been very important in understanding girls' attitudes toward feminism and the emergence of alternative citizenship practices, which are worthy of further exploration. Building on this and other similar work, which examines blogging, my own research from a sociological feminist standpoint perspective focuses on feminist blogging by women in the MENA region as an emerging form of political participation and citizenship practice. Of particular importance is the fact that these women wrote during conflict and socio-political transitions in countries where the public sphere is controlled by authoritarian regimes. Within this context, women in the MENA region were, and still are, restricted by a series of cultural, legal, socio-political hindrances that leave little space for political participation and agency. Acknowledging of course that this is an interdisciplinary subject, I choose an integrated framework within the field of political sociology, feminist theory and women's studies.

1.2 Blogs, blogosphere and blogging as feminist practice

'Blog' is an abbreviated form of the term 'weblog', which simply refers to a website arranged in reverse-chronological written entries (also called posts), usually focused on a particular topic. Although written entries are a very important element of blogs, boyd (2006) argues that blogs must be approached as a diverse set of practices producing diverse content, including written text and graphics (such as images and videos), hyperlinks to other blogs, web pages and social networking sites related to the topic. The interactive aspect of blogs, allowing the audience to leave comments and share written posts, distinguishes them from static websites. Favouring this dynamic aspect, instead of the narrow definition of what constitutes a blog, I use the term with flexibility throughout this thesis by discussing the use of social media platforms (such as Facebook and Twitter) as part of women's practice of blogging.

There are some significant features of blogs highlighted by other authors from interdisciplinary fields (boyd, 2006; Keller, 2013; Rettberg, 2008): blogs are frequently updated (and thus constantly changing), they are often written in the first person (thus they are personal), and they contain a social aspect through the use of embedded hyperlinks to other websites, blogs and comment sections. Therefore, approaching blogs as a "social genre facilitating multiple conversations in a single [blog] or among multiple blogs" (Rettberg, 2008) and conceptualising them as both a medium and a "bi-product of expression" (boyd, 2006) allows us to see blogs in the context of culture and practice.

Indeed, the social aspect of blogs enables me to understand how feminist blogging has blurred the lines between public and private, local and global, personal and political, in terms of socio-political culture and practice.

All the blogs on the Internet and their interconnections are referred to as a 'blogosphere', because they function as a connected community (or as a collection of connected communities), a term that I will employ in this thesis. Due to the relationships between blogs and bloggers, the blogosphere is understood in the literature as a cultural and social network, constantly growing and changing, but heavily based on publishing of everyday authors and communicating their opinions with their readers and other bloggers (Gabriel 2014; Keller, 2013, 2017; Mowles, 2008; Tobias, 2005).

There is a consensus, mainly within the literature of communication and cultural studies, that a practice outside the mainstream media can be classified as 'alternative' when it includes the following characteristics: be oppositional in structure and/or in content, be community focused, encourage interaction and participation (Gabriel 2014; Keller, 2013, 2017; Mowles, 2008; Tobias, 2005). The blogs featured in this study are independently managed by the women bloggers outside the mainstream, collaborating in some cases with online media or blogging platforms which shows the interactive and participatory aspects of their practice, making them independent/alternative narratives.

The feminist blogosphere is not the only way that women engage in political debates, but for several reasons I have chosen feminist blogging as a space from which to ask questions about political participation and feminism. I approach feminist blogging as the act of writing about issues relating to gender equality on the social, cultural, political and economic levels. Feminist blogs serve the purpose of spreading ideas, sparking debates, raising awareness, discussing opinions, sharing stories, and advocating virtually for various issues relating to gender equality at all levels. I also approach feminist blogging as a contemporary continuation of journaling and diary writing as a feminist practice. Building upon Huff's (1989) history of journaling, the two share some common characteristics that this thesis attempts to highlight. First, blogging as a form of diary writing provides testimonies that can be re-read and reflected on. Second, journaling and blogging have the ability to build ties between the reader and the writer. Third, diaries and blogs put community over hierarchy, and communication over authority. Fourth, journaling and blogging provide a diversity of approaches and standpoints. Fifth, diary writing and blogging share the tendency to connect the inner with the outer.

1.3 Blogging in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region

Blogs are harder to control than broadcast and print media. As a result, in politically sensitive areas, such as those I use as case studies in this research, authoritarian regimes often seek to suppress blogs and/or harass and punish those who maintain them (Eltantawy and Wiest, 2011). In late 2010, during the Tunisian Revolution (also called the Jasmine Revolution by Western media), activists and people in the streets used social media to raise global awareness about the human rights violations experienced under the authoritarian regime of Ben Ali. These large-scale demonstrations were followed by multiple revolutions in other countries of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, such as Egypt, Algeria, Jordan, Syria, Libya and Yemen, all demanding change for the working class and disadvantaged social groups. Egyptians organising their own movement, for example, watched similar events unfold in Tunisia, and shared words of encouragement and ideas across the movements. “During the Tunisian revolution, Egyptian bloggers were on Twitter, Facebook and personal blogs posting updates and uploading images and videos of the Tunisian protests” (Eltantawy and Wiest, 2011, p. 1214). The Mubarak regime initially underestimated the power of the Internet due to its non-hierarchical features. When the regime realised the power and the speed of social media technologies and the enabling factors for organisation among citizens and activists, it proceeded to cut off the Internet and cellular communication across Egypt in January 2011. Such measures were also taken in other countries in the MENA region and reveal that blogging can be understood as part of emerging and powerful forms of political participation, outside the realm of the regimes’ capacity to exercise effective control over it.

This thesis focuses on examples of women’s initiatives through blogging in the MENA region, specifically Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, Tunisia, and Yemen. In late 2010, these countries were experiencing a multitude of challenges, including socio-political transitions that tremendously impacted women’s lives. Women took an active role in shaping, influencing, and redefining the public sphere, despite the often institutionalised norms of exclusion and marginalisation restricting their physical mobility, visibility and voice. Female voices that fought back and resisted against the patriarchal regimes became even more marginalised and delegitimised by authorities (Agapiou-Josephides et al., 2012; EuroMed Rights, 2012; Skalli, 2006). In other words, in the context of demanding political reforms and combating authoritarian regimes, the multi-layered marginalisation and exclusion of women from the justice system, transitional bodies and decision-making

processes, constituted forms of male dominance and patriarchy, as political instruments to methodically silence opposition.

Consequently, blogging, along with other social media, have been tools in raising awareness about women's complex realities in their countries and condemning inequalities as well as the different forms of institutionalised physical, sexual and psychological violence against women and girls (Abdela, 2012; Eltantawy and Wiest, 2011; Karam, 1998; Skalli, 2006). My research will show that there are important commonalities among the different bloggers in their continuous struggle to legitimate access to the public sphere and in their efforts to participate in defining the conditions of women's inclusion into this space (Al-Hamad, 2002; Eltantawy and Wiest, 2011; Moghadam, 2003). What is more striking is that women human rights defenders (WHRDs) in these countries managed to transcend their local realities and communicate their voices and conditions to other parts of the world through blogging. Hence, the interactivity and networking enabled (among followers and bloggers) the discussion to open up in multiple overlapping mini public spheres connecting the dots of online and offline political participation (Eickelman and Salvatore, 2002; Schuster, 2013; Sutton and Pollock, 2000). The fact that blogs are dynamic and hard to control makes it difficult for authoritative regimes to silence the voices expressed. This uniqueness of blogs as a medium of expression helps us better understand the ways in which community-formation and movement mobilisation are enabled and (re)constructed. The diversification of socio-political practices and discourses constructed through this medium in the struggle over the public sphere constitutes partly the focus of this thesis. These practices contribute to the production of a valuable capital of knowledge about political participation that this thesis aims to further explore. The concept of the public sphere, which went through different theoretical assessments since the 1960s, is a conceptual pillar that I will explore to link the practice of feminist blogging to political participation. I will thus focus on those conditions that enable alternative forms of political action that expand the notion of political public sphere in the digital era.

1.4 The feminist blogosphere: a window to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights

The focus of this research, as I have already mentioned, is to look deeper at what feminist blogging during the 2011 Arab uprisings tells us about the way internet technologies revolutionised participation and processes in political systems, specifically in relation to human rights.

On the one side, human rights were breached by authoritarian regimes, and on the other, these are the rights the feminist bloggers attempt to promote through their blogging. I am guided by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) (1948), a milestone document in the history of humanity, agreed as a common standard that today guides 192 member-states of the UN and the world's population. The inherent dignity and the equal and inalienable rights of all humans was recognised as the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world. The UDHR is also used as a near-universal blueprint by researchers, practitioners, lawyers and constitutional professionals across the globe (Suksi, et al., 2015).

I juxtapose this framework with the narratives of feminist bloggers, whose experiences reveal the extent to which human rights were violated by those in power in their respective countries in this particular time in history. The issues explored and analysed in this thesis can be examined in light of specific articles of the UDHR such as the following:

- Article 1: all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights;
- Article 2: everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms without distinction such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political and other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status;
- Article 3: the right to life, liberty and security of person;
- Article 5: no one should be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment;
- Article 7: equal protection of the law;
- Article 9: no one should be subjected to arbitrary arrest, detention or exile;
- Article 10: an equal and fair public hearing by independent and impartial tribunal;
- Article 12: no one should be subjected to arbitrary interference with his privacy, family, home or correspondence, nor to attacks upon his honour and reputation;
- Article 13: freedom of movement and residence;
- Article 19: freedom of opinion and expression; and
- Article 20: freedom of peaceful assembly and association.

While I only touch upon these few key articles here, more UDHR rights found in Annex I, which have been systematically violated (and continue to be so to this day) are addressed in the ten blogs I focus on. For example, among others, the right to “standard of living

adequate for the health and well-being” (Art. 25), continues to be violated in the ongoing humanitarian crises in Yemen and Syria.

I further explore the political discourse emerging from the blogs as an alternative form of citizenship practice through which bloggers claim and assert their human rights with the creative use of the internet and social media, in parallel to the action on the ground.

1.5 Theorising political action and the public sphere from a sociological feminist standpoint: a need for an integrated framework

Considering that feminist standpoint theory has not been used enough in research (O’Brien Hallstein, 2000), this thesis argues that putting feminist standpoint theory into practice allows researchers to develop a diverse and rich body of knowledge about the lives of marginalised groups, and specifically women’s lives. Precisely, when studying political participation, social and political scientists ought to examine and analyse the power relations in the public sphere within specific social, cultural, historical and political contexts. For many decades, feminist critiques of Jurgen Habermas’ conceptualisation of a dominant public sphere, a key framework in this study (originally written in 1962), called for more inclusivity by looking at the ways in which marginalised groups exercise agency in the public sphere (Bickford, 1996; Chambers, 1995; Fraser 1992, 1993, 2014; Gould, 1996; Harcourt, 2000; Young 2000; Youngs, 2009). Specifically, in the context of internet-enabled agency, mainstream ways of theorising the public sphere often miss the role of women in the blogosphere for political expression and agency. Thus, I have chosen an integrated theoretical framework placing primary attention on the conversational narratives and situated knowledges of women. To do so, I use the feminist standpoint theories as a key theoretical framework for my analysis, as these emphasise that knowledge can be produced from the everyday experiences and from words of women located and analysed within broader power relations and social structures (Collins, 1986; Harding 1987; Hartsock, 1983; O’Brien Hallstein, 2000; Smith, 1987, 1999). These critical authors raise questions about the public political sphere(s) that would otherwise not get asked. These can then become research agendas, policy initiatives and reform, and ultimately challenge social and political structures and bring about social change. I take on the call in the literature for looking at ways in which discourse action in the public sphere(s) moves away from universalistic tendencies towards political listening, inclusion and access to interactive communication (Bickford, 1996; Chambers, 1995; Gould, 1996; Young, 2000).

This thesis aims to contribute to this strand of theories drawing from the different standpoints presented in the blog posts I have selected. Employing critical discourse analysis as an analytical and methodological framework, I will show how blogging presents significant methodological advantages in gaining knowledge and understanding on practices against oppression during socio-political transitions as expressed through language. Producing knowledge via standpoints provides a significant empirical part of this thesis. Blogging as a feminist practice provides the ground for more complete knowledge on how activists organise, network and share information; the types of coalitions they build; and how they redefine political participation in the shrinking space of the traditionally male-dominated public sphere(s).

These situated knowledges constitute shared aspects of multiplicity, of being locatable and embodied in different cultures and operating as social and collective points of view (standpoints). These standpoints give us access to important social hierarchies/axes of domination, such as gender, race and class, on which we need to insist on in order to fulfil our obligation to challenge the organisation of power in society and the categories of oppression, exploitation and white supremacy. These situated knowledges provide alternative visions (Hartsock, 1996) of looking at the subject of knowledge opening possibilities for changing power relations. The struggles they represent and express can go beyond survival to recognise the significance of looking at changing systematic power relations. Recognising themselves as the knowledges of the marginalised, provides knowledges that can become accountable and engaged.

Through my case studies - the discourses emerging from these multiple subjectivities and standpoints expressed in blogs - intersectionality is taken into account in relation with social, historical and political contexts that need to be acknowledged. From a sociological feminist standpoint, these aspects can be a source of reflexivity and stronger objectivity in knowledge production. It is of particular relevance within the framework of this research as it complements feminist standpoint theories providing together a holistic framework for research design.

Additionally, taking a feminist standpoint and a discourse analytical perspective helps me focus on the interaction between women's text and socio-political contexts. I analyse the ways political power is discursively constructed and circulated through these dynamic websites (blogs). Therefore, I approach language as a way of 'existing' and as a form of social action, constructing social reality through shared and agreed meanings (Berger and Luckman, 1967; Burr, 2003, 1995; Gergen, 1994). I explore in the following chapter the

different approaches, from a feminist standpoint, in framing and analysing the set of meanings, statements, images and stories constructed through blogging shaped by culture, history and social context. In particular, I seek to understand how women's ideas, narratives and situated knowledges are developed within patriarchal, militaristic and authoritarian socio-political contexts. As knowledge evolves through an on-going conversation and interaction, identity, inner voice and affirmative rhetoric are being created (Gould, 1996; Young, 2000). Thus, blogs provide a conversational narrative where we understand ourselves and each other through changing stories, as well as a set of meanings and statements that are always subject to re-interpretation through repeat readings (Chambers, 1996). These are the types of discourses and meanings I attempt to capture through the study on feminist blogging.

Thus, by using an integrated and complementary theoretical framework, I argue that the alternative visions produced from the different standpoints (multiple subjectivities) expressed through feminist blogging, reconstruct political participation in emancipatory ways that expand the notion of the public sphere. This fluid and dynamic approach I believe expands the possibilities of understanding, fostering communication, dialogue and inclusion of a range of perspectives.

My research also contributes to women's studies looking at citizenship and political participation in the digital age, by exploring opportunities, constraints, and new ways to challenge power structures, especially in the context of an ever-shrinking human rights environment and the current resurgence of authoritarianism in a number of countries.

1.6 Feminist politics in the 21st century: from online communities to transnational feminisms

There have been different suggestions addressing the categorisation and classification of feminisms. Thus, we must speak of plurality of feminist schools and thought. Some authors use the metaphor of different waves of feminism and others refer to different feminist perspectives that developed historically (Abou Habib, 2020a; Bell, et al., 2019; Chamberlain, 2017; Hadjipavlou, 2010). There are also different levels of agreement on the number of waves of feminism and the chronological period for each, often challenging the wave narrative.

Some locate the first wave in the establishment of women's movements in the mid-19th century when the focus was on women's right to vote. The 1960s and 1970s brought new

questions about the personal, psychological and sexual aspects of women's oppression that the second wave emerged to address. 'Women's liberation' was not adequately met by legal and political reforms. Thus, with the slogan "The Personal is Political", women's cultural and political inequalities were challenged and women were encouraged to understand how their personal lives reflected sexist power structures (Freidan, 1963). The second wave movement argued for a radical revolutionary process of social change with regards to equality and discrimination. By the 1990s, feminist organisations as well as women's studies and gender studies programmes were emerging in most countries, giving more visibility to women's contribution in arts and sciences. The third wave emerged as a continuation of the previous wave, as well as a reaction to its perceived failure (placing emphasis on the experiences of upper middle-class white women). The third wave, as an international ideology, challenged definitions of femininity and approached women's lives as intersectional, signifying how race, ethnicity, class, religion, gender, and nationality are all important factors when discussing feminism.

Grounding my analysis within the context of contemporary feminist social theory, initially I described our contemporary moment as being marked by the emergence of a fourth wave in feminism (Abou Habib, 2020a; Dean and Aune, 2015; Cochrane, 2014; Evans, 2015; Munro, 2013). While its emergence has been the subject of debate and multiple definitions within feminist scholarship, I understand this movement as emerging around 2012, aspiring to the empowerment of women and acknowledging the significance of the internet and new technologies in this process. Fourth-wave feminist ideology reiterates its focus on intersectionality, inclusion and democratisation, addressing the power imbalances affecting marginalised groups and advocating for greater representation of these groups in social, political and economic life. The key argument of an emerging fourth wave is substantial equality which can only be realised through policies and practices that consider the perspectives of all women. In the meantime, a fifth wave is now developing bringing new conversations on sustainability and organised activism across feminist movements (Courtemanche, 2019; Garcha, 2020). The emergence of a fourth and perhaps a fifth wave within a decade is impressive and indicates that this study is positioned in a key evolutionary stage of feminisms in the digital era.

Crucial elements of contemporary feminist theory, political participation and activism remain to a large extent unaddressed. Particularly, issues regarding women in the Global South who continue to be exploited by multinational corporations and local patriarchal gender inequalities (Allam, 2017; Badran, 1995; Bell et al., 2019; Sadiqi, 2016, 2006).

Feminists in the Global South remind us that researchers and society as a whole must acknowledge the different experiences of women and the different power dynamics behind the multiple oppressions that persist (Abou Habib, 2020a; Hankir, 2019; Mohanty, 2013, 2003; Sadiqi, 2016, 2006; Salem, 2019, 2018). These are discussions that this thesis explores through the perspectives of feminist blogging.

As a project of continuous local and global, historical, and socio-political transformation, feminism(s) of all kinds are movements with emancipatory purpose, interrogating power relations of subjection and objectification of women. Not only they interpret but they also change the world, as I discuss in the final chapter of this thesis based on the analysis of feminist blogging.

1.7 Structure of the thesis

Chapter Two explores theoretical and analytical frameworks that can be used to discuss political participation and the public sphere. To answer my research question, I use an integrated theoretical framework using feminist standpoint theory and discourse analysis. Within this framework, I discuss how blogging, as a feminist practice, can provide a unique source of testimonies producing new knowledge(s) that is both political and feminist.

Chapter Three deals with the methodology I have used in collecting data from selected blogs and in researching the political context across the MENA countries under study (Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, Tunisia, Yemen). Taking into account that blogs as units of analysis in social research are an emerging field of study, as well as their methodological uniqueness (dynamic structure, ease of access, data from wide geographical areas, time- and cost-efficient), I applied a flexible and reflexive approach through my methodological processes. Grounded on my research question and the literature reviewed, I developed a set of criteria as to which blogs to include in the sample (for example, that the authors write for countries in the MENA region experiencing socio-political transitions; the topics the blogs focused on; that the authors' working language was English; and that the blogs had international reach). I also created a set of criteria based on thematic categories and associated concepts that facilitated the collection of posts from each blog.

This chapter also introduces the methodological tools used to record the blogs identified for the sample, the template for observation of the blogs, the template to list all data entries, and a visual map with the preliminary results of data analysis. I made use of NVivo

12 software to manage the data entries from ten blogs (269 blog posts in total) and facilitate the analysis process.

Chapter Four presents the findings by providing a socio-political profile of the bloggers as well as their unique standpoints, as well as insight into their blogging practices. It then presents in detail the findings from the constructed narratives of the bloggers with regards to four major emerging themes: voice and agency; the diverse and dynamic blogging strategies employed in the struggle over the public sphere; the transition from local political space(s) to global audiences and space(s) through the strategic use of blogging; and the ways in which blogging contributes to turning margin to alternative power. The chapter also concludes with a (re)definition and a (re)conceptualisation of the notions of political participation and the public sphere provided by the bloggers' narratives.

In **Chapter Five**, I focus on the key emerging and interwoven themes from the discourse analysis of the blog posts from a feminist standpoint theoretical framework. Ultimately, I propose a new Schema of integrated analysis, based on Harcourt's (2000) concept of 'glocality', to demonstrate a dynamic way of organising from grassroots action to global mobilisation and from the margins to interwoven glocal counterpublics. This contribution may constitute a model for future analysis of blogs for political participation in the digital era.

I conclude this thesis by outlining the main contributions that this type of analysis makes to the literature in the disciplines of feminist theory, media, women's and gender studies, and political sociology. I present the implications, the extendibility and the new questions that arise about feminist blogging reconstructing and expanding the notion of political participation. I conclude by discussing the new realities of transnational feminist movements and the ebb and flow of democracies in the making.

CHAPTER TWO – THEORETICAL AND ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK: THE PUBLIC SPHERE, SITUATED KNOWLEDGES AND THE FEMINIST STANDPOINT

In this chapter, I review relevant literature by theme and explain the reasons why I have chosen feminist standpoint theory as part of an integrated theoretical and analytical framework to explore the role of blogging as feminist political practice in the digital era. I use as my guiding framework the Habermasian (1991) public sphere, for which I provide a critique from a feminist standpoint as this expands the concept of public sphere, in light of fourth-wave transnational feminisms. I will also discuss the reasons why blogging provides a unique source of testimonies producing new knowledge(s) that is both political and feminist.

2.1 Development and decline of the public sphere in the 21st century

In this section, I review key theoretical assessments of the concept of the public sphere from a feminist standpoint, which are useful in exploring my research question on feminism, blogging and political participation. As mentioned earlier, by studying feminist blogging as an alternative form of political participation, I seek a deeper understanding of the power dynamics and relationships in the mainstream public sphere within the specific social, cultural, historical and political contexts of the MENA region.

One of the interventions I make in this chapter is to suggest that taking a feminist standpoint on the blogging practice of women during the 2011 uprisings helps us explore the ways in which new modes of participation in the digital era enable women as a marginalised social group to access public spaces.

Since the 1970s, Habermas' concept of the public sphere has been widely applied and at the same time still under critical reflection in many disciplines including sociology, political communication and media studies. Beyond the historical context in which it has been developed, it is relevant today in understanding contemporary social and political developments and participation. Habermas (1991) defines 'public sphere' as a domain of our social life in which public opinion can be formed (p. 398). In Habermasian terms, a public sphere is a democratic space where citizens' proactive engagement in public discourse and communication is a key element. Specifically, communicative action refers to the embodiment of intersubjective reason in life, which Habermas contrasts to the

instrumental or strategic action that dominates the economy and the bureaucratic state administration (Habermas, 1984, 1987 [1981]). The public sphere is thus approached as a mediating space between the state (public authority) and civil society, whereby freedom of expression, equality, structure and function constitute prerequisites (see Figure 2.1).

PRIVATE REALM	PUBLIC SPHERE	SPHERE OF PUBLIC AUTHORITY (institutional structures)
CIVIL SOCIETY		STATE
	POLITICAL REALM	

Figure 2.1 Schema of Habermas' Public Sphere (adapted from Vatrapu et al., 2008)

Within the scope of this thesis, I explore the key feminist assessments and suggestions that are useful in my exploration of feminist blogging as a form of online political participation beyond the mainstream Western understandings of the public sphere. I position blogging as feminist practice particularly in the MENA region where engagement in the public sphere/discourse is not a democratic right enjoyed by all.

Feminist critiques of the concept of the public sphere advocate for inclusivity in the dimensions of public/political engagement, elements that, to some extent, can be found in Habermas' theory, but require re-conceptualisation and expansion (Habermas, 1982, 1992, 2001; Pajnik, 2006). Alternative approaches place emphasis on the need to expand the concept of the public sphere as an open and inclusive mode of public engagement. Specifically, from a feminist standpoint, political communicative action within the concept of the public sphere could and should be understood not only as theoretical concept, but also used to assess and explain the dysfunctioning of the public sphere in contemporary, technologically advanced societies (Pajnik, 2006, p. 401).

Within feminist literature addressing the public sphere, five key areas are synthesised, specifically by Pajnik (2006), where the Habermasian communicative action within the public sphere could be reconceptualised. These are useful starting points for my analysis, especially in approaching women's participation in the context of authoritarian regimes, knowing that the public sphere is neither pure nor free. It becomes clear that understandings based solely on rationality and procedural ethics, without any consideration

of the relationship between discourses and their social, political, cultural and historical contexts, narrow the scope of knowledge production.

Feminist literature has a number of reproaches to the Habermasian concept of communicative action in the political public sphere (Pajnik, 2006, p. 401), specifically that Habermas has:

- (1) purified communicative action from interest, and placed in the field of fiction (Gould, 1990; 1996; Dietz, 1996);
- (2) provided a monological and technical understanding of rationality (Braaten, 1995);
- (3) grounded communicative action in a proceduralist ethics of justice (Chambers, 1995; Bickford, 1996; Gould, 1996);
- (4) promoted speech acts as the only genuine form of communicative action (Gould, 1990, 1996; Meehan, 2000; Young, 2000); and
- (5) abstracted communicative action from contextual appearances by grounding it using a narrow epistemological tradition (Langsdorf, 2002).

Based on Pajnik's synthesis of feminist standpoint approaches, feminist scholars provide useful insights of a more inclusive concept of "citizen activity". These critiques reconceptualise the public sphere not just as a theoretical concept, but also as a useful concept to explain the dysfunctioning of the public sphere in contemporary societies. Without overlooking the political dimensions of the broader context in which Habermas' theory was developed, such alternatives in the direction of greater inclusivity and diversity include, as presented in the comprehensive synthesis by Pajnik (2006, p. 401):

- (1) a principle of complementarity of communicative and strategic action;
- (2) a theory of communicative thinking together with intersubjectivity as a corrective;
- (3) a feminist discourse of the ethics of care, instead of a Habermasian ethics of justice;
- (4) expressive, political narrative as a supplement to rational expressions; and

- (5) a theory of communicative experience, combined with the corrective of rationality as a purely linguistic action, and a critique of the ideal speech situation.

Of course, it is not possible to explore all the alternatives within one thesis, so I focus on those feminist theoretical frameworks that are useful in my discourse analysis of feminist blogging in MENA countries. Specifically, I explore the theoretical aspects of communicative thinking, intersubjective action and expressive political narrative as correctives to the myth of the public sphere as a unitary space of rational expressions. Based on these theoretical alternatives, I propose an integrated theoretical framework by focusing on the alternative narratives and situated knowledges of women as they emerge from their blogging practice in the struggle over the public sphere(s).

2.1.1 From communicative rationality to communicative thinking

Feminist, post-feminist and postcolonial social theorists challenge the claims of communicative rationality, reason and universality in approaching the public debate (Benhabib, 2011; Braaten, 1995; Fraser, 1992, 1989; Mohanty, 1984; Young, 2000). The key argument is that Habermas' early social theory provides a one-dimensional perspective, that of the white, male, bourgeois class in the dialogue among institutional structures (state) and civil society (Dietz, 1996, 2003; Eliot and Lemert, 2014; Gould, 1990, 1996).⁵ As a result, by viewing the public sphere as a pure sphere (Pajnik, 2006), attention moved away from other forms of popular culture, the commercialisation of the media and the diversity of social movements. These are factors that shape the public sphere as avenues for criticism of politics and public decision-making processes. Although Habermas' work is not blind to the impact of various forms of popular culture and social movements, the significance of including alternative views and ideologies that influence the public discourse is significantly undermined (Eliot and Lemert, 2014; Pajnik, 2006).

Indeed, such universal claims of the white, male subject to rationality have historically excluded women, as well as ethnic and other minorities from the public discourse and political life (El Saadawi, 1980; Lorde, 1984). Discourse action, according to Jane Braaten (1995) requires intersubjective action with others, as well as solidarity, based on which she proposes the concept of 'communicative thinking' as an alternative to Habermas'

⁵ The emergence of the bourgeois public sphere, according to Habermas, can be found in newspapers and weekly journals, all increasingly popular forums of public discussion in early modern Europe. These forums – as 'weapons of party politics' – were used by educated elites in political debates to question political authorities (Eliot and Lemert, 2014).

communicative rationality and reason. In contrast to the abstract rationalist discourse, which is based only on institutionalised procedures reflected in the socio-historical context of Habermas' work, communicative thinking emerges as a useful concept in respecting differences in everyday life, opening up possibilities for rethinking and transforming conversational politics. This conversational and dialogical aspect delineates the scope of this research, allowing me to explore the positions of different groups of people in society, specifically, women activists and bloggers in the MENA region.

In moving away from universalistic tendencies of rationality characterising the Enlightenment and Western, Anglo-American theoretical traditions, feminist theorists argue that discourse action must move towards political listening, inclusion and access to interactive communication that encompasses the complexity of everyday life and takes into consideration the diversity of contexts of socio-political action (Bickford, 1996; Chambers, 1995; Gould, 1996). Indeed, Chambers (1995, pp. 176-7) argues that, in order to become a "democratised forum", the public debate must address difference, inclusion and possibilities of action. She argues that this is not only a matter of rational institutional rules and procedures (in the Habermasian sense), but also of a political culture of active engagement in public debate, cooperativeness and willingness to take responsibility.

In the context of this research, the notion of "political listening" proposed by Bickford (1996, pp. 23-4) offers a deeper explanation of the ways in which intersubjective communication in the public sphere can be an inclusive concept. The notion implies interdependence between the speaker and the listener, who are understood as different-but-equal (Pajnik, 2006, p. 391). This conceptualisation provides us with a practice of citizenship that gives attention both to individual perceptions, but also moves the attention from the subject to the world.

Fraser (1992) contends that, in practice, democracy has significant limitations in achieving equality in political debate and consequently in the public sphere. The public sphere is constituted of conditions and practices of social life where equality depends on participation and representation of manifold standpoints and interests (Fraser, 1992; Vatrapu et al., 2008). Hence, individual voice can be frequently put off by fear or past experiences of dismissal in attempting to access the public sphere. Put in other words by Gould (1996, p. 175), "there are voices that are mute in this discussion".

Indeed, bypassing the “muting” and the lack of consideration towards women’s institutional incapacity to bring certain issues and opinions to light, is what I am interested in. To clarify, the Habermasian model of the public sphere seems to close down consideration of the relationships and power dynamics between the public sphere, political speech and institutional repression, which is precisely the situation where the most pressing problems arise. Thus, the default male, bourgeois, Western constructions of the public sphere must be redefined in order to provide a basis for freedom and democratic values in the digital context of the 21st century. In this direction, we need to look deeper into the alternatives offered by women activists and bloggers on the ground.

2.1.2 Inclusive political narrative

Inclusivity is a criterion for political legitimacy that implies the ability to transcend individual interests through conversation among individuals, an act that involves interaction, listening and responding. Thus, validation of differences must be seen as a starting point in redefining public action and space (Gould, 1996).

In this direction, Young (2000) focuses on embodied forms of expression, such as emotions and different viewpoints and demands of individuals as well as groups that are minorities or otherwise marginalised. Gender, racial, economic and cultural differences that are embedded in the needs of the marginalised might have equal value as speech acts in Habermas’ normative assumption, but in practice, they are excluded from the public discourse (Pajnik, 2006). Thus, in the context of this research, I follow Young’s (2000) suggestion to expand political action to include three types of inclusive political communication that are relevant and useful to explore: 1) greeting and public acknowledgement; 2) affirmative rhetoric; and 3) narrative and situated knowledge.

- 1) Greeting or public address is an expression of acknowledgement of discourse or communicative equality, which implies the possibility of establishing political interactions (namely “communicative political gestures”) of diverse segments in the political public on the basis of trust and listening. Young (2000, p. 61) refers to this moment as going beyond the mere expression of arguments, which involves coherent linguistic formulation together with other discursive signs. This is a mode of communication in which members of the public recognise the plurality of groups and perspectives that constitute the public sphere.
- 2) Moving beyond the rational-irrational speech dichotomy in understanding rhetoric, Young argues for including affirmative dimensions of rhetoric in communicative

action: (a) the emotional tone of the discourse (uttered with fear, joy, anger or other expressions of passion); (b) the use of figures of speech (such as metaphor, puns, along with humorous, ironic, etc. styles); and (c) forms beyond speech, such as visual media, signs, banners, street theatre and demonstrations (Young, 2000, p. 65). The reformulation of rhetoric in communicative action suggests a recognition and rethinking of conflict, in which certain groups of citizens might be excluded due to alternative forms of expression. Rhetoric has the important function of situating those seeking to persuade others in relation to their audience and therefore the reflexiveness in the sense of active listening to various speakers.

- 3) Narrative and situated forms of knowledge represent the third way to expand the conceptualisation in the direction of inclusiveness of communicative action in the public sphere. This form addresses conditions in which the dominant experience and the values of the majority influence minorities and marginalised groups. This often takes the form of domination, repression, devaluation or demanding change to comply with the dominant discourse in the public sphere. Hence, narration and storytelling can be a means and a strategy to: (a) illuminate marginalised perspectives in order to explain and describe experience that has been silenced, (b) empower the excluded to speak out against discrimination and injustice; (c) challenge the supposedly neutral, unbiased, and standardised principles of validity norms; and (d) create links between the history of socially differentiated groups and their perceptions of the history of society as a whole in social relationships (Young, 2002, pp. 65, 119-20).

Consequently, inclusion is not achievable simply by assuming the formal and abstract equality of all citizens, but by valuing diverse models of communication as necessary, important and meaningful in democratic discussions. Young's (2000) three moments of political narrative in treating the public sphere as a more inclusive concept are a very important framework for this research. In this thesis, I draw upon these aspects of greeting or public address, affirmative rhetoric, narrative and storytelling to convey the situated knowledges of the differently positioned – through women's blogging in the MENA – to uncover the injustices and systemic gaps that disadvantage marginalised groups, including women, ethnic minorities and migrants.

In this regard, in the sections that follow, I will discuss why a holistic/integrated theoretical and analytical framework is useful in my exploration of a feminist standpoint re-framing and reconceptualisation of political participation and the public sphere, using the 2011

Arab uprisings as a case study. Within this framework, I will discuss (in Chapter Five) the reasons why blogging as feminist practice provides situated knowledge(s) that are both critical and political, as they are expressed in environments with particular social, historical and economic challenges in achieving greeting, public acknowledgement and political listening.

2.1.3 The myth of the public sphere as a unitary space

The public sphere is, in fact, far from unitary. I will now focus on feminist literature looking at other understandings of the public sphere: one comprising a multitude of diverse communicative spaces. These heterogeneous spheres do not have equal access to public discourse, nor the same levels of impact on political agendas. Some are socially and politically more mainstream and located closer to decision-making power. The need for collective group identity formation in the form of counter-public spheres that offer alternative political pressure for social change is particularly stressed by Fraser (1992). For this reason, a key aspect of the public sphere is the ideal of equal access of citizens to engage in democratic practices at precisely the point where challenges are encountered.⁶

Fraser (2014) explains that Habermas' formulation of the public sphere is limited to a "Westphalian political imaginary". She suggests that the all-inclusive (gender-neutral), single, bourgeois public sphere should be replaced by a model of "competing publics in multiple public spheres serving various classes, sectors of society, including a subaltern public sphere" (p.71). This explains why we need to revise and scale up the concept of the public sphere rather than to abandon it. Although political theory has good examples of research on how global governance must be democratised, it seems that the construction of the public sphere beyond the nation-state has received very little critical attention. Fraser advocates for more studies on the transnational public sphere and takes a critical stand by saying that in order to support emancipation struggles, it is not enough for cultural and media studies researchers to focus on mapping existing communication flows. Instead, she urges critical social and political scholars to reconsider the central premise of public sphere theory regarding the legitimacy and effectiveness of public opinion (2014, pp. 33-4).

I take this need on board; moreover, Fraser's framework can be used in my analysis of the public sphere as it applies to my research question exploring feminist blogging. Which

⁶ The formal and informal mechanisms that hinder truly democratic participation in 'civic spaces' is addressed also by literature on political communication (Coleman and Freelon, 2015). Literature however, often fails to adequately address the aspect of gender.

aspects of feminist blogging provide more light in reconceptualising the public sphere in terms of efficiency, legitimacy and accountability? What are the possibilities of exercising political pressure, destabilising power, or enhancing efforts to mitigate human rights violations and oppression of minorities? Fraser's two-tier model of the public sphere (moving from the nation-state to a global society) projects the strengths and weaknesses of the public sphere on a transnational level:

A critical conception of the public sphere must consider the need to construct new addresses for public opinion, in the sense of new, transnational public powers that possess the administrative capacity to solve transnational problems. The challenge, accordingly, is twofold: on the one hand, to create new, transnational public powers; on the other, to make them accountable to new, transnational public spheres. (Fraser 2014, p. 33)

In addition, Fraser's (1992, p. 123) theorisation of the "subaltern counterpublics" is described as "parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counter-discourses to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs".

Furthermore, Harcourt (2000) talking about the "cyberevolution" as a new era for women, uses the term 'glocality' to describe "politics based on place-based needs" that's connected through networks, weaving together different groups in ways that can no longer be placed into political categories that can be deemed national, regional or international. The concept of glocality challenges the sense of polarity between the local and the global – as if the two were entirely separate. Instead, it positions the global as very closely mapped onto the local (Harcourt, 2000). I utilise this concept by Harcourt (2000) in my analysis of feminist blogging to understand the transcendence of situated knowledges through local-global space(s) to inform global audiences via blogging.

Both Harcourt's glocality and Fraser's theorisation on subaltern counterpublics are thus utilised in my findings, and in dialogue with feminist standpoint theory, to signify new directions and characteristics of today's transnational feminisms (Fraser, 2014; Harcourt, 2000). To signal the heterogeneity of online communities and contest the idea of a singular public sphere, I explore these concepts to understand and analyse the political work and interactive engagement being undertaken in and through women's blogs in the MENA region. Thus, I bring these feminist theorists together along with feminist standpoint

theory, to explain the ways they work in complementarity to produce new understandings of political participation and expand the notion of the public sphere beyond nation-states.

I am not the first to use the concept of “publics” to explore digital life (boyd, 2008; Papacharissi, 2015). There is a consensus in feminist literature about the existence and operation of multiple ‘mini-public spheres’ (Youngs, 2009, p. 132) or ‘networked counterpublics’ (Keller, 2013, 2017), which better promote inclusion and participation compared to a monolithic and homogenous understanding of an overarching public sphere. Yet I believe that the concept is not exhausted in its full application to online political participation in the digital age, especially with regards to women as a distinct social group often excluded from analyses of the public sphere. There is also a diverse body of literature addressing how different media serve as channels for “affective expression” in historical moments demanding social change (Papacharissi, 2015). However, literature on new media and their role in collapsing public-private boundaries, on one hand, and amplifying and remediating the tradition of storytelling on the other, often overlook the diverse and intersecting gender aspects.

2.2. Feminist standpoint: an integrated theoretical framework

Jorgensen and Phillips (2002) talk about how discourse analysis, as a theory and method, must be combined with other theories for a more holistic approach. In doing discourse analytical research, my starting point was a combination of different theories and methods, forming an integrated framework. I relied upon knowledge that is context-specific and can be produced by different perspectives, rather than universal knowledge that is based on neutral and context-free premises (Jorgensen and Phillips, 2002).

Specifically, building upon the feminist reflections towards expanding the concept of the public sphere, I have chosen an integrated theoretical framework by focusing on the alternative narratives and situated knowledges of women. To do so, I have chosen feminist standpoint theory as a key theoretical framework for my analysis, as it emphasises that knowledge can be produced from the everyday experiences, words and standpoints of women located and analysed within broader power relations and social structures (Harding, 1987; Hartsock, 1983; Smith, 1987, 1999). Feminist standpoint theory is one of the most developed strands of theory expanding critical social constructionist research (Collins, 1986; Harding, 1991; Harraway, 1996; Jorgensen and Philips, 2002; Smith, 1987). Drawing on my research question, I propose an integrated framework using women’s blogs as case studies to discuss the discursive ways that the expression of these experiences

produce situated knowledges that are both objective and political (Harding and Norberg, 2005).⁷ In this way, I explore the concepts of political participation and the public sphere beyond traditional Western terms, and explore the possibilities for a reconceptualization. In doing this, I employ a feminist standpoint in blogging as political practice in times of political repression and revolt.⁸

Feminist standpoint theory is based on the following key theoretical principles: (1) knowledge is socially positioned; (2) marginalised groups are socially positioned and able to be aware of situations and ask questions that the non-marginalised may not be aware of; and (3) research focusing on power relations must address the lives of those marginalised. In this way, feminist standpoint theory contributes significantly to epistemology, philosophy, methodological debates in the social sciences, as well as political activism (Bowell, 2011; O'Brien Hallstein, 2000).

A standpoint is not simply an individual perspective provided by someone who happens to be a woman; it is earned through the experience of collective political struggle and an achievement of historically shared, group-based experiences (Collins, 1997; Harding 2005; Hartsock, 1998). These critical standpoints reveal problems and raise questions that would not otherwise be asked. These can then become research agendas, policy initiatives and reform, and ultimately, through challenging social and political structures, social change. This thesis aims to contribute to this strand of theories drawing from the different standpoints reflected in the women's blog posts. Blogging offers significant methodological advantages in gaining knowledge and understanding on practices against oppression during socio-political transitions as expressed through language. Acquiring knowledge via standpoints provides a significant framework for the empirical part of this thesis, because blogging as feminist practice provides the ground for more complete and less distorted knowledge on how activists organise, network and share information; the types of coalitions they build; and how they redefine political participation in the shrinking space of the traditionally male-dominated public sphere(s).

2.2.1 Women's experience and situated knowledges

I will now discuss the above mentioned three key theoretical premises of feminist standpoint theories connecting them to my research question that reveal the important role

⁷ Harding discusses strong and weak objectivity in response to the status of knowledge production and how situated knowledges coming from women's experiences offer stronger and embodied objectivity.

⁸ I will also discuss at a later stage the important implications in the discussion about the potential emergence of a new wave in feminism, often referred in the literature as a "fourth wave".

of seeking knowledge from the positionalities of feminist blogging in accessing the public sphere(s).

The first key theoretical premise that feminist standpoint theorists and literature call us to address is the fact that knowledge has traditionally been seen as universal and objective. Authors that question the meaning and source of knowledge must reflect back to their own subjectivity (Jorgensen and Philips, 2002). The work of postmodernist theorists such as Richard Rorty and Michel Foucault represent the situated knowledges (Haraway, 1988) of a particular social group – European-American, masculine, and based on racial and economic privilege (Haraway, 1989-90). So, the aforementioned questions remain: What about social groups that have no access to intellectual capital and no say in the knowledge produced affecting their lives? What about the social context of knowledge? What about the knowledge coming from collaboration? To provide answers to these questions, I approach women bloggers individually and as a group, as agents and subjects of knowledge.

Feminist standpoint theory as formulated by Smith (1987) contends that the ideals of modern Western science relating to objectivity and abstraction both reflect and reinforce the marginalisation of women in a patriarchal and capitalist society. Therefore, Smith suggests a sociology based on a standpoint of women. Not because women can see reality differently because of their biological difference, but because women as a social group have different experiences to men as a result of the gendered distribution of labour. Although science presents itself as gender-neutral, just as scientists distance themselves from the object of study, in reality, it is based on and advances the worldviews and interests of men (Jorgensen and Phillips, 2002). Thus, knowledge is a social product that is produced by particular individuals and groups that share certain kinds of experiences that of course depend on their opportunities, their status in society and are always located in historical movements, social, cultural and geographical contexts.⁹ Feminist blogging produces alternative types of knowledge located in a particular time and space (knowledge of the world).

In Haraway's terms, these situated knowledges constitute shared aspects of multiplicity, of being locatable (in time and space) and being embodied in different cultures and operating

⁹ According to Jorgensen and Phillips (2002), the social constructionist premise is that an individual's positioning (in time and space) across cultural and historical contexts provides different taken-for-granted understandings of the world. Based on this premise, feminist standpoint theorists have led the development of theories about situated knowledge as the starting point for most feminist research.

as social and collective points of view (standpoints) of specific forms of oppression (Haraway, 1991; Hartsock, 1996; 1983). These standpoints give us access to the above-mentioned important axes of domination (such as gender, race, class and sexuality) on which we need to insist in order to fulfil our obligation to maintain the categories of oppression, exploitation and white supremacy. By recognising themselves as the situated knowledges of the marginalised, they provide alternative visions (“alternative knowledges” in Hartsock’s words) of looking at the subject of knowledge that can become accountable and engaged. The struggles that marginalised groups represent and express move beyond survival, and open up the possibilities for changing systematic power relations. It is within this understanding of alternative knowledges and different types of political participation that I conceptualise feminist blogging.

Hartsock (1996) recognises building coalitions and alliances as important functions for groups that have been dominated and marginalised. She asserts “in any form of coalition building or alliance formation, close attention must be given to specific situations of each group as defined by axes of, gender, race, class and sexuality”, because the perspectives of marginalised individuals and groups have been systematically made invisible. We must recognise that the subordination of each group is often maintained by different mechanisms that force us to examine our experience through the eyes of those who dominate (Hartsock, 1996).

2.2.2 Women as a distinct social group

The second key theoretical premise of feminist standpoint theorists is that women are a distinct social group. The social location of marginalised groups provides them with the ability to be aware of situations and ask questions that the non-marginalised may not be aware of. Women represent a special group that has been overlooked and oppressed both in society and science. Therefore, this premise has two major consequences: a) the aim of feminist research is to make women and their lives and their experiences visible to fight against oppressive structures;¹⁰ and, b) the feminist standpoint gives rise to significant discussions about “how one can make visible and criticise dominant, naturalised understandings by locating oneself in a particular position, and how the anchoring of the knowledge produced by the researcher can be theorised” (Jorgensen and Phillips, 2002).

¹⁰ Feminism provides a clearer political direction towards the critique of taken-for-granted knowledge and what should be criticised (Jorgensen and Phillips, p. 191).

Smith (1987) uses the experiences of women to create a platform from which she is able to observe the dominant, taken-for-granted understandings and criticise them. She does not suggest that women's experiences always lead to a feminist and critical perspective on the dominant power relations, as both sexes understand themselves and the world around them through the dominant discourse. A feminist understanding of the world has to be actively constructed, but the conditions for a feminist understanding are in the marginalisation of women's lives and work. In the context of this thesis, women's experiences fall outside patriarchal frameworks of understanding, and this 'outside' provides the resource (which is also an epistemic advantage) for the feminist critique of the dominant and undisputed understandings.

Seeing the world from the oppressor's dominant view and at the same time from the marginalised/oppressed point of view, a critical perspective emerges, along with the potential to criticise the ruling power. This is an aspect that I explore in the act of feminist blogging. In Smith's (1987) theory, women's experiences represent a site outside the dominant discourse which can be used as a starting point for the problematisation of naturalised understandings as oppressive to women.

Collins (1986) addresses the issue of homogeneity in feminist standpoint theory by introducing the concept of the outsider within in order to link gender and race. She suggests that black women historically have been outsiders within societies, going into white people's homes as cleaners and caregivers, for example, but never accepted as equals. This shared experience of always being both outside and inside can form a basis, according to Collins, for black, feminist thinking, in which both a theory and a political strategy can be developed, directed to furthering equality between gender, classes and ethnic groups. Collins (1998) later also stressed that women are different and that black women do not represent a homogeneous group either. Thus, certain groups of women under certain circumstances can share the same life conditions and these common conditions can form the basis for a specific worldview or standpoint.

2.2.3 Research on power relations must address the lives of the marginalised

The third key theoretical premise emphasised in the literature, is that feminist standpoint theory offers a strategy to distance oneself from the centre, in order to look at the centre from the periphery and challenge power by addressing the needs marginalised groups. Another way to do this is to move away from the centre in time and space, an opportunity that is provided when exploring feminist blogging during the 2011 Arab uprisings.

Haraway's theory is useful in establishing an alternative understanding of the world, by focusing on the gaps in the structure rather than viewing it from the periphery. Haraway (1991) uses the figure of the cyborg to explore, among other things, our ideas about identity. The cyborg is a mix of organism and machine, nature and culture, and it therefore collapses the dualisms existing in the Western tradition. The long list of such dichotomies (self/other, man/woman, civilised/primitive, and so on) contribute to the maintenance of a system of domination in which men dominate women, the 'civilised' dominate the 'primitive' and so on (1991, p. 177). Haraway employs the cyborg metaphor to identify and criticise these dichotomies. Thus, I understand that research, much like our identities, can never be completely 'pure'; but what it can potentially do is disrupt our understandings and reassemble them in new and better ways from the perspectives of those "muted" in the public discussion.

2.2.4 Critical discourse analysis as methodological framework

Based on the key theoretical principles of feminist standpoint theory explored in the previous sections, I have chosen women's narratives through blogging as a space from which questions about political participation and feminism can be asked from the point of view of the marginalised. Through blogging, women share their stories, express their ideas and opinions, and advocate virtually for issues relating to gender equality. As I pointed out in the Introduction, I approach feminist blogging as a contemporary continuation of journaling and diary writing as 'feminist practice'. Building on Huff's (1989) history of journaling, I focus on the common characteristics between the two. First, blogging, as a form of diary writing provides testimonies that can be re-read and reflected on. Second, journaling and blogging have the ability to build ties between the reader and the writer. Third, diaries and blogs focus on community over hierarchy, and communication over authority. Fourth, journaling and blogging provide a diversity of approaches and standpoints. Fifth, diary writing and blogging share the tendency to connect the inner with the outer.

I take as a starting point that discursive practices in the media help shape new forms of politics, influenced as they are by societal forces that do not have a solely discursive nature (for example, the structure of the political systems in the MENA countries and the institutional structure of the local media). Critical discourse analysis allows me to interpret language-as-discourse as a form of action (cf. Austin, 1962) through which women as a particular social group can bring social change, which is socially and historically situated

and in dialogue with other social practices (Jorgensen, 2002). Thus, I explore the links between language use and social practice for social change towards the achievement of more equal power relations in socio-political processes and the society. I take a critical discourse analytical approach to complement my feminist standpoint framework because this research is emancipatory in spirit and from the point of view of oppressed social groups. Additionally, the literature points that discourse analysis is not sufficient in itself for analysis of wider social practice, since the latter encompasses both discursive and non-discursive elements (Chouliaraki and Fairclough, 1999; Bolander, 2013; Fairclough 1995; Fairclough and Wodak, 1997; Jorgensen and Phillips, 2002). For this reason, the use of critical discourse analysis as method – part of an integrated framework – allows me to complement the social feminist standpoint as a necessary addition pointed in the literature (my methodological choices are explained in Chapter Three).

My approach to discourse is based on the principle that texts should never be analysed in isolation, but can only be understood in relation to other texts, as well as their social, cultural, political and historical context. The governing principle to answer my research question is that discursive practices from feminist blogging are in dialogue with other social practices (such as working, parenting, schooling, veiling, fasting, female genital mutilation, child marriage). In that sense, discourse is socially embedded. From the disciplinary field of sociology and by drawing on discourse analysis, I engage in a feminist standpoint analysis of the relations between discursive practices in blogging and political practice. One of the purposes of my analysis is to show the links between these discursive practices and the wider social and cultural developments and structures during the 2011 Arab uprising.

I attempt to capture such discourses and meanings in feminist blogs, as they provide a conversational narrative where we understand ourselves and each other through changing stories, and sets of meanings and statements that are always under re-interpretation through multiple readings. Feminist blogging offers a unique standpoint because women are writing embodied in specific standpoints and social contexts, but they write for socio-political purposes. This fluid and dynamic approach I believe expands the possibilities of understanding, fosters communication and dialogue, and supports the inclusion of multiple perspectives.

2.3 Framing political participation

There is a growing literature exploring the ways in which political blogs can function as public spheres for creating, shaping and influencing public and political discourse (Eltantawy and Wiest, 2011; Gabriel, 2016; Harris, 2008; Keller, 2012, 2013, 2017; Michalska and Lilleker, 2017; Vatrappu, et al., 2008). We must rethink the concepts of political participation and citizenship in an era characterised by globalisation, the propagation of new communication technologies, and other social, political, cultural, and economic transformations and crises. This multidimensionality of participation can foster democratic processes and social capital through citizen engagement, constituting important markers of democracies (Zuniga, et al., 2012).

Political participation is under constant re-conceptualisation and has been discussed by scholars in several disciplines, from social and political theory, to philosophy, to communications and cultural studies. In mainstream politics, political participation is linked to a traditional definition of citizenship, leaving women in a precarious position. Over the years, scholars from social and political sciences have employed a flexible approach to the concept of citizenship to describe a variety of political practices beyond mainstream politics and the strict confines of the nation-state; especially with the emergence of Internet-enabled communication technologies. However, in looking at the multiple practices of political participation, social and political theory scholarship often fails to adequately address women's citizenship practices, especially during periods of socio-political transition and reform.

Political participation represents a crucial area for women and women's groups: the struggle against diverse forms of oppression in claiming their space in both the private and public spheres is ongoing. Thus, online activism through social media and blogging can bring new layers of understanding about modern day political engagement. Social groups quickly self-assemble, radically overcoming constraints on the size and scope of group efforts to gather global support for human rights action (Schuster, 2013). This openness provides an alternative space for 'marginal voices', especially women that have been excluded from positions of power and with often limited access to the mainstream public sphere. In analysing human rights discourse and gender mainstreaming, this openness helps encompass the diversity of women's experiences and to enhance women's

empowerment, allowing for intersectional approaches¹¹ to be expressed (Cockburn and Hunter, 1999; Yuval-Davis, 1997, 1999, 2006).

Another reason social researchers must bring women's technology-enabled social and political engagement to centre stage, is because they signify new directions in activism, the construction of new participatory communities, and the development of new kinds of "public selves" as citizens and political actors (Harris, 2008, p. 482). We must approach feminist blogging as a new example of political activism contributing to 'participatory culture' and 'transversal politics', where community building and diversified networking have a prominent role (Michalska and Lilleker, 2017).

It is not possible, nor is it my intention, to address all of the interdisciplinary literature; as noted, my focus is on feminist standpoint scholarship, and social and political studies that feature women's political engagement at their core. It is from this scholarship that I will explore a more dialogic conceptualisation of political participation that focuses on individual voice and the conversational narratives that bring to the surface the individual's responsibility and agency for social change. At the same time, I approach political participation as an open concept, so as to potentially redefine it through my own data.

¹¹ hook's seminal book *Ain't I a Woman* (1981) was pivotal in drawing attention to the need for multiple feminisms. hooks' work on black womanhood gives emphasis on the intersectionality of factors like class, race, religion and sexual orientation, creating a diversity of experience that affects the extent to which sexism acts as an oppressive force in the lives of individual women (hooks, 2000). Intersectionality has been receiving feminist academic attention since the 1980s when the term was introduced by Crenshaw (1989), followed by debates on diversity, social divisions, the politics of difference, identity politics and transversal politics (Anthias and Yuval-Davis, 1992; Benhabib, 2002; Cockburn and Hunter, 1999; Fraser, 1997,1993; Yuval-Davis, 1997, 1999, 2006).

CHAPTER THREE – METHODOLOGY

3.1 Rationale of a feminist research design

With this thesis, I aim to highlight the linguistic dimension of blogging as a feminist act. Discursive practices, in the ever-expanding new media, play a critical part in shaping new forms of social and cultural reproduction and politics. Thus, there are epistemic advantages of focusing on women's experiences and meanings constructed through their political commentary via blogging as the "outsider within" their societies (Collins, 1986). Critical discourse analysis allows me to interpret language as discourse both in terms of action (cf. Austin, 1962) through which women can bring social change, but also as a form of action that is socially and historically situated, and in dialogue with other social aspects (Fawcett and Hearn, 2004; Jorgensen and Philips, 2002). In this regard, I empirically analyse the language in blogs within their social context by carrying out a linguistic textual analysis of the social interaction taking place in feminist blogs. It should be clarified here that for the purposes of this thesis I use the term Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) in a wider sense and not in its methodological capacity, which involves approaches based more or less on linguistic characteristics. In other words, I use CDA because I approach discourse as social practice and I analyse how language interrogates power. Given that this thesis presents its own integrated framework of thematic analysis, specifically on employing/investigating the three elements of inclusive political narrative by Iris Marion Young (2000), I have not relied on any of the approaches in CDA to present the findings. I further elaborate on this in the "Data Analysis" section later in this chapter.

The conversational narrative that takes place in women's blogs offers a space where questions can be raised about how social realities are produced, maintained or challenged (especially with regards to political participation, social justice and social change). My focus was on 'how' so as to reveal valuable perceptions, attitudes and perspectives that would not be accessible through traditional quantitative research. Using qualitative research allowed me to present narratives, stories and statements which shed light on how women understand, conceptualise and take political action. This approach allowed me a better understanding of the diversification of actions and connections enabled through blogging.

3.2 Blogs as case studies

Based on the integrated theoretical and analytical discussion described in Chapter Two, I have chosen blogs as units of analysis for accessing and exploring the stories and narratives of women activists as a marginalised group in countries where political commentary would not otherwise be identified, analysed and shared. In addition, blogs, along with other Internet research methods, offer a number of practical advantages: ease of access; the sample can be from a wide geographical area; and the ability to examine more texts compared to print media.

A case study strategy assisted me in gaining deeper understanding about the role of feminist writing and blogging during the 2011 uprisings and the socio-political transitions resulting in different contexts in the MENA region. Case study methods are used for an in-depth examination of feminist blogging as a particular example of individual political expression and activism with global outreach for exposing corruption and state abuse, but also for social change. At the same time, case studies represent a holistic way of understanding events, collecting data, analysing information and reporting results. It is also a holistic way to explore commonalities and differences in participatory strategies and activism (for example, networking, information sharing, community-building and coalitions across social movements for resistance). The case study strategy has been useful to collect the most relevant information looking at specific social and cultural contexts in line with feminist standpoint analysis.

I note here that I approached the blogs and bloggers as feminist voices from the MENA region without a predefined expectation of which countries would ultimately be chosen as cases. The focus was on the quality and diversity of the case studies that would provide the best possible answers to my research question. The case selection consciously focused on prominent feminist voices from these communities seeking to expand their audience and exercise pressure for social change. To that end, I sought to ensure the inclusion of perspectives of women involved in transnational advocacy networks pushing for social change, while also actively engaged in grassroots political activism in their countries to influence local socio-political transitions and processes.

3.3 Data

I selected ten blogs authored and facilitated by prominent women's and human rights activists, blogging about the 2011 Arab uprisings and the socio-political transitions in

Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, Tunisia, and Yemen. Blogs were chosen based on meeting all of the following criteria:

1. The blog's content must address human rights activism, feminist activism, political participation and democratic processes in countries facing socio-political transitions in the MENA region.
2. The author(s) of the blog should be from a country facing socio-political transitions in the MENA region as part of the 2011 Arab uprisings. Specifically, countries with authoritarian regimes and bad records on human rights,¹² where female activists are stretching boundaries of participation and promoting alternative public discourse.
3. The blog must publish stories written by feminist activists.
4. The blog's audience must be not only local but also international.
5. The blog's working language must be English (or, include English).

I primarily focused my analysis on the written text of the blog posts including the reader's commentary. Based on my research question and the literature reviewed I put together a set of predefined thematic categories. These were refined during the initial selection of blogs that met my criteria. I maintained a flexible approach to allow for emerging concepts to be included during the selection process, which meant defining the categories was an on-going process from the research design until the data collection.

Table 1 Thematic categories and associated concepts used for the selection of blog posts

Thematic categories	Initial associated concepts	Concepts that emerged
Political participation (voice/action/agency)	Citizenship, citizen, democratic values, elections, political parties, human rights action, online activism, protest, justice, access, freedom of speech/opinion expressed, network(ing), coalition, mobilisation, demonstration, petition, campaign,	Peaceful assembly, rally, strike, react, volunteer, youth, resistance, citizen/data journalism, cyber activism.

¹² Based on human rights and freedoms covered in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Annex I).

	solidarity, civil society, NGOs.	
Feminism and public sphere (space)	Gender equality, womanhood, LGBTQI, patriarchy, margin, discrimination, exclusion.	Private sphere, public sphere, rape, sexual revolution, feminist spaces, feminist voices, paternalism.
Socio-political transitions/processes (power/authority)	Regime, authoritarian, conflict, war, violence, detention, harassment, travel bans/restricted movement, corruption, discrimination, legislation, constitution, elections.	Legal gaps, arrest(s), violence against women, women human rights defenders (WHRDs), sexual harassment, virginity tests, kidnapping, censorship, revolution, 'Arab Spring', security forces.

Secondary data were also collected from interviews of bloggers published in online newspapers and global media and activists' platforms such as YouTube. I considered these aspects of added value not only for my data analysis and gaining context specific knowledge, but also as part of validation of the quality of the sample.¹³ I have also included in my data-set blog posts that were published in international media and/or civil society platforms and re-published in the blogs (I call this strategy 'cross-posting'), because I wanted to analyse the diversification of discursive practices through blogging in transcending the local (micro) level and reaching out to the global (macro) level. I read each blog up until the end of my data collection period (June 10, 2018), and purposefully

¹³ I also saved information on the timelines of the revolutions for each country to make sure I was well informed about the social, political and historical contexts and milestones relevant to my research. Taking into consideration for example, the specificities of the ongoing Syrian war and the additional waves of revolutions that followed 2011 (such as in Lebanon in October 2019). They may fall outside the period of focus in this research, but deserved attention for a complete analysis.

selected entries based upon their relevance to the research question and predefined thematic categories. I came across many interesting discussions throughout my research that I am unfortunately unable to include in this work, and I hope to return to these in a future research project.

Thirteen blogs were accessed principally through a purposive and snowballing method via recommendations made by civil society networks and feminist activists. As a member of human rights and women's rights activist networks in the MENA region, I was able to access information and request recommendations about prominent feminist blogs facilitated by women human rights defenders and activists. I approached two regional human rights networks who provided suggestions and approved a list of women's blogs in the MENA region: The EuroMed Rights Network¹⁴ (more specifically, I am a member of the Gender and Women's Rights Working Group) and the Euro-Mediterranean Women's Foundation.¹⁵ This helped me ensure that prominent narratives from different social and cultural backgrounds were included in the sample. Ultimately, ten blogs that met my predefined criteria were selected and included in my study covering the aforementioned five countries.

Purposive sampling was the most appropriate method to identify and select the blogs that had significant outreach to civil society and were authored and facilitated by prominent women activists in the MENA region. The bloggers were either self-identified feminists or were identified as such by human rights civil society networks. This allowed me to access women's insights regarding the situation in their countries with on-going socio-political transitions, as well as their accounts on citizens' protests, demonstrations and uprisings against human rights violations. In line with other online discourse analytical research, proportionality was not my primary concern, but quick access to content relating to my research question covering different geographical, social, cultural and political locations (Silverman, 2014, 2013). The main advantage of this approach is the ability to critically think and define the parameters of the blogs to be studied at an early stage (Miles and

¹⁴ Euro-Med Rights is a network of more than 80 human rights organisations, institutions and individuals based in 30 countries in the Euro-Mediterranean region. Created in 1997 in response to the Barcelona Declaration and the establishment of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, the network stands by universal human rights principles and supports cooperation and dialogue across and within borders [www.euromedrights.org]

¹⁵ The Euro-Mediterranean Women's Foundation is a non-profit independent organisation launched in 2014. It is structured as a network of networks, bringing together all gender equality actors in the Euro-Mediterranean space with the aim of: advancing the common fight for equal rights of women and men to participate in political, economic, civil and social life; eradicating all forms of violence and discrimination against women and girls; and encouraging a change in attitude and behaviour in favour of gender equality [<https://www.euromedwomen.foundation>]

Huberman, 1994). Therefore, I was able to choose my case studies based on their prominence in the Arab women's movements during the socio-political processes following the uprisings in December 2010.

Taking into consideration the specificities of the diverse socio-political, cultural and historical contexts in the countries of the MENA region, a snowballing approach in sampling, as explained below, helped me maintain a flexible but targeted stance towards data collection. In this regard, in the process of identification and selection of blogs, I found recommendations from blogs and bloggers writing about feminism, gender equality and human rights in countries in the MENA Region. For example, due to the ongoing Syrian conflict and the restrictions in democratic assembly and freedom of speech, it has been very difficult to identify credible blogs facilitated by a feminist activist on the ground that provided blog posts in English. For this reason, I reached out to the bloggers and feminist activists who suggested names of other blogs.

In sum, snowball sampling involved primary data sources (bloggers and activists from the two human rights/feminist networks) nominating other potential blogs to be included in the research (referred to as chain referral in the literature). The snowball method has also been recommended by scholars studying blogs where there is a need to cover different geographical locations and difficult to find examples that fit the criteria of the research (boyd, 2006; Flick, 2009; MacKay and Dallaire, 2014; Mauthner, 2000; Schuster, 2013).

With regards to language, even though the working language of human rights and feminist activist blogs in the region under study tends to be Arabic,¹⁶ I purposively chose the blogs that published in English, as these target a global audience to communicate their stories and narratives beyond the local level.

The fact that the feminist bloggers in this study chose to blog in English and make their blogs accessible to an English-speaking audience (international, mostly Western) is a particularity worth delving into (in line with my research question and context). Writing in English was a key tactical advantage: it allowed the bloggers to translate the revolution(s) with a deep understanding of their history as perceived by outsiders. Also, they took on the task to provide a critical analysis of the revolution(s) from their perspective(s) as a marginalised social group – women as “outsiders within”.

¹⁶ I am conscious of the limitations around the fact that I do not speak or write in Arabic or French, the two most used languages in the case-study countries. I also acknowledge this limitation may have resulted in the omission of some narratives from the data collection.

The bloggers/blogs selected as case studies exhibit high levels of language capital, most commonly in English and French. The bloggers are highly educated (e.g. Ben Mhenni), researchers (e.g. Razan Ghazzawi, Mona Seif), journalists or quasi-professionalised journalists with affiliations to conventional media (e.g. Mona Eltahawy) or experts in the field of human rights (e.g. Mozn Hassan) for example. Some have experience of European and Western countries, outside the MENA region (e.g. Paola Salwan Daher), have a dual-nationality (e.g. Razan Ghazzawi), and could be considered to be well networked or more broadly characterised by an elaborated cosmopolitan capital.

I would like to stress here that, all of them have demonstrated high involvement in local grassroots activism in their political communities both offline and online. The critical knowledge they maintained and produced on social and political issues was therefore not only based on their formal education, but also derived from their empirical contribution to their societies, i.e., emerging from their own struggles against the authoritarian regimes and other oppressive systems. As alternative and critical voices, they were badly treated by state authorities, regimes and other actors representing hegemonic powers. At the same time, the bloggers in the case studies provide acknowledgement of their own positionalities and exhibit in their writing high standards of reflexivity and critical perspectives regarding privilege. They acknowledge that constructing an alternative and affirmative political narrative does not preclude enjoying a certain level and/or type of privilege. On the contrary, they hold themselves accountable, feeling a greater sense of responsibility to use their blogging to 'hold space' for others. In other words, they use their blogging as discourse action, as a platform and a medium for those who are muted in the public discourse. Even though their countries were differently impacted by the Arab uprisings in terms of challenges and opportunities for social change, they nevertheless shared some common experiences and tactics for international, mostly Western outreach. The discursive strategies in their blogs strived to amplify underrepresented voices and to provide an uncensored view from the streets and the realities faced in their countries. The interdiscursivity, as a common tactic, involved a constant critical analysis of political engagement on the ground, offline but also within and across online advocacy spaces. This reveals one of the key characteristics of the broader women movements' field in the region that signified an important socio-political shift during the specific historical moment of the 2011 Arab uprisings. These findings provide us with the conceptual tools that would allow for further in-depth discourse analysis and better understanding an ever-expanding social movements environment in the future.

3.3.1 The data collection process

Data collection was conducted between February and June 2018. The first step was to construct a list of blogs matching the aims and objectives of my research, based on a combination of purposive and snowball sampling (described above) to ensure that blogs authored by prominent human rights/women's rights defenders were included in the sample. During the initial phase of sample identification, the selected blogs were closely read to ensure the blog met the above criteria.

I followed Helen Snee's (2010) recommendations on the identification and selection of blogs in order to maintain a reflexive stance: a) I ensured that the criteria were linked to what was central to my research; b) I devised a way of keeping a record of the searches (Annex IV); and c) I sifted through lots of results. I rigorously explored the structure of each blog and went through a large amount of blog posts, and this process of data management and textual analysis took several months.

3.3.2 Keeping record of searches

I developed a Table (see Annex III – Table for the identification of blogs) to record the blog search, adapted from Snee (2010, p. 3). Each potential sample entry was recorded (13 in total) under the following items: reference number; blog link; country; blog author(s) name; other blog characteristics (for example, the working language(s) of the blog, the context of any references to human rights activism and feminism in socio-political transitions); and whether the blog was suitable for inclusion in the sample.

3.3.3 Managing the data

Taking into consideration that electronic media (email, blogs, webpages, and even social network profiles) have increased the size of data qualitative researchers can collect and analyse, the greatest challenge was managing the load of data (Silverman, 2014, 2013; Snee, 2010).

Once the identification and selection of blogs was completed, based on my predefined criteria, attention was given to dealing with the blog posts that would be included in my data-set from the ten blogs included as my case studies.

Blogs are multi-modal/multimedia texts, and alongside written elements, they also contain photos/visuals, video clips, hyperlinks to other websites, advertisements, and audio files. My focus was on the written textual aspects of the blogs. However, multimedia aspects

(wherever applicable) were also analysed to better understand the context, the diversity and the discursive strategies of blogs in struggles over the public sphere.

Although the purpose was not a visual semiotic analysis, in my findings chapter I explore how the discourses in the text of blog posts related to the visual narrative and I presented some key examples, whereby the visuals enhanced the textual discourses of the bloggers. I looked at visuals as part of the discourse, and how the pictures were used to support and strengthen the words of the women. The blog visuals were all saved in NVivo 12 as pdfs in the exact layout as featured on the blogs, to be analysed in light of their relation with the overall text of the blogs (such as composition and positioning) to show how they strengthened the words of women in their blogging practice. Thus, the process required a lot of reflexivity in choosing the visuals and precisely describing what I saw in relation to the visual and textual narrative of the blogger. I also saved selected screenshots of the examples of cross-blogging and cross-posting within the framework of collaborations with online advocacy platforms.

There were differences in the layout of each blog, an aspect that I took into consideration from early on in the research process. I had to maintain a flexible and reflexive stance for each blog. The selection from a large number of blog posts was ultimately based on the list of predefined thematic categories and associated concepts. Relevant blog posts were identified as follows: a) keywords emerging from my predefined thematic categories plugged into the search boxes of the selected blogs (including word stems); and b) thematic tags assigned by the blogger categorising the blog posts.

Some blogs lacked adequate search functionality, and in those cases I went through the monthly archive for the years 2010-2013 and selected the posts that were in English and had titles relevant to the predefined thematic categories and to my research question. I found a higher number of blog entries in the months of the peak of the uprisings and the transitional periods (in most cases, end-2010 to 2013). Chronological and quantitative limits were applied in order to further filter and manage the data based on the timelines of the uprisings in each country (as these differed). Posts with thematic relevance to my research questions published after 2013 were included in the sample as secondary data when I needed to ensure that the social and political developments and historical context in each country was taken into consideration. This was especially the case in countries like Syria and Yemen where the uprisings led to civil wars that are ongoing.

I also developed a Note-taking Template (Annex II), providing a semi-structured guide for note-taking while going through each of the ten blogs. This tool was useful in keeping a record for each blog and analysing the overall layout, visual aspects and interactivity levels of each blog. The blog's home page, the 'about' page and selected posts were also imported into NVivo 12 because they provided valuable information on the socio-political profile of the women. Using this software, I was able to save each blog post as a separate and chronologically ordered pdf. During the importing phase, NVivo allowed me to assign keyword tags associated with the emerging themes, which helped me develop a first-level coding of the data.

I devised a list of 269 blog posts (Annex IV – Data Collection Record) noting the following items: data entry number; name of blog; post URL link; post title; date published; and a column for additional comments/notes.

3.3.4 Data analysis

My data analysis was conducted on the text of 269 blog posts and my notes, so as to have a holistic view and define the emerging themes and ideas for my coding. This was done by carefully reading through each blog post entry using my data collection record (Annex IV) and taking short notes in the comments column on specific aspects of the particular text.

I used the data management and analysis software NVivo 12 which allowed me to categorise my data into categories. Apart from the texts of the specific blog posts I also imported secondary data such as articles, speeches, reports, statements, or relevant URL links that were cross-posted by the bloggers in their blog posts.

At the first level of coding, distinct concepts and categories in the data were identified in the text, forming the basic units of the analysis. In this way, the data were broken down into first-level concepts, or master headings, and second-level categories, or sub-headings. In NVivo 12, the data were organised and classified as 'nodes' and nested under master headings, which allowed for easy retrieval of all the specific quotes under each 'node' and category.

NVivo12 also helped me manage coding and transfer the concepts and categories emerging from my findings to an outline *Annex V- Mind Map*. This procedure facilitated the analysis of the blogs, using predefined and emerging codes and categories related to the research questions and my conceptual/analytical frameworks. During this process, keeping a flexible stance while going through the data in detail, I was seeking possible meanings and

connections among the data and with my analytical concepts, which I was able to further adjust on the mind map. Therefore, the codification process was more than just labelling bloggers' quotes, but also a continuous dialogical process helping me learn and understand about the feminist constructions of blogging practice, political participation and the public sphere.

The assigned nodes to answer my research questions were taken from the literature review in Chapter 2, including: voice and agency of women, constructions of the public sphere, challenges in accessing traditional political spheres, diversified political action in reclaiming public spheres, transcending public spaces, exploring the concept of 'glocality' and 'mini-public spheres', aspects of community- and coalition-building among bloggers and exploration of the characteristics of transnational feminism (Annex VI– Code Book).

Based on my theoretical and analytical frameworks, and the analysis of my findings, I developed a Schema to demonstrate a dynamic way of organising from grassroots action to global mobilisation and from the margin and exile to interwoven public spheres. I used this Schema during my analytical process to understand how these concepts and emerging findings connect to each other and adjusted the Schema accordingly. I provide a detailed description of this Schema as my original contribution for the analysis of blogs for political participation in my discussion chapter (Chapter Five).

At all stages of the data analysis, I kept memos and annotations reflecting on specific aspects of my analysis, ideas, and questions, and the special connections among my data. Each memo and annotation were dated, named and linked to a specific source (i.e. a pdf blog posts). My analytical process involved re-organising my memos and notes according to key ideas, concepts and processes. I compared my memos, looking for relationships between them and seeing how they fit together.

NVivo 12 also offered me the possibility to search my data-set using keywords, whilst letting me know the frequency and the referencing level of specific words in my data sources.

As part of my integrated feminist standpoint theoretical framework, I utilised in my analysis Young's (2000) theoretical propositions on inclusive political narrative to explore embodied forms of women's political expression, as this expands the concept of the public sphere. These include greeting and public address; affirmative rhetoric; and narrative and situated forms of knowledge. In my analysis I also bring in dialogue the concept of

'glocality', developed by Harcourt (2000), to understand the transcendence of situated knowledges through local-global space(s) via blogging. Based on my findings, I fine-tune this concept to apply it to the feminist blogosphere, and propose a Schema to visualise this as a form of participation within 'glocal' counterpublics. I discuss these discursive strategies that signify new directions and characteristics of today's transnational feminisms (Fraser, 2014; Harcourt, 2000) in my final chapter. Thus, I bring these feminist theorists together along with feminist standpoint theory, to explain the ways they work in complementarity to produce new understandings of political participation and to expand the notion of the public sphere.

3.4 My social location, motivation and reflexivity

With this study, I bring my own social location in dialogue with my research findings. In the process of acquiring my academic degrees and professional expertise in sociology and human rights – particularly on gender studies and women's rights – my journey of becoming a feminist activist was liberating because I connected with other women who believed in social change. However, the process of recognising discrimination and sexism in a very patriarchal, nationalistic and highly militarised country was not smooth nor automatic. It meant a process of becoming a feminist through the recognition of situations that I was not able to clearly see or understand before due to my socialisation. It meant questioning and challenging sexual violence, inequality, and injustice (Ahmed, 2017; Arruzza et al., 2019). What prompted me to study the blogs of women and focus on their writings during the 2011 Arab revolutions had originally nothing to do with the writing of a thesis, but emerged from my engagement in transnational feminist movements.

As part of my fifteen-year feminist activism including a twelve-year professional experience¹⁷ at the Mediterranean Institute of Gender Studies (MIGS)¹⁸, I had participated in several meetings and actions of the EuroMed Rights Network, specifically the Gender and Women's Rights Working Group since 2009. I have been participating in discussions and advocacy missions since then led by this group of women's rights defenders and experts - in Cyprus, Egypt, Morocco, Tunisia, Brussels to name a few. In 2011, I was personally shaken by the fearlessness of women in the MENA region protesting against the

¹⁷ My academic disciplines include sociology (major), political science (minor), and human rights (MA). As a gender expert and researcher at the Mediterranean Institute of Gender Studies, I have engaged in feminist research, education and training, advocacy and lobbying for gender equality for the advancement of women's rights in Cyprus, the MENA region, the EU and beyond. My academic (Kaili, 2008) and professional expertise and contribution (Kouta et al., 2020) in human/women's rights, gender equality and gender-based violence enabled me to maintain an integrated feminist standpoint approach.

¹⁸ More information available at medinstgenderstudies.org.

authoritarian regimes and demanding their civil and political rights. By engaging in discussions with women in the region, what I found even more striking was the scale of the revolutionary movements that overcame geographical and national limits with great speed. Using technology, activists shared with the world their narratives and stories of resistance, exposing authoritarian regimes as well as encouraging other neighbouring countries to revolt. Women played a tremendous role in the context of demanding political reforms and combating authoritarian regimes.¹⁹ Despite their actions, the multi-layered marginalisation and exclusion from the public-justice systems, transitional bodies and decision-making processes, constituted forms of male dominance and patriarchy, as political instruments to methodically silence opposition.

During our EuroMed Rights meetings these realities were brought into our feminist debates by activists in the region - including Egypt, Lebanon, Algeria, Libya, Tunisia, Morocco to name a few. I had the privilege to engage in dialogue with women from countries in the region trying to find ways to fight the oppressive systems in their countries. Women activists exposed the corruption and violence exercised by the authoritarian regimes of their countries and emphasised during our discussions that we must keep fighting against the oppressors and dictators. Amidst escalating violence and life-threatening consequences (for some) if found to participate in such meetings, we discussed strategies to ensure that women's struggles led to greater participation in the political and social life in their countries. It was clear that there were similarities in the needs and visions but diverse challenges and experiences at different levels from country to country that could be addressed from a feminist standpoint.

In December 2012, during my participation in one of the EuroMed Rights working group meetings in Cairo, one of the military attacks took place to break protests at the Egyptian presidential palace. I remember during the curfew in our hotel the long discussions and analyses I had with the Egyptian activists and experts in the group. We spent hours reflecting about the possible impacts of the demonstrations outside the parliament against the president Mohamed Morsi that resulted in military intervention and thirteen deaths. The entire experience affected me at a fundamental level. I remember the Libyan women activists in our group describing the tragic consequences of the massive rapes and the illiteracy of women that hampered their visibility and presence in the political sphere (including the process of drafting the constitution). I also remember the Tunisian

¹⁹ After Tunisia and Egypt, Yemen and other Arab countries followed, with some going through civil war and other socio-political transitions until today.

and Moroccan colleagues encouraging their Libyan counterparts to influence decision making processes - no matter what - before it was too late, all while warning the rest in the group about the regimes' control over telecommunications and the internet to hamper mobilization and the organisation of protests. Many meetings with similar discussions followed after the one in Egypt. We met in Jordan, in Morocco, in Brussels always connecting our actions with local advocacy missions targeting EU Representations, embassies and international bodies. I felt that our meetings were an enabling force informing our feminist organising, to think globally, act locally and vice versa.

As a feminist activist and researcher, I share these concerns and feelings of responsibility to struggle for the female voices to be expressed and heard. During these discussions I shared my knowledge and my own experiences from the feminist and peace movements in Cyprus. I shared the worry and the anger about being excluded from the public sphere and the political processes at all levels of social and political life. The experience of participating in the EuroMed Rights discussions and connecting with other feminist activists, changed me as a woman, as an activist and as a professional. This also shaped the way I see feminist struggles. These experiences provided me with an uncensored view of what the 2011 Arab revolutions meant for women activists and human rights defenders themselves, and made me want to highlight and promote these voices through my thesis. In addition, these experiences enriched my knowledge on the cultural and historical contexts in the countries of the blogs under study (particularly Tunisia, Egypt, Syria, Lebanon and Yemen) and helped me contextualise my research and findings.

The stories of the women activists from the MENA region must be read because they matter and because they are part of their history. When I met journalists, bloggers and activists writing their own blogs and creatively using social media to raise awareness about their realities, I felt I had a responsibility to amplify these stories. I wanted to learn and document these narratives as expressed by women activists through blogging, as well as to highlight these unique discourses of resistance, participation and new coalitions that empower women's movements for social change. I realised from my own standpoint that recognising our experiences in the lives of others strengthens our determination to do the difficult political work of coalition-building (Hartsock, 1996), which is both global and local. My situated experiences of 'glocality' (Harcourt, 2000, 2014) is at the core of my understanding of transnational feminist movements synthesising knowledge production,

advocacy and alliance-building in dialogue with the standpoints of diverse groups of women in my field.²⁰

Within this context, I relate to women in the MENA region, because I experienced similar injustices in my country. My own social positioning in Cyprus brings into this research experiences located in a divided country steeped in patriarchy, nationalism and militarism. I relate to the feminist activists in my research, because reflections across movements do not only generate valuable knowledge but help us find acknowledgement and solidarity about the ways we are being silenced by institutional sexism and racialised identities. The discourses of feminist activists and bloggers in the region taught me that being angry and vocal about these injustices is part of their country's history but also part of our feminist 'her-stories' that remain hidden and unknown (Vassiliadou, 1997).

I was personally affected by trauma similar to that experienced by the female activists in my research, since my family also had been impacted by civil war and outside interference in 1974 in Cyprus. I am the third daughter of displaced Greek-Cypriots following the coup d'état in Cyprus and the subsequent 1974 Turkish invasion and its tragic consequences on all its people. Today, more than 46 years after the displacement of Greek-Cypriots from the one-third of the island's territory, I am part of a generation who grew up in a divided society living with the impact of intercommunal conflict (including fragmented contacts among the Greek-Cypriots and the Turkish-Cypriots).

Another point for reflection is that Cyprus is also a Mediterranean country that is considered a European country in contemporary politics. I am also in a position to understand that maps are also constructs and change constantly according to strategic interests, ideology, and the identity that those in political power wish to promote. Geographical borders constantly change especially when you live in a place of armed conflict. In ancient maps, Cyprus is positioned very close to ancient Mesopotamia (today's Syria). Historically, Cypriot society, with all its ethnic groups, has had many influences from neighbours in trade, culture and society. This aspect is often forgotten and/or deliberately hidden from the public discourse. I am aware that my own social positioning and experience is part of this ongoing power struggles for history, 'her-story' and space within the context of centuries of colonial rule, war and conflict.

²⁰ Maintaining my strong connection with feminist networks in the MENA region and after 12 years of following the socio-political developments from a feminist standpoint (including additional waves of uprisings that followed), I want to acknowledge that this research could be part of an ongoing project to incorporate today's revolutions for democracy and human rights in the region (for example, in Lebanon).

At the intersection of nationalism, colonialism, militarism, religion and patriarchy from my own Greek-Cypriot positioning, I feel close to my colleagues in the MENA region seeking not only justice and democracy in their countries, but also ways to make women's voices heard and see that justice is served. I view this study as a bridge connecting these movements with the legacy of feminist authors and activists from diverse disciplines in Cyprus striving for decades to establish an independent and radical movement. Hadjipavlou (2010) analysed for many years and in great detail the diverse ways in which the Cyprus conflict was consistently used to sideline gender equality issues and prevent women from accessing the public discourse around peace-building and decision-making. Women's voices in their plurality continue to be absent from the negotiation table as well as in decision-making processes; women's involvement is kept at the level of symbolic gestures, such as the appointment of women in technical peace committees or as commissioners (Demetriou and Hadjipavlou, 2018, 2020; Hadjipavlou and Mertan, 2019; Kamenou, 2020). A similar pattern was revealed in the bloggers' narratives about patriarchal politics in their own socio-political and historical contexts. During my participation in transnational feminist movements, and also in the course of this study I had the space to reflect on these realities and experiences.

Thus, my feminist methodological premise about feminist discourse analysis and the quality of research relationships is based on empathy and mutual respect; on the need for a less rigid conception of 'method' that allows flexibility to the researcher; avoiding impersonal, neutral detachment (Birch and Miller, 2002; DeVault, 1996; Jorgensen and Phillips, 2002). I also acknowledge my own subjectivity, different personal histories and lived experiences in line with Sandra Harding's argument that 'strong objectivity' can be achieved through 'strong reflexivity' about our own cultural and social locations as researchers (Harding, 1991, p.161). As such, through the process of critical discourse analysis of the bloggers' own textual narrative accounts, I explored my assumptions both critically and systematically, but I also maintained an open-mindedness on the cultural and historical specificities of the 'situated knowledges' emerging from my data (Haraway, 1992; Smith, 1987).²¹

²¹ The field of feminist methodologies is grounded in feminist activism – research as lived experience – and in the critiques of feminist scholars and practitioners towards the standard procedures of social research (DeVault, 1996; Fonow and Cook, 1991). Feminist methodologists do not apply or propose any single research method. Instead, they welcome a variety of methodological strategies that include women's lives, needs and concerns in accounts of society.

3.5 Importance and originality of the research

This research provides for the first time a feminist analysis of feminist blogging for political participation in the MENA region and particularly following the 2011 Arab uprisings. Specifically, I have identified and analysed from a feminist standpoint the discursive ways in which feminist blogging – as an emerging citizenship practice – offers a more dialogical understanding and reconceptualisation of political action and space. The diverse discursive strategies and meanings as these emerge from the language of women blogging revealed how storytelling through this dynamic medium contributes to the creation of interwoven transnational public spheres.

I bring together feminist standpoint theory and critical discourse analysis as part of an integrated theoretical, analytical and methodological framework. This approach facilitates documenting the experiences and voices of those excluded from the public sphere, but also offers a profound critical feminist analysis of the structural and institutional inequalities that are part of many authoritarian and oppressive systems.

Moreover, the methodological tools and templates I have developed to facilitate my data collection, management and discourse analysis are based on an integrated theoretical framework. Thus, they may provide a useful set of guidelines for other researchers who may want to carry out an online-textual discourse analysis of political blogs in other contexts.

In addition, another contribution of this thesis is the Schema (Figure 5.1) which I developed to demonstrate a dynamic way in which feminist blogging can organise from grassroots political action to global mobilisation and transnational coalition-building. This Schema brings out the ‘glocality’ of women’s blogging narratives and actions; from exile and margin, to interwoven transnational public spheres, in the struggle for social change, human rights and democracy.

CHAPTER FOUR – EXPLORING FEMINIST BLOGGING AS POLITICAL PRACTICE

This chapter presents the findings of the research by providing a socio-political profile of the bloggers as well as their feminist standpoints and insights into their blogging practices. It then presents in detail the findings from the constructed narratives of the bloggers with regards to four major emerging themes: voice and agency; the diverse and dynamic blogging strategies employed in the struggle over the public sphere; the transcendence from local political space(s) to global audiences and space(s) through the strategic use of advocacy platforms; and the ways in which blogging contributes to turning margin to alternative power. The chapter also concludes with a (re)definition and a (re)conceptualisation of the notions of political participation and the public sphere provided by the bloggers' narratives.

4.1 BLOGGING, VOICE AND AGENCY

4.1.1 Situated knowledges and feminist standpoints

The feminist standpoint is privileged in this thesis to demonstrate how Western, male-centred understandings of the public dialogue exclude the realities of women and other marginalised social groups. The analysis of the ten blogs under study, in line with feminist standpoint literature, shows that putting women's narratives at the centre reflects situated and alternative knowledge. The blogging practice of the female activists under study provides us with knowledge produced from their everyday experiences, words and standpoints located and analysed within the broader power relations and social structures of their societies. In this section, I will briefly present the socio-political profiles of the ten feminist bloggers whose narratives I included in my research. I do so to highlight key aspects of their social and political positioning relevant to my research question as they emerged from primary and secondary data sources. Then, I explore how they construct their own social identities, their connection with their homelands, their social, cultural and historical positioning and their need to have a voice, visibility (political presence, political listening / acknowledgement) and shared empowerment for social change.

In mid-December 2010, Ben Mhenni and other bloggers learned of Mohamed Bouazizi, a fruit vendor in the city of Sidi Bouzid who had set himself on fire in protest at how the local authorities and police constantly harassed him (including confiscating his produce).

Bouazizi's death became the spark that lit the fire of the Tunisian revolution.²² The Tunisian revolution sparked a wave of uprisings that marked a new chapter in the MENA region and in the lives of many women activists and human rights defenders. With the help of the Internet, new technologies and social media, the protests spread rapidly, and the idea of freedom and democracy felt real after decades of dictatorship.

Abir Ghattas, (Lebanon) - abirghattas.com

Abir Ghattas is a Lebanese activist, blogger and trainer in digital communication²³ and security. She has worked as a digital communications and outreach director at Raseef22²⁴ and outreach director for Majal²⁵ (a network of digital platforms on securing freedom of expression and access to information). Ghattas' writings and blogging practice focuses on women's rights and the intersection of gender and technology. Her blog posts and articles are published both in Arabic and English. Ghattas stopped writing her own blog after she left Lebanon and published her writings on platforms such as Medium, Raseef22 and Majal (whose role I present later in this chapter). Ghattas' blogging brought to light important transnational aspects of blogging using diverse strategies for reaching out to global audiences and other women for sharing information and facts about the Lebanese government's corruption (including internet blockages and e-corruption) and human rights violations. Ghattas' writings shed light to the critical role that digital rights activism and data journalism can play in the broader human rights and feminist movement, amidst challenging contexts for human rights defenders. The outreach strategies and participatory projects employed by Ghattas, point to new directions in feminist political action²⁶ covering the lived experiences of women and marginalised communities most at risk, from LGBTQ rights activists to journalists.

Afrah Nasser (Yemen) - afrahnasser.blogspot.com

Afrah Nasser is a journalist and blogger from Yemen who had a prominent role as an activist in Yemen's youth revolution in 2011. As a feminist political writer, Nasser's narratives brought to light the untold stories of Yemen's embattled journalists and the calls

²² Also, referred to as the "Jasmine revolution" by Western political analysts and media.

²³ Ghattas' Twitter URL: @AbirGhattas.

²⁴ A voice inspired by the Arab Spring, Raseef22 is an independent media platform, standing at the intersection between community, identity, democracy and social justice movements. Raseef22's editorial line adopts local values with a modern perspective, filling a cultural void evident in the Arabic language media landscape. Available at www.raseef22.com/english.

²⁵ Available at <https://majal.org>.

²⁶ For example, feminist participatory projects such as Hammam Radio (#HammamRadio), is an initiation of Ghattas and other female activists and bloggers after the Lebanese protests of 2019. It is a project defined as a space where women's voices from the MENA region can be expressed and celebrated.

of a population living under siege, hunger and suffering as a result of a devastating war. In 2017, Nasser won the Committee to Protect Journalists International Press Freedom Award and used that international platform to turn the attention of the media and politicians towards the humanitarian crisis of Yemen. Through her writings, her voice reached out to international media, civil society leaders and Yemenis of the diaspora in search of someone to tell their stories to the world. Her blog, with over 838,000 page views, focuses on women's rights, democracy and the politics of Yemen. Nasser writes in exile from Sweden where she is a strong advocate of human rights in Yemen and a champion of gender equality in the Middle East. Her blogging has been a medium for reaching out to English speaking Yemenis and to western scholars and journalists.²⁷

Afrah's blog received a number of other awards such as the Eldh-Ekblads Peace Prize by the Swedish Peace and Arbitration Society in 2017; the Pennskaft Prize by Pennskaft in 2016 and the Dawit Isaak Prize by the Publicity Club in Sweden in 2014. Her blog was also recognised as one of the top blogs in the Middle East (for example by the CNN, Al-Monitor, Arabian Business and others). Twitter has been an important micro-blogging tool in disseminating her writings and to lobby for international attention for human rights in Yemen.²⁸

Lina Ben Mhenni (Tunisia) – atunisiangirl.blogspot.com

Lina Ben Mhenni (1983-2020) was a Tunisian political activist, blogger and assistant lecturer in linguistics at Tunis University.²⁹ She was the first in Tunisia to blog – *A Tunisian Girl* (in Arabic, French and English) – using her real name; she documented the struggles and openly stood up against the authoritarian regime of president Zine el-Ben Ali. Defying censorship, assaults and death threats, she wrote and exposed human rights violations and neglect of the most marginalised in her country. She chronicled the Tunisian revolution in 2011, advocating for freedom of speech and women's rights. Ben Mhenni was also a contributor to Global Voices, an online blogging community that shares and translates the posts of activists and bloggers from around the world.

²⁷ Internationally, Afrah has written for Al Jazeera English, CNN, The New Arab, Middle East Eye, The Institute for War and Peace Reporting, Raseef22, The National, the Dissident Blog, the European Magazine, among other. She also appeared in a number of international TV channels commenting on a number of political issues relating to Yemen and the MENA region. Nasser gave a number of lectures and seminars on the use of social media and the tools of today's journalism to Universities and civil society institutions.

²⁸ Nasser's Twitter URL: @Afrahnasser.

²⁹ Ben Mhenni was the eldest child of political activists. Her father was imprisoned for six years by ben Ali's regime when she was a child.

Her blogging was seen as a threat by the Ben Ali regime who blocked her blog within Tunisia, which forced her to use proxy sites. After organising a protest against censorship by the authorities in Tunis in May 2010, security forces broke into her house and confiscated her electronic equipment.

In 2011 her blog was awarded the Deutsche Welle International Blog Award. The same year, the publication of her 32-page memoir, *Tunisian Girl: Blogueuse pour un printemps arabe*, earned her Nobel Peace Prize nomination and she also won El Mundo's International Journalism Prize for her fight for freedom of expression.³⁰

Ben Mhenni travelled to Sidi Bouzid reporting and documenting the protests from the front line. She was one of the few voices that told the world of the killings and crackdown on protesters in Sidi Bouzid. She took photographs, videos, wrote testimonies from protests and those injured and killed, even going to hospitals to document the wounded. Ben Mhenni was the only blogger present in Tunisia's remote areas of Kasserine, Al Omrane and Regueb where government forces brutally suppressed protests and neglected the humanitarian needs of the people. Due to controlled media in the country (media blackouts were common), activists from Tunisia and beyond flocked to her blog (and Facebook and Twitter³¹) posts. Western and especially French media outlets were banned from entering Tunisia and several relied on her blogging to report what was happening on the ground in Tunisia.

In the years following the 2011 uprisings,³² at a period when the world was referring to Tunisia as a good example of post-revolution success in the region, Ben Mhenni kept writing about the political and economic regression, advocating for equality, access to rights, accountability and impunity. She remained an independent voice, refusing to join a political party, advocating for women's rights, working against the continuing corruption and suppression of civil liberties in Tunisia.

On January 27th 2020 during the final stages of writing this thesis, Ben Mhenni passed away at the age of 36 from complications due to an autoimmune chronic illness.³³ In her

³⁰ The Daily Beast has acknowledged her as one of the bravest bloggers in the world.

³¹ Ben Mhenni's Twitter URL: @benmhennilina.

³² The uprisings led to the toppling of President Ben Ali who had ruled oppressively for 24 years. Almost 10 years after the uprisings of 2011, Tunisia is the only country in the region with more democratic characteristics. There was a lot of change since Ben Ali's rule, and the Western media has focused on new laws promoting gender equality and freedom of speech, on the compromise of the Islamist secular political groups, on the introduction of a progressive constitution and democratic elections, on non-intervention of the army and the independence of civil society.

³³ Her death brought great sadness across the Arab world as well as, to myself as a researcher and a feminist activist. In dedicated research memos and personal journals, I reflected on my feelings and thoughts about

last blog post, she criticised political leaders for not fulfilling the expectations of the people who had sparked the 2011 Arab uprisings. Her focus, to the last, was on the most marginalised, those who had been victims of violence during the uprising who were denied reparation and justice.

Marcell Shehwaro (Syria) - marcellita.com / edgeofsyria.com

Marcell Shehwaro, Syrian blogger and activist, writes about her life in Aleppo, the heart of Syria's armed conflict, and in exile outside of Syria. Her blog posts – *On the Edge of Syria* – were primarily in Arabic which is the reason why she was not included in my initial sample. In the process of my data analysis, I encounter references to Shehwaro's political activism in the other blogs (such as Ghazzawi, 2014). I found "Dispatches from Syria", a series which had been originally written in Arabic but, in the course of my thesis, had been translated to English by Amira Al Hussaini and Lara AlMalakeh from Global Voices. Shehwaro after her collaboration with Global Voices increasingly published posts in English, thus these translated posts in her blog qualified under my methodological criteria. "Dispatches from Syria" won the 2015 Online Journalism Award in the category of Online Commentary. The judges praised her "intensely personal writing" for finding "the gray areas in a war usually told from polar extremes" (Online Journalism Awards, 2015).

Shehwaro is part of a community of writers and digital activists who participated in the original non-violent reform movement in Syria. Through internet-enabled networking and community building, Shehwaro was actively involved in reform movements in other parts of the Middle East. Shehwaro's narratives and citizen journalism bring a new understanding of political activism from the insider's voice and experience. Her writings and blogging place attention on and help us hear the powerful voices and personal stories of people who had previously been subjects in the stories of outsiders about the war in Aleppo (Global Voices, 2015). Shehwaro's narratives, during extreme violence and geopolitical manipulation, go beyond extremism and polarisation behind the dominant discourses on the Syrian war (Shehwaro, 2015). Shehwaro's stories reveal what we rarely hear about the complexities of the lives of Syrian people. In her blogging, we are guided through her survival struggles, the murder of her mother at a governmental checkpoint, the dilemmas of her friends and their families, and dreams for social change of a revolution

what her writing meant to the world and myself. In her funeral procession hundreds of mourners applauded her while her coffin was carried on the shoulders of women. After her death Tunisian president Kais Saied stated: "There are women who history does not forget. There are women who make history". This statement in my perspective showed an aspect of political acknowledgement that is crucial to inclusive political participation.

that never materialised. Despite the constraints imposed, Shehwaro continues to claim space in the local and global political arenas for human rights.³⁴

Mona Eltahawy (US- Egypt) - monaeltahawy.com

Mona Eltahawy is an Egyptian born journalist, columnist, writer and public speaker on Arab and Muslim issues and global feminism based in Cairo and New York City. Eltahawy's discourse provides us with a liberal Muslim perspective of the Egyptian revolution. Before she moved to the US in 2000 she was a news reporter in the Middle East for many years, including almost six years as a Reuters correspondent reporting for various media from Egypt, Israel, Palestine, Libya, Syria, Saudi Arabia and China (Eltahawy, Homepage Statement).

She attributes her presence in the current conversations about democracy in the MENA and also her ability to connect with less-prominent voices to blogging and Twitter.³⁵ During the 18-day Egyptian revolution in 2011 when President Hosni Mubarak was overthrown, Mona appeared on most major media outlets, leading the feminist website Jezebel to describe her as "The Woman Explaining Egypt to the West".³⁶

In November 2011, Egyptian riot police beat her, tried to possess her digital equipment, breaking her left arm and right hand and sexually assaulted her. Using the hashtag #FreeMona she let the world know that she had been detained by the Interior Ministry and military intelligence.³⁷

The organisational structure of Eltahawy's blog and her communicative tactics for publishing and spreading the word internationally revealed macro-level aspects in my analysis. Eltahawy features all her writings published in mainstream media covering the uprisings and reforms during and after the 2011 Arab uprisings. In her writings she talks to global audiences, discussing the impact of the revolutions in the Islamic world on feminism and Egyptian Muslim-Christian relations, challenging the stereotypical perceptions of Western media. Her writing and blogging played an important role in bringing the Egyptian socio-political and historical context to international audiences and discussing equality and justice, as well as women's agency in changing Islam and politics.

³⁴ Shehwaro's Twitter URL: @Marcellita.

³⁵ Eltahawy's Twitter URL: @MonaEltahawy. Eltahawy has also shared a number of videos of talks on YouTube.

³⁶ Among other acknowledgements, Newsweek magazine named Mona as one of its "150 Fearless Women of 2012", and Time magazine featured her along with other activists from around the world as its People of the Year.

³⁷ Mona Eltahawy's narratives also discussed privilege, violence and alternative power. I return to these aspects later in the findings to demonstrate that when it comes to women's political participation, no matter the perceived privileges, women are excluded from actively participating in the traditional political sphere.

Mona Seif (Egypt) - ma3t.blogspot.com

Mona Seif is an Egyptian blogger, human rights activist and breast cancer researcher at Cairo University who actively participated in democratic reform movements before and after the 2011 Egyptian revolution. As a key activist in the year leading up to the fall of Mubarak, she exposed human rights abuses, raised awareness and joined sit-ins, protests and demonstrations. Seif used her blog *Ma3t* together with Twitter³⁸ to promote human rights. She used social media in creative ways to influence public opinion, mobilise demonstrators and spread news outside Egypt.

Seif comes from a family of political activists and together they were among the thousands who gathered in Cairo's Tahrir Square during the Egyptian Revolution in January and February 2011.

She rose to prominence for her advocacy to end military trials for civilian protesters, launching her first worldwide online campaign when the Mubarak government imprisoned her brother for 45 days. Seif is a founding member of the No Military Trials for Civilians movement, which aims to: 1) document human rights abuses by the armed forces; 2) push for the civilian's release, 3) put an end to the trials of civilians by military courts; 4) transfer these trials to the jurisdiction of civilian courts; and 5) investigate torture allegations involving military police. As part of her truth-finding and transitional justice mission, Seif asked detainees who had been released if she could write down their testimonies and take pictures of their bruises and burns. Writing in her blog during the military police crackdowns of the Tahrir protesters, Mona collected stories from protesters and detainees; she believed the only way to combat suppression is via the internet.

Mona continues to highlight the abuses of power occurring in post-revolutionary Egypt. In 2012, she was a finalist for the Front Line Defenders Award for Human Rights Defenders at Risk, which ultimately went to Syrian blogger Razan Ghazzawi (see below).

Mozn Hassan (Egypt) - www.nazra.org/en

Mozn Hassan is an Egyptian feminist and human rights expert who rose to prominence by documenting human rights violations in Egypt. She coordinated the response to the alarming number of sexual assaults, including rape and the infamous "virginity tests" on women participating in public protests during and following the Egyptian revolution of 2011. The blog *Nazra for Feminist Studies* (Nazra) - which I approach as a collaborative blog - is linked to a feminist NGO Hassan founded in 2007. Hassan and Nazra ensured

³⁸ Seif's Twitter URL: @monasosh.

that survivors of rape and other sexual crimes received medical, psychological and legal support. The survivor testimonies documented on Nazra's blog highlighted the impact of sexual violence on women and the marginalization of women human rights defenders in a progressively shrinking public sphere. The blog also raised awareness on the coalitions between women's groups that succeeded in lobbying for the inclusion of women's rights in Egypt's 2014 Constitution and ensuring the passage of amendments to the Egyptian Penal Code to include sexual harassment and an expanded definition of sexual crimes.

In 2011, Hassan was among the first (along with members from Nazra) from Egyptian civil society to be charged in the Case 173, known as Egypt's "Foreign Funding Case" which I discuss in the pages to follow. Nazra was investigated for illegally accepting foreign funding under a draconian Mubarak-era law designed to impede civil society.

Hassan was awarded with the Global Fund for Women's inaugural Charlotte Bunch Human Rights Award in 2013. She also received the Right Livelihood Award, known as the "alternative Nobel Peace Prize", in 2016 (Nazra, 2016). Her name was present in the blogosphere and a number of feminist bloggers in my case studies dedicated blog posts expressing their solidarity and contesting the marginalization of Hassan and her organisation from the political public sphere. The reports by Hassan with Nazra published in their blog produce valuable feminist knowledge, which I analyse later in the thesis, enhance coalition building and contribute to transnational feminist movements. The blog not only provided a space for the victims' voices to be heard, but also a redefinition of political participation and the public sphere, showing how violence can be used to systematically prevent women from participating in the public sphere.³⁹

Paola Sawlan Daher (Lebanon) - www.myrrhandmint.tumblr.com

Paola Salwan Daher is a feminist activist, writer and blogger from Lebanon living in Geneva. As a member the feminist collective Nasawiya, she promoted sexual and reproductive rights as well as refugee and migrant women's rights, and advocated against violence against women in Lebanon. She also had prominent role on the promotion of human rights in the MENA region as a UN Advocacy Representative at the Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies, and as a Policy Officer at the Collective for Training on Development Action in Beirut. Paola is the global advocacy adviser at the Geneva Office of the Center for Reproductive Rights, using legal standards to advance reproductive

³⁹ Hassan and Nazra also provide mentorship to young women to enter politics, across Egypt's political spectrum. Twitter URL: @Mozn and @Nazraegypt.

freedom and health of women and girls affected by conflict. She published in outlets such as Sawt Al Niswa, Young Feminist Wire, Solidarités, Al Akhbar, Khol and others. Paola's writings in her blog - *Myrrh and Mint* - brought to light important aspects of feminist political participation, such as the role of Lebanese diaspora in amplifying feminist narratives / voices and contributing to the production of knowledge through the creative use of the Internet and social media. Furthermore, Paola's blogging provided insights on feminist transnational solidarity across movements, taking local challenges into account for a global human rights and feminist perspective.⁴⁰

Razan Ghazzawi (Syria) – www.razanghazzawi.org

Razan Ghazzawi is a prominent Syrian-Palestinian revolutionary and feminist activist. She started blogging using an alias, Golaniya, when Israel launched a war against Lebanon in 2006. She wrote and blogged against racism towards Syrian workers in Lebanon while she was there undertaking postgraduate studies. Ghazzawi started blogging – in *Exiled Razaniyyat* – under her real name two years later advocating for freedom of speech in Syria. When the Syrian uprising started in March 2011, Ghazzawi took part as a protestor and a grassroots activist, circulating updates on the anti-Assad regime demonstrations taking place across Syria.

During the revolution she was detained twice due to her human rights activism with the Syrian Center for Media and Freedom of Expression and forced out of the country under threat of a third detention. Ghazzawi returned in Syria in 2013 where she lived for a year in Kafranbel, a town in north Syria not under the control of the regime. She founded Karama Bus, an organisation that provided psychosocial support to internally displaced children in the Idlib suburbs. In 2012, Ghazzawi received a Front-Line Defenders award.⁴¹

Sherry Al-Hayek, (Syria) – sherrie.coals.blogspot.com

Sherry Al-Hayek is a Syrian-American blogger and activist, who was involved in a number of joint online projects addressing the war in Syria aiming for creative, peaceful action to bring democracy in the country. Al-Hayek started blogging – *Sherrie.coals* – in 2008 and in 2012 she was awarded for the blog category “Best Social Activism Campaign” by the Welle Blog Awards, for “Freerazan” a Facebook page inspired by fellow blogger Razan Ghazzawi. Al-Hayek's narratives and creative use of social media revealed the constructed

⁴⁰ Salwan Daher's Twitter URL: @PSalwanDaher.

⁴¹ Ghazzawi is currently a PhD candidate at the University of Sussex, focusing her research on the intersections of sexuality, exceptional violence and sovereignty of the Syrian state. Ghazzawi's Twitter URL: @RedRazan.

meanings of solidarity and supported Syrian bloggers who had been detained for their work. She was also involved in ‘Syrians know their way’, a collaborative poster campaign to empower Syrians at home and abroad through solidarity.⁴²

The socio-political environments

The 2011 Arab uprisings consisted of distinct, but interrelated continuums playing out in each country’s socio-political timeline. These historical moments, as moments of transformation, found each of the five countries in different social, political, economic circumstances, creating unprecedented possibilities for political engagement. Critical issues cut across the agendas of political elites and mobilised the public in the cases of Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, Tunisia and Yemen. Comparatively, the levels of state processes and the relations between state and (civil) society were different in each country on the trajectory of the Arab uprisings. In addition, the role of non-state forms of solidarity and identity politics were significant factors for motivating political engagement, mobilisation and collective action (Heydemann, 2016). In line with the findings of this thesis, blogging was part of these momentums of collective resistance and action that revealed different possibilities and setbacks for each country, especially in the efforts to establish stable and legitimate forms of governance, as well as in the potential for civil society actors to influence transnational socio-political processes.

Starting in December 2010, young people and women occupied the streets of Tunisia, Egypt, Syria, Yemen, Lebanon and other Arab countries (i.e., Bahrain, Libya, Morocco) to protest against authoritarian regimes. Autocrats who had held on to power for decades, such as Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali (Tunisia) and Hosni Mubarak (Egypt), were overthrown within weeks. It was no coincidence that the uprisings in Tunisia sparked a wave of large-scale protests that marked a new chapter in the MENA region as well as in the lives of many women activists and human rights defenders. In fact, Egypt and Tunisia provide distinct contrasts to the Syrian and Yemeni⁴³ contexts, where the 2011 protests were dealt

⁴² Al-Hayek’s Twitter URL: @sherrie_coals.

⁴³ In 2011, the political crackdown against Yemenis protesting corruption and poverty, led to what the United Nations describe as the world’s biggest humanitarian crisis. Despite tribal, regional and, to a lesser extent, sectarian divisions, the youth- and women-led protest movement came together to demand accountability and a civil state that would guarantee equal citizenship. In 2012, after months of protests and pressure from the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), President Šāliḥ handed over power to his deputy, Abdrabbuh Mansour Hadi. Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula also entered the country at this point, hindering efforts towards democracy as well as any hope of the country gaining stability over the next few years, all the while the humanitarian crisis grew. In 2013, the GCC joined with the UN to set up a National Dialogue Conference for Yemen’s transition to democracy, a process reported by some Yemenis as flawed (Adada and Allahoum, 2021). The turning point in the uprising was the fact that President Saleh was given immunity by the international community, the UN, and the GCC, resulting in lack of transitional justice. Other issues also derailed Yemen’s transition. The Houthi rebels (supported by Iran) dissatisfied by the GCC’s terms for an

with military violence to restore order. In both (Egypt and Tunisia), transformational outcomes were dependent on struggles among the competing political elites for control of consolidated states. In addition, non-state identities and solidarities were present and played important role yet subordinated in the dynamics of transformational processes that, according to some perspectives, preserved the state and the potential for further democratisation instead of defection, conflict and potential state collapse (Heydemann, 2016). In Tunisia, for example, the army had a more distant role from politics, the religious demographics were more advantageous, and the protests prepared the ground for a democratisation process using digital media. In Egypt, conflict between elites led to the reassertion of authoritarian powers. In contrast, in the case of Syria, there were numerous political and military groups that together with Assad's neoliberal policies (benefiting the upper class and foreign investors) and external interference contributed to a state of armed conflict and consequently the third largest humanitarian crisis of our times (International Rescue Committee, 2020; Daher, 2018).⁴⁴ In fact, Syrian politics were not just a conflict between two extremes between pro-Assad and anti-Assad groups (as projected by Western analyses). Rather, the conflict revealed the emergence of a new generation of jihadists focused on seizing territory and creating states. In addition, it revealed war tactics that transgressed the modern norms of armed conflict (i.e. bombing of civilians and repeated use of chemical weapons⁴⁵), using emerging technologies, for example, drones, encryption

equitable power sharing deal launched a military offensive, taking the capital Sanaa from the transitional administration led by Hadi. For many social groups in Yemen the main problem was the accountability gap and lack of real political listening by the state. In 2015, a military coalition led by Saudis launched a campaign to restore the ousted government of President Hadi. While a power-sharing agreement between the UAE and the government was signed in 2019, the influence of Saudis increased, and the UN-sponsored peace talks between the government and the Houthis bore little fruit, the impact of the years-long civil unrest has left the country in a dismal state (McDowall and Barrington, 2021).

⁴⁴ The Syrian conflict has been the most complex to emerge from the 2011 Arab uprisings. The first wave of organised opposition was met with military violence in 2011, which included chemical weapons and other attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure. International diplomacy proved largely unsuccessful (Yacoubian, 2021). Conflict and war escalated with the rise of the Islamist forces, prompting retaliation from Western and Arab coalition of countries in 2014. Conflicts also continued between Kurdish forces and the Islamic State on the Turkish border and the seizing of the ancient city of Palmyra destroying many monuments at pre-Islamic the World Heritage site in 2015, which led to Russian intervention, and then in 2016, Turkish troops entered Syria to help rebel groups push back so-called Islamic State militants and Kurdish-led rebels. Russian air power and Iranian-sponsored militias supported the government's troops to recapture Aleppo. US intervention followed in 2017 and Islamist State retreated in 2017. In 2018 Turkey led an assault on northern Syria, prompting the US, Britain and France to carry out a wave of punitive strikes on Syrian targets. In 2019 the US withdrew troops from northern Syria which cleared the way for Turkey to attack US Kurdish allies in the area (BBC, 2019). 2020 found Syria with ongoing wide-scale poverty, a humanitarian crisis and massive civilian displacement: 5.7 million of people many of whom sought refuge in camps in Jordan, Turkey and Lebanon, and 6.6 million worldwide (UN Refugee Agency, 2021).

⁴⁵ In August 2013, more than 1,000 civilians were killed by one chemical weapon attack by the Syrian government. According to U.S. government sources, the Syrian government has used various chemical weapons—from sarin, a toxic nerve agent banned by international law, to chlorine, a dual-use chemical—at least 50 times (Yacoubian, 2021).

and social media, and electronic warfare—across virtual and physical war-spaces (Yacoubian, 2021).

On its own continuum, Lebanon is a special case in the MENA: its government had been toppled back in 2005 in the Cedar Revolution. Since, the country experienced political polarisation, corruption and a disintegration of its state institutions. Lebanon also witnessed major demonstrations in 2011, led mainly by young people and intellectuals using similar forms of protest and messages as the movements in Tunisia and Egypt. In contrast to the other countries involved in the uprisings, the protesters did not call for the overthrow of an autocrat, and differently from other countries, the military forces did not fire back. In Lebanon, the political elites fuelled and exploited the politicisation of sectarian identities, which together with the outside interference by regional and international actors linked to wars in the region, exacerbated socio-political fragmentation and conflict. In 2011, the protests in Syria, Yemen (as well as Libya, Iraq and parts of Saudi Arabia) had turned into violent conflicts with strong ethnic-sectarian and tribal tendencies. In Lebanon it started as a struggle of political power for socio-economic reform and ended in sectarian battle (similar to other regional conflicts). The political elites in Lebanon who claimed to respond to the progressive demands of the people continued to mishandle government agencies. At the time, there was no elected prime minister, but only a custodian government and a gridlocked parliament. These conditions created strong political polarisation, and paralysed the Lebanese politics for ten years. In particular, women and the youth were (and still are) disappointed by the political class. While protesters in the region joint voices to topple the regimes, the Lebanese exposed the lack of political authority and order. The political mistrust and anger emerging from previous experiences may explain to some extent the scepticism of groups during the Arab uprisings of 2011, as well as their mistrust of external interference that for example led to the civil wars in Syria and Yemen (Rosiny, 2018).

In these different but interrelated contexts, the blogging tactics of women activists were part of the rapidly spreading protests, and a new imaginary of freedom and democracy felt real after decades of dictatorship. This, despite experiencing – and writing about – their traumatic contexts, which included: institutional discrimination and disintegration, and/or state collapse due to violent conflict, as in Yemen and Syria, or regression policies and the reassertion of authoritarian powers, as in Egypt, Lebanon, and a majority of Arab countries initially involved in the protests. Manifestations of these conditions were military and police violence – such as detention and torture (Tunisia, Syria) and virginity tests (Egypt) –

other forms of political violence, the resurgence of neo-authoritarian powers (as discussed in the writings of Ghazzawi, Nasser and Hassan in this study).

More broadly, the bloggers in this study lived through the rise, collapse and re-assembling of new political coalitions, bringing up new understandings of political legitimacy, citizenship and the relations between state and society. Previously repressed political factions (e.g. Islamist parties) entered the political arena and new political groups emerged to demand for a share in power. Civil society organisations proliferated and transitional governments organised multi-party elections and launched processes for constitutional reforms.

These diverse and multi-level transitional periods were intense, especially for women's groups striving to expand political participation through inclusion and justice. According to the shadow reports to the CEDAW drafted by civil society organisations in the five countries covered in this study, the processes in each country around the improvement of women's situations in the MENA region were challenged greatly by: the use of explosives/chemical weapons (i.e. Syria), lack of respect of international law, the setup of constitutions and discriminatory amendments to legislation, women's illiteracy (i.e. Yemen, Syria), gender-based violence, lack of freedom of association, and the general social status of women with regards to family, nationality and penal laws.

The diverse contexts and timelines of the countries addressed by the case studies in this research reveal the characteristics of newly empowered political actors outside political party structures and established elites, all from the perspectives and discourse action of the women. Frameworks and findings of this study thus embrace a relational understanding of these different contexts and transformations, whereby the term transformation "captures the notion of systemic change yet without implying directionality or some form of democratic teleology" (Haydemann, 2016, p. 195). The fluidity and unpredictability of these transformational settings has been captured and critically analysed from a feminist standpoint by the bloggers in this study emphasising agency during these crucial times.

4.1.2 "The blog is a dear part of who I am": New identities unfolding

My analysis reveals that the blog and the act of blogging is not only perceived as a significant medium and product of self-expression, but it is also seen by the authors as part of their individual identity and agency that can lead to or be part of collective political action. It represents an effort to express voice, be heard and visible, but also empower and get empowered to bring about social change.

The blog is one of the spaces where personal insights on oneself, others, states and exile are communicated and (re)negotiated. This is done through writing about personal experiences, stories, expressing feelings and trauma, dreams for social change, reporting on strikes, protests and offering critical political commentary from the grassroots' perspective. The picture below is a screenshot showing how these are reflected in the visual discourse of the header of Ghazzawi's blog.

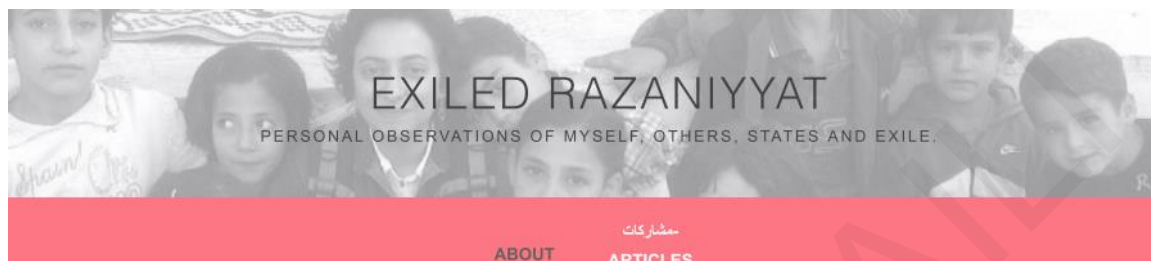


Figure 4. 1 Screenshot of the header of Razan Ghazzawi's blog.

Ghazzawi –writing from exile – felt the blog is part of her individual identity, connecting her inner voice with the outer world by offering personal observations and analysis of herself, others, states and exile: “This blog is a dear part of who I am, perhaps the best attempt I tried thus far to express myself in this world” (Ghazzawi, About page).

Her blog offers her own reflections and meanings of her personal struggle that started at home at the age of fifteen. Ghazzawi affirms that being part of the Syrian popular uprising has been her most beautiful act. Acknowledging that her own definition of a revolution differs from that of mainstream voices, she brings up the complexities of Syrian politics, and the difficult realities faced by like-minded revolutionaries worldwide who are exiled and seeking refuge⁴⁶: “Being part of the popular uprising was the most beautiful act I’ve ever done. But it’s clear that my definition of revolution is different than most. And close to handful of comrades scattered worldwide” (Ghazzawi, 2017).

Egyptian blogger Mona Seif, in a blog post entitled “My revolution: the beginning” (2011d) described the Egyptian revolution as one consisting of multiple personal

⁴⁶ In a webinar on “Feminist Politics in Syria” (5 July 2020, under Facebook page “Global Campaign of solidarity for Syria”), Ghazzawi invites us to consider the opportunities for diaspora, anti-military feminists, emphasising the great role they played in the critical moments after 2011 uprisings by differentiating from dominant narratives. Ghazzawi employs a non-binary perspective to inform us about the numerous political and military groups in Syria, an aspect often missing from Western analyses that usually portray Syrian politics in two binaries: pro-Assad and anti-Assad. She extended a warning that not all human rights work is feminist, by explaining that there are people who supported the Syrian revolution but ended up supporting counter-revolution forces. For this reason, Ghazzawi highlighted the role of diverse groups of feminists (including atheists, Christians, queer and non-binary women) who have joined the struggle for democracy and social justice. Thus, the bonds of solidarity especially among women in exile and in the diaspora, play a pivotal role because they maintain connections with women on the ground.

revolutions led by personal histories of defiance starting from her family.⁴⁷ Seif described her own revolution, her own personal story, starting when her parents decided to conceive “not just out love but out of defiance”. Mona was born while her father was in prison in 1985 sentenced to five years for defying Mubarak’s regime. Her mother was abroad when the verdict was announced so her father stayed in hiding. With the help of their friends, her mother and father were secretly reunited with her brother. Mona shared that her parents wanted a baby girl, as her mother felt that having a new baby to care for “would soften the coming years without Baba”. In this context her father turned himself in only after they confirmed her mother’s pregnancy. Mona’s story reveals the symbolism around the conception of a girl in a patriarchal society and how this story defined her own adult life of defiance: “Revolutions are created by such defiant gestures. Small personal gestures that collectively toppled the regime. The moment Baba kissed Mama's stomach knowing I was in there, was the moment Tahrir became inevitably my destination.” (Seif, 2011d)

Afrah Nasser’s (Yemen) narrative and storytelling revealed the realities of a woman from Yemen struggling from girlhood to womanhood. After her graduation as a journalist she joined Yemen Observer newspaper. She started blogging about social and cultural topics since 2010, and a year later she started blogging actively about Yemen’s uprising that began in January 2011 providing “direct critique” against the president and the regime and reporting on the protests. As an anti-regime protester, Afrah’s political blog received threats from pro-regime individuals, leading her to flee the country and live in exile in Sweden.

On May, 2010, I sneaked out of Yemen to participate in a couple events in Europe, then the threats against me where doubled. It was too dangerous for me to go back. Then, I decided to stay in Sweden. Today, I’m sort of a dissident writer in exile. (Nasser, 2011b)

Sherry Al-Hayek (Syrian) has been blogging since September 2008 because she felt she wanted to share her ideas the Syrian society, to raise social consciousness about human rights and social issues. In March 2011, she switched to English at the start of the Syrian revolution to provide a new perspective from a woman’s lens to English-speaking audiences.

I write a lot of things on Facebook and a lot of my English speakers friends would complain that they see things they want to know about but they never understand it.

⁴⁷ The collection of moments and incidents of resistance that existed way before January 25th when Egyptian citizens massively occupied Tahrir Square, carrying their own revolutions.

I am sure that the media is covering up a lot of events from Syria and they are doing a good job, however, I still believe that as a Syrian, I would have more to write about from my own experiences, in the past or current. (Al-Hayek, 2012a)

Marcell Shehwaro described her participation to the Syrian revolution as the most important act of determination in her life, which still defines her identity as an activist for human rights and social justice: “The Syrian Revolution: The most formative thing that happened to me is joining the uprising in 2011, and it still defines my struggle for freedom, dignity and justice.” (About page “Things about me”, marcellita.com)

Women bloggers share a deep connection and love for their homelands, which they cite as a crucial factor of their motivation to write and blog. Shehwaro speaks about the constructed meanings of her political action and her deep and inextricable connection with her homeland, as this relates to her personal identity and right to protect their own voice:

My name is Marcell. The name means “young warrior”. I come from a small family. [...] I cannot introduce myself without telling you about my city, Aleppo, as the two of us are exactly alike: worn down, exhausted, full of fire, full of the desire to live, confused. Aleppo is the second largest city in Syria [...], its population used to be 5 million. I am not sure how many of them still remain, and how many refugees from other places have come to live here. (Shehwaro, 2014a)

She further described the love for her homeland and culture in contrast with the pro-regime security forces that consider her dangerous for her blogging and political activism:

I’m from Aleppo, and I have a huge passion for my city. “It is a bit annoying sometimes”, I love its music, its food and its strange strong accent. It is one of my deepest losses that I can’t go back there, because Bashar al-Assad’s security forces consider me “dangerous”. (Shehwaro, “Things about me”)

Similarly, Afrah Nasser introduces herself stating her love for her country, as a way to clear the stigma of blogging seen as a threat by the regimes in their countries: My name is Afrah Nasser, I’m a journalist and blogger from Yemen, and I love my country,” that’s how lately I have been introducing myself to strangers. For almost 10 years, I have been writing.” (Nasser, 2011b)

Lina Ben Mhenni, also wrote about the generations of people fighting for their freedom in Tunisia revealing this meaning as an intergenerational duty to follow as an activist and blogger: “I am Tunisian, I was born in Tunisia, my parents are Tunisian, my grandparents

too. I fought for my freedom, for our freedom and I will continue to do it” (Ben Mhenni, 2012d).

4.1.3 Margin and exile: Questioning and silencing

The blogging experiences of the women showed that their writing and feminist political opinions were not welcome in their local context. As a result of this, some of them have been writing from exile. Ghazzawi spoke of the isolated and lonely position of not fitting into any prescribed social or ethnic category or gender norms in times of war in Syria.

Being a neither/nor person is not easy in peace times, it’s stressful and painful in times of war & exile. It’s an isolating position. In virtual spaces like this one, you’re under risk of being attacked, discredited, and ridiculed if you’re a woman. Many times mansplained. I was almost called a “traitor” by a dear friend. Called a “White Syrian” by another. Most of my attackers are men identified as revolutionaries. I had to restrict, unfriend and block to protect my well-being in spaces like Facebook. All because I am not only a dissent to Assad, but to problematic dominant narratives in revolutionary circles, especially adopted by self-identified intellectuals. (Ghazzawi, 2017)

That is the reason that many, especially women, choose to remain silent. Ghazzawi spoke to a number of women and other political activists in private chat rooms and gatherings offline, confirming that anti-Assad voices who have different views from the dominant narratives are not able to speak. Reflecting on this, Ghazzawi warned her readers outside Syria that the information received is not representative of all the revolutionary views.

What you hear is not representative of all revolutionary opinions. The dominant narratives on Syria exclude and attack non-conforming opinions and discourses. I self-censored myself but my determination to speak mirrors my determination against Assad. (Ghazzawi, 2017)

Furthermore, in many instances the bloggers had to confront those who tried to stifle their voice in defending the human rights of the marginalised by referring to their privileges. Razan being conscious of her privilege of having a US passport provided her readers with an analysis why she changed the title of her blog to “Exiled Razaniyyat” and not “Refugee Razaniyyat”. Despite a feeling of alienation that such situations created, Ghazzawi emphasised that having some privileges does not mean that members of her family were not forced to cross the sea, or that she did not have to live in exile for her safety. She used

her privilege to empower herself to make underprivileged voices heard and challenge male dominant discourses, thus complicating further the issue of safety.

I've learned that it's not productive to feel guilty on things you cannot change about yourself or your privileges. [...] Even though I could not register as a refugee, it doesn't mean I, too, did not have to leave as well. Like tens of thousands of residents in Syria (Syrians, Palestinians, Kurdish-Syrians among others), I left Assad and IS. But unlike many male opposition activists residing today in so-called Northern "liberated" areas, I also left the male dominated opposition territories. As many of you know, dozens of Syrians left Assad's controlled areas because of their political opinion and activism that will put their lives (and their families) in danger. (Ghazzawi, 2016)

Also acknowledging her privilege of having a US passport, Eltahawy informed security forces of her dual citizenship after they detained her for protesting in Tahrir square in 2011. She wrote about the response she received from the military intelligence officer when she asked for a consular representative to be called: "Aren't you proud of being Egyptian? Do you want to renounce your citizenship?", implying that she had betrayed her ethnic origin. Eltahawy emphasised that her privilege in fact came with an obligation to fight patriarchy and other oppressive systems even harder. Even through her injuries, Eltahawy responded: "If your fellow Egyptians break your arms and sexually assault you, you'd want someone in the room you can trust" (Eltahawi, 2011b).

As a critique to the dominant discourses, Ghazzawi explained why exile was the only option for her, even when she lived for nine months and twenty days in 2013 in the so-called 'liberated' areas in northern Syria i.e., lands and territories that were not under the regime's control and under the control of forces closer to opposition. Being an unveiled single woman activist was very draining and almost impossible for her to co-exist as a citizen in the area. Ghazzawi emphasised that these are tough realities that you never hear in the dominant discourses of male opposition, writers or media journalists in these areas.

Today, if I want to go back to the "liberated areas" I must be veiled, and preferably with a husband. Exile is my only option. This blog is going to be about this journey of exile into unknown paths and future. (Ghazzawi, 2016)

Exile was the only option also for Shehwaro once she was seen as a threat by Syrian authorities, showing us how the theme of exile as an experience connects many of these stories. The Syrian secret service developed a dossier on her. During that period, and

following a year of protests, taking the advice from family and friends to be careful, the turning point arrived in the loss of her mother: “my mother was martyred at a Syrian regime forces’ checkpoint in Aleppo. I lost a part of me forever” (Shehwaro, 2014a).

After this traumatic event and under constant fear of arrest Shehwaro decided to accept a scholarship postgraduate studies in the UK. She returned to Aleppo several times during that year and was hosted by different friends as it was dangerous for her to return to her own home. When her friends’ lives, became also threatened as a result of their relationship with her, she was forced to leave more permanently:

I was then forced to make what was obviously the right decision, and moved to the liberated part of Aleppo, leaving behind friends, family, memories, my home and the two graves of my parents. In short, most of the life I was used to. (Shehwaro, 2014a)

Moving to the “liberated part of Aleppo” did not mean fewer challenges. Being one of the few unveiled women in a conservative environment she still experienced safety issues:

Living alone as an activist during wartime, alone and away from family and familiar surroundings, posed new challenges. I had moved to an area which I knew nothing about, except that the regime’s security apparatus had no presence there. But it wasn’t free of all the other forms of death. [...] I live with the constant fear of being kidnapped. At times I can withstand it, but at others I break down in exhaustion. (Shehwaro, 2014a)

Finally, the obligation to write about the powerful stories and personal struggles of the everyday people that can inspire change - from the insider’s voice and experiences - was a significant attribution to the practice of bloggers in this research. Amidst extreme violence, extremism and polarisation of dominant discourses, Shehwaro put at the centre the desire for social change as the strongest motivation behind her blogging practice.

You are free to choose to sympathise with me, or be harsh with your judgements. But my hope is that what I relate to you reflects some of the dream, the desire to change, and the trust that this change is possible, as far-fetched or painful as that dream might be. (Shehwaro, 2014a)

The internet has been of paramount importance for feminists in exile, despite the trauma and hostility they experienced. Ghazzawi was called “a white Syrian” and a “separatist”, which she understood to be a tool for policing and shaming women in order to silence them and erase them from the public sphere – a legacy of the Syrian regime reproducing a

culture of violence. Diaspora was also an emerging identity, especially for Syrian women activists, waiting to settle in their own minds. The narratives of feminist bloggers invite us to consider the opportunities for anti-military feminists in diaspora, and the role they played in the critical moments after 2011 uprisings for sharing information globally, defying and questioning dominant narratives.

4.1.4 “I am abjuring you forever”: Anger as a political act

As part of the personal voice expressed through the constructed narratives of the female bloggers, a plethora of individual and collective feelings were revealed. Feelings of empowerment, solidarity and hope for the future were prevalent in their affirmative discourse because the personal is political. Equally important was the expression of women’s anger and its revolutionary power that emerged as a dominant theme from the findings of this research. Women’s rage towards social injustices forces us here to examine this emotion as women are socialised to avoid in order to be accepted as ‘good’ women. The blogging narratives reveal that voicing anger is a political act that helps to find relief, release, inspiration and exhilaration (Eltahawy, 2019; Straister, 2018), but even more importantly to take space, whether it’s as women or as social groups that have been historically disregarded.

The day Ghattas left Lebanon, she wrote a blog post entitled “The day I left Lebanon” (2013) expressing indignation towards the dominant patriarchal political discourse that had kept women from their share of political, social and economic power in Lebanon.

I am leaving Lebanon, and I am very excited about it. I will spare you all the patriot speech since I am extremely angry at this country. Angry to the point where I can look Gebran Khalil Gebran in the eye and tell him: “Dude, If Lebanon was not my country, I wouldn’t have chosen it to be” (this applies to Lebanon in its current state). (Ghattas, 2013b)

The following poem written by Ben Mhenni reflects feelings of anger and betrayal she feels about her native Tunisia. Writing this poem, based on her personal experience, helps expose the corruption and violence of the oppressive Tunisian regime. Her inner voice is in dialogical relationship with the dominant authoritarian discourse and the hegemonic oppressive state. Her poem also signifies a voice of individual agency, resistance and power and shows conversation with authority. Exposing the elements of corruption, violence and abuse of citizens’ rights, her personal perspective and narrative reflects the

feelings of the collective; a political act against the systemic abuse and betrayal of her human and civil rights.

I loved you

I worshipped you

I gave you my life

But now I'm abjuring you forever

You land of prisons

You the biggest jail

You land of hatred

You the greatest liar

You land of persecution

You the wildest torturer

(Ben Mhenni, 2010b)

Salwan Daher reflected on the anger shown by women following the Lebanese revolution of 2011, especially when feminists realised that transitional justice was not going to materialise. They exposed the lack of real political listening. By occupying public spaces, women made their anger visible and demanded effective anti-violence legislation and legal protections to counteract the serious justice gaps.

Our anger was justified when religious leaders opposed the bill drafted by forty-one activists, lawyers and organisations that proposed the criminalization of marital rape and requested a legal architecture of prosecutors, tasked with handling intimate partner violence cases, amongst other things. Our anger was justified when they were subsequently able to whitewash their criminal opposition, when we got stuck with a law that did not reflect our labor, when we were told that this was what we had asked for, when we were not granted half of the rights we were owed. (Salwan Daher, 2019)

Feminist bloggers understood that the erasure and discouragement of women's anger constituted an organised effort. The methodical silencing and repression of feminist activists during such a crucial socio-political time was attributed to the fact that they have been seen as a threat to the status quo by those in power. Because in women's rage is the motivation, agency and ability to bring social change. This finding offers a feminist

understanding of anger as political act that contests how historically women in politics have been framed by men as un-feminine – outside the gender norms about their societal role. In other words, women have been historically approached in male-dominated politics as “angry women” to silence them, discredit their political role and stop them from bringing about social change. Feminist blogging shows us how women’s anger and rage can be a determining and transformative force of political power and social presence playing crucial parts in revolutionary and ongoing social movements.

4.1.5 Feminist identities in the making

I would like to focus now on feminist identity constructions in the blogging practice of the women in this research, that reveal new layers of understanding. Explaining why anger is a political act and an integral part of a feminist identity, Salwan Daher – in her post “On Angry Feminists, Women’s Bodies, and People’s Sense of Entitlement” – concluded that feminists are angry because the moment the feminist lens is on, it becomes impossible not to see the gender bias and discrimination in the lives of women. The anger of women stems from the societal expectations towards women who are expected to deal with sexism, obedience and “nod submissively” otherwise they are ridiculed, degraded, and dismissed:

Feminists are angry because they question what society takes for granted: gender stereotypes, gender injustice, discrimination and society’s sense of entitlement” (Salwan Daher, 2013).

Al-Hayek, using the occasion of International Women’s day, which coincides with a national anniversary of a revolution in Syria (the Ba’ath day), highlighted in her blog the importance of acknowledging women’s role in Syrian society. Al-Hayek brought the focus on the devastating impact of war on women’s lives and their families; they suffered the trauma of losing children, loved ones, their homes, and the trauma of rape as a weapon of war. Conflict is gendered and Al-Hayek is well aware and makes sure to place this at the centre of her blogging practice. She explains how hardships felt by women in wartime often are overshadowed by national days and male histories.

March 8th is International Women Day, however, in Syria it is the Ba’ath day. This year, however, some activists decided ...to bring sunshine to this date by calling it the Syrian Women day to dedicate this date for Syrian women who had been suffering the loss of their children and beloved ones more than ever in Syria in this past year. For those who lost their lives or lost their houses, for those who got raped, for every woman in Syria, for all of the women who lived about 50 years not

knowing that March 8th is their day, Happy Syrian's Women Day! (Al-Hayek, 2012b)

A key feminist critique expressed in the blogging practices of the women in this study is the Western-centric lens of approaching Arab Middle Eastern women in media and political analyses. Al-Hayek's critique deconstructs the ways in which Arab women are portrayed as victims in biased Western culture. She brings up the perspective of a woman who grew up in Syria, a Middle Eastern country, who even though her family was open minded, still feels discriminated in a male-dominated society. She stressed however, that these realities do not make her less proud to be an Arab woman. To deconstruct this stereotype, she offered a call for action to other women: claim the 8th March as Syrian Women's Day and place the focus on women's stories.

I am very proud to be a female that comes from a Middle Eastern country. It is really hard to get an idea across to the Western culture because once you say something like, "it's hard being a female" someone who is western may take it to the extreme. [...] Happy Syrian Women Day; I am very proud to be one of you, from now on, this day is ours, the Syrian Women's Day. (Al-Hayek, 2012b)



Figure 4.2 Sherry Al-Hayek's poster on International Women's Day, from her blog.

Al-Hayek also used a creative poster in this blog post, showing a picture of herself saying – in Arabic – “March 8th is Syrian Women's Day, a female and proud to be”. The newspaper in the background was a picture that Al-Hayek took from an old journal on female stories.

Nasser, describing her journey of rediscovering her inner feminist in Sweden in 2011, reflected on the trauma of experiencing harassment by men that made her feel mistrust towards men even in Sweden where she did not encounter such violence:

I remember how I used to repeat one sentence before I walk[ed] out of my house in Yemen. Fight the system and fight men's harassment. Then, the sentence was transformed into Fight dictatorship. Today, I am fighting my own demons [...] being traumatized by the first experience I had when I was harassed at the age 7. It is not easy now to look at men differently, not easy at all! (Nasser, 2011d)

Even though there are different understandings of a feminist future, democracy and state accountability remain common in women's demands. In order to move towards a feminist transformative future, we must talk about the lives of those who are invisible and who are treated as disposable.

These narratives of anger, rooted in traumatic experiences of social, political, economic violence, discrimination, exile and diaspora, may be a lesson that women in their diversity must celebrate their positionalities and differences. Even when there are internal contradictions within feminisms, the bloggers in this study invite us to use such obstacles as reflections of learning and contributing. Amplifying other voices in their blogs, and inviting other women into online discussions, and other strategies discussed in pages to follow, emerges as a core element of a feminist identity and praxis.

4.2 DIVERSIFICATION OF FEMINIST BLOGGING IN THE STRUGGLE OVER THE PUBLIC SPHERE

We have seen how feminist constructions of blogging as political action place women's voices and stories at the centre of their citizen practice. Unique standpoints highlight marginalised perspectives of the socio-political processes following the Arab revolutions of 2011 and offer critical information on human rights. In this section I will present and analyse the diverse methods and strategies in which the blogging practice of feminist activists served as a powerful tool and medium to express indignation and as political commentary in the struggle over constantly shrinking and exclusionary public spaces. By occupying space online and offline with their blogging practice, revolutionary events were diligently documented. With the creative use of social media and internet technologies, alternative knowledge – from the grassroots – reached global audiences exposing human rights violations, as well as political and economic corruption hindering democratic processes.

4.2.1 Documenting and archiving the uprisings

A key finding from my analysis and a common discursive strategy employed was the diligent documentation of the protests, strikes, sit-ins, and clashes with security forces. The bloggers recorded in writing and pictures the revolutionary events, revealing different aspects from insiders' point of view and giving visibility to those fighting for gender equality and human rights.

In *A Tunisian Girl*, for example, Ben Mhenni reports from the second demonstration in Sidi Bouzid, providing a detailed description of policemen who outnumbered the protesters, confirming the dangers of those fighting for civil and political rights: "... today Monday, December 27th, 2010. It started at 1pm in Med Ali Place. Arrived there, again, I was not surprised to see that police officers outnumbered the demonstrators." (Ben Mhenni, 2010d).

Ben Mhenni incorporated pictures as visual discourse, complementing her text, and documenting the most important aspects of the demonstrations. The numbers of demonstrators were rising in each event. The demonstrators were singing the Tunisian National Anthem in harmony, shouting slogans claiming their rights to work, dignity and freedom of assembly and speech. Below, is one of Ben Mhenni's powerful photos featuring the great social involvement and the crowd peacefully demanding freedom and rights.



Figure 4.3 Photograph from Ben Mhenni's post documenting demonstrations.

In an effort to show her audience the facts, she describes how the demonstrators were prevented from moving peacefully through the streets and occupying public space. Policemen were pushing violently, clubbing the demonstrators with their truncheons, and throwing stones at them. The information shared with the readers included the number of

persons severely injured, the date, time and duration of events, and ‘behind the scenes’ acts such as the presence of public officials who did not act for the safety of protesters.

Four persons were severely injured. Some demonstrators tried to rush them to the hospital but policemen prevented them from leaving Mohamed Ali Place. Clashes between policemen and demonstrators lasted for a couple of hours. The Minister of Interior was present during the demonstration. (Ben Mhenni, 2010d)

The photographs taken and used by Ben Mhenni along her blogging text provide an uncensored depiction of the violence towards protesters and journalists by the regime. In her analysis such events were framed as a systematic way to silence and discourage Tunisian citizens from occupying in public spaces and even more in changing the future of their country.



Figure 4.4 Photograph from Ben Mhenni’s post documenting police violence towards protesters and journalists.

Highlighting the progressively shrinking public space for free expression and assembly, Ben Mhenni stressed: “Journalists were prevented from doing their job. They have been continuously harassed” (Ben Mhenni, 2010d).

Nasser described a similar situation of freedom of expression and opinion being taken away from the media in Yemen: journalists’ cameras were destroyed during demonstrations, and they were often threatened and even hospitalised due to violent attacks. Many journalists went into hiding. Copies of independent newspapers were seized and burned.

Ghourab has received 15 telephone threats since the start of the uprising. He now has to live in hiding. Copies of the independent newspapers AlOmana and Al-Thawry have been seized and burned at checkpoints and, as is often the case, their distributors have been physically attacked. (Nasser, 2011a)

4.2.1.1 “I was not brave, I was protected”: Reconstructing Tahrir Square as a place of social solidarity

Mona Seif described in her blog the most intense and dramatic moments of the Egyptian uprisings on January 25th 2011, including gun shots and screams. In her narrative she reveals that when Al-Jazeera called her for statements, she wanted to restore a feeling of social solidarity rather the terror spreading through the news about protesters occupying the Tahrir Square. In her story she reflects on the fast spread of her interview and the positive comments she received about her bravery. Seif’s affirmative rhetoric reveals the significance of her strategic decision to bring in the public dialogue a different perspective in approaching Tahrir square. In doing so, she reconstructed Tahrir Square as a place of social solidarity, safety and protection of being part of groups of citizens claiming civil and political rights and social justice.⁴⁸

I have to clarify this: I was not brave, I was protected. [...] When you are away from Tahrir square, listening to the stories about it makes it seem much more scary and terrifying than it really is. But when you are among bandaged people who wake up singing and chanting, kids running & playing, strangers offering you food and insisting you take it, strangers smiling at you as you greet them with "good morning", you would feel warm, hopeful, optimistic but definitely no fear. (Seif, 2011a)

After the fall of Mubarak, Seif described feelings of belonging and community in her blog post entitled “Long live the revolution of Egyptian people”, revealing the social bonds and empowerment created in solidarity with other men and women, from different backgrounds occupying the streets: “in close proximity with thousands of strangers, snuggled in a warm cocoon, liberating Tahrir square, marking it as ours. [...] together we shared intensely charged emotional days that we became friends rapidly” (Seif, 2011c).

Her feelings of pride, hope and belonging marking this historical moment personally and collectively stems from the fact that she lived to see the uprising of the Egyptian people and the downfall of Mubarak. These feelings and experiences were constructed as an intergenerational duty within the context of many social, cultural and historical revolutions in Egypt, “I can dream about having kids and me telling them proudly that I was part of this extraordinary moment. This is my place” (Seif, 2011c).

⁴⁸ Within the same narrative there are some contradictions emerging from a social environment that looked like a battle field and where women’s mobilisation and rights were at stake. Placing these contradictions in this specific social, cultural and historical context unconsciously the narrative of bravery, as for example when she described young men’s bravery, becomes present as this is in abundance in patriarchal societies.

By occupying public spaces, women of different backgrounds joined the uprisings reclaiming their civil and political rights and together the ownership of their homelands. Writing in their blogs they were documenting the history of the uprisings from women's perspectives.

4.2.2 Exposing attacks on the freedom of speech and of the press

In 2012, a year into the Tunisian uprisings, Ben Mhenni was documenting how journalists were still being attacked on a regular basis. She covered journalists who went on hunger strike in response to their cameras being seized by the authorities. She provided detailed reports on journalists' mistreatment, exposing a variety of state corruption, including political propaganda. Ben Mhenni pointed out the systematic character of these abuses, highlighting repeated instances where plain-clothes policemen would interfere with TV broadcasts and many were sent to jail over accusations on blasphemy (speaking up against the authorities). In many occasions Ben Mhenni shared in her blog post statements issued by journalists (such as the New Arab debates team) to inform her audience and to support local actions taken about the breaches of media's security (TV stations and newspapers). In this way, interdiscursivity in the blogging texts contributed to bringing accurate information to her audiences from the perspective of those silenced. This is the statement of the New Arab debates team published in Ben Mhenni's blog accompanying her affirmative rhetoric.

We have protested to the Tunisian Interior Ministry and told them that we regard this as an attack on our independence and interference in our right to pursue a free speech project in a newly democratic country. We are suspending all our operations in Tunisia, pending an internal investigation and until such time as we can guarantee the security of our data. (Ben Mhenni, 2012c)

Ben Mhenni closed this post as she did many others: by making a call for action to fellow activists to maintain the fight for their fundamental rights. Using the blog as a platform of influence, Ben Mhenni explained that bloggers are seen as a threat to oppressive governments because they spread information for fundamental human rights. For this reason, oppressive regimes take advantage of the legal gaps⁴⁹ on freedom of speech and therefore attack and punish bloggers:

⁴⁹ Legal gaps concerning the protection of freedom of speech and privacy include the absence of well-defined regulatory legislative framework governing: a) the audio-visual sector (including self-regulation as guaranteed by international standards), and b) the freedom of expression, press and publication (including internet neutrality, telephone tapping, information security and data protection). For example, the organic law

Oppressing governments, fearing the spread of news, and dictatorships concerned with muzzling free speech are taking advantage of this gap in the law to oppress and punish citizen journalists. Recently, many cases of bloggers' arrests, imprisonments, and even deaths under torture have been reported. (Ben Mhenni, 2010a)

Blog posts revealed a tremendous number of cases of such unlawful attacks revealing the multi-level corruption including in law enforcement. Ben Mhenni's detailed show-casing of the high number of attacks was characteristic within a climate of ongoing campaigns to support bloggers all over the world and stressing the fact that there is no legal backing nor freedom of the judges for the protection of bloggers:

Tal Mallohi is one such a case: Tal is/was a Syrian blogger and student. She was born in Homs on November 4th, 1991. She was just 18-year-old, when she was arrested by the Syrian State Security Apparatus December 27th, 2009, after blogging about politics. Her family never succeeded to see her. Moreover, the Syrian government refused to reveal her fate. A few days ago, the news of her death under torture have spread on the internet. [...] via a phone call he received from a judge, who refused to reveal his name. No one knows about Tal's burial place. (Ben Mhenni, 2010a)

It is worth noting that many more cases like Tal's were recorded in the blogs under study including the sad and unknown fate of bloggers in other Arab countries such as Bahrain and Libya, involving the detention of bloggers and activists by the authorities under false accusations for allegedly spreading 'false news' on popular pro-democracy websites⁵⁰, and for being involved in terrorist conspiracies.

After censoring a number of blogs, the governments in Tunisia and Bahrain moved towards strategically blocking individual Twitter pages. Having in mind that Twitter had become a microblogging medium often used by bloggers, Ben Mhenni wrote about the authorities' actions within the context of methodically censoring specific voices. Writing about her own experience of censorship by the Tunisian regime in 2010, Ben Mhenni shared her feelings of disappointment, disgust and indignation:

N°2004-63 of 27 July 2004 on data protection, does not provide exemptions or derogations to the application of data protection provisions in the framework of the treatment of data processed for journalistic purposes. This gap exposed bloggers and citizen-journalists to penal sanctions in certain circumstances. (ARTICLE 19, 2013)

⁵⁰ Such as BahrainOnline.org

Do you know how does it feel to be censored? Well, I do! Indeed, I am experiencing this DISGUSTING feeling since February, 24th 2010. [...] I was so disappointed when I discovered the horrible “Error 404” message- a message that stands for a censored web page in my country [...]. People should be free to write and express themselves: No one should prevent another person from writing. Writing is a right. To write is to exist. To write is to live. (Ben Mhenni, 2010c)

Thus, having a voice is constructed as matter of existence and being able to write and express political opinion constitutes an integral part of the life of women. Being forcefully deprived of expressing views and opinions feminist bloggers bring out the dangers of accessing and participating in the public and political sphere during such a crucial socio-political time in their countries.

4.2.3 “Our dictators tailor wounds to suit their victims' occupations”: Uncovering attacks, violence and detention

In this section, I focus on how feminist bloggers use their writing to strategically expose the ongoing repression in the transitional period after the 2011 uprisings. Specifically, I focus on their strategic reporting through which they create archives evidence of how the regimes wanted to punish them for their practice. Their narration and storytelling radically uncovers their own experience of violence and detention.

Nasser, exposing the violence and serious human rights violations inflicted by extremist forces in a climate of armed conflict in Yemen, informed her audiences about the continuing forceful and illegal control of the judicial system by the Houthis in the north. For example, Asmaa al-Omeissy, was the first known Yemeni woman to be sentenced to death for allegedly committing "terrorism", in an instrumentalised effort to frame human rights defenders as threats to state security: “Meanwhile, in the south (Yemen), extrajudicial killings have tragically become the norm in a climate of armed militiamen, with no justice ever being served to its victims” (Nasser, 2018).

Eltahawy, cross-posting her article in the Guardian (December 2011), let the world know about the violence inflicted on her by the Egyptian security forces who broke both her hands. Exposing their brutality in detail and positioning her experience within the context of sustained attacks against human rights activists, she informed her audience that the riot police were aware who she was and that they had purposefully injured the hands with which she wrote her posts. The injury was neither random nor rare. For example, Bashar al-Assad’s security forces stomped on the hands of the well-known Syrian cartoonist Ali

Farzat. From a feminist perspective, such crimes reveal that the conflict taking place in the streets had been also taking place on the bodies of women, with devastating impact: “Our dictators tailor wounds to suit their victims' occupations. [...] My body had become Tahrir Square, and it was time for revenge against the revolution that had broken and humiliated Hosni Mubarak's police. And it continues” (Eltahawy, 2011b).

Eltahawy revealed the importance of her phone and access to Twitter during her detention and assault as in her mind was two things: “*the pain and my smartphone*”. Eltahawy used Twitter, the growing micro-blogging medium, strategically, for example, to raise awareness about her arrest and assault. Borrowing the phone of another activist she tweeted: “*beaten arrested at interior ministry*”. Using the hashtag #FreeMona and seeking solidarity and support online, Eltahawy informed her audience about her detention. A campaign to free her went viral in 15 minutes gathering momentum, while she defiantly thought of her next article: “The whole time I was thinking about article I would write...” (Eltahawy, 2011e).

Eltahawy accompanied her powerful text with this picture to make a point: the oppressive regimes tailor their attacks to suit their victims' occupation. In many ways she may have been in a privileged position as an Egyptian writer, journalist and blogger holding a US passport - in terms of accessing her rights. Yet, she has been attacked by the regime's security forces precisely of her writing. Thus, having privileges cited by bloggers in this study as a justification given by those who seek to discredit their political action as not reflecting the realities and demands of marginalised social groups. Such claims not grounded in justice and fairness. It was rather an effort to discourage them from expressing their political demands and marginalise them from the political public sphere.



▲ The price of protest: writer Mona Eltahawy with her arms in casts after they were broken by Egyptian security forces in Cairo. 'Our dictators tailor wounds to suit their victims' occupations,' she says. Photograph: Dan Callister for the Guardian

Figure 4.5 Mona Eltahawy's picture in the Guardian (December 2011), author screenshot.

Reflecting on a picture of an Egyptian woman demonstrator stripped down to her underwear and beaten by the military police⁵¹, Eltahawy offered a critical analysis to Western audiences, unmasking the brutality of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF), which she characterised as “the military junta that runs Egypt and which must be tried with crimes against the Egyptian people” (Eltahawy, 2011b).

Through her textual and visual narrative, she reveals how the extensive violence, the trauma and humiliation inflicted on women human rights defenders in Egypt had a paralysing effect not only on women's dignity but also other women's ability to access the public sphere as equal political actors.

Did you notice the soldier who was about to stomp on her exposed midriff? How could you not? [...] I'm unable to look at any of those images of beatings because I feel the nightsticks fracturing my arms all over again. If I hadn't got up when I fell, they would have stomped on me as they stomped on that woman. (Eltahawy, 2011b)

Such violent acts were presented in a number of Eltahawy's posts as part of the “real war” against women human rights defenders in the Middle East.

⁵¹ The widespread outrage as a result of the brutality against women demonstrators resulted in the initiation of a march led by several hundreds of women. The “million woman” march exposed the military's sexual violence against female demonstrators; protesters held up pictures of women, elderly people and teenagers who had been victims of the cruelty of the police and demanded a regime change.

Why Do They Hate Us?

The real war on women is in the Middle East.

BY MONA ELTAHAWY | APRIL 23, 2012, 3:05 AM



Reuters

Figure 4.6 Reuters picture as featured in Eltahawy's (2012) article in the Guardian, author screenshot.

In "About the beatings that I suffered and ... Other things" (2012f), Ben Mhenni provided a similar detailed description of her beatings by police during protests, exposing the instrumentalised efforts to silence her. She was isolated from the group she was participating in and suddenly attacked and beaten up by police men demanding her backpack to seize her camera. Ben Mhenni did not obey and fought back although up to twelve "*chickens who think they are lions*", clumped around her beating her all over her body and tearing her clothes. Journalists who were participating at the events with great solidarity negotiated "*with the STICK*" the recovery of Ben Mhenni's camera, however, without the memory card. The attacker told them that because Ben Mhenni was a blogger and a journalist she was not allowed to film or take pictures (Ben Mhenni, 2012f). This shows the systematic and strategic nature of these violent attacks across geographical borders to silence female bloggers because of their ability to document the abuse taking place during the uprisings.

Ben Mhenni dedicated a number of blog posts in the attacks she received and accompanied her detailed description with pictures showing the results of her assault by the policemen (2012a).



Figure 4.7 One of Ben Mhenni's injuries documented on her blog.

The incidents above only strengthened Ben Mhenni's resolve and obligation towards all those fighting for personal freedoms and civil rights. Her personal account reflected a rise in organised resistance. In her analysis, she positions the acts of censorship she experienced within the context of deprived regions, neglected cities, young people being denied of opportunities to be productive, women's dignity under threat, public services at risk, as well as within the context of institutional breakdown due to economic corruption in Tunisia.

It is in this context that they would once again want to reduce myself to silence, or even to deprive myself of any ability to continue to fulfil my duty as a witness and actor [...] despite all the obscurantist, repressive and barbaric forces. (Ben Mhenni, 2012f)

4.2.3.1 Sexual assaults of women human rights defenders

Sexual violence against women human rights defenders has been a cross-cutting issue in my data, especially in the narratives of Egyptian activists reporting. Women across the MENA region have been subjected to high levels of gender-based violence committed by militia (protesters), soldiers and police; specifically, sexual violence and rape.

The Egyptian bloggers in this research drew significant attention to the socio-political context where violence against women was used as a tool for political repression. During this crucial transitional time for establishing women's access and participation in transitional bodies and decision-making processes, several factors were linked to the widespread sexual violence prevalent on the ground. The examples in the blogging

narratives of women provide insights on the interacting factors, such as cultural practices, gender inequality and stereotypes, social and political breakdown, competition over resources and power, the normalisation of violence within interpersonal relationships, and poverty. Sexual violence affecting women human rights defenders had devastating effects, not only on the defenders themselves but also on their families due to the associated social stigma. For example, Eltahawy, writing about her own sexual assault, raised the issue of the psychological trauma that accompanies the physical pain:

They [...] sexually assaulted me -- I was groped all over my body. I lost count of the number of hands that tried to get into my trousers. Calling me a whore. Pulling my hair. All the while beating me. At one point I fell. Eye-level with their boots, all I thought was: "Get up or you will die". (Eltahawy, 2011b)

Despite repeated requests for medical attention, Eltahawy's injuries were ignored throughout her detention. Describing the response of the detaining officers, she reveals both state corruption as well as the taboos in Egyptian society about women:

Why's a good girl like you talking about hands in your trousers? Shut up and silence your shame, I imagined them saying. I'll be damned if I carry this alone, I thought. And so I went on and on, until finally they heard, and one of them yelled out: 'Our society has a sickness. Those riot police conscripts who assaulted you, do you know what we've done for them? We've lifted them out of their villages, scrubbed them clean and opened a tiny door in their minds'. 'That's exactly why we're having a revolution', I responded. (Eltahawy, 2011b)

Eltahawy continued to write in the foreign press, for example, *The Guardian*, to expose the state's apathy and denial of the mass sexual assaults in Cairo and the crucial role of bloggers who exposed violence against women.

The police watched and did nothing. The state denied the assaults took place, but bloggers at the scene exposed that lie; this encouraged women to speak out and forced men to listen. [...] More than 80% of women now say they've been street sexually harassed, and more than 60% of men admit to having done so. (Eltahawy, 2011e)

Virginity tests

As the protests in Tahrir Square continued, the Egyptian police adopted illegal and violent tactics specifically aimed at women protesters, in order to silence them and push them out of the public sphere; these included arresting them and submitting them to electric shocks,

sexual assaults, strip searches, and threatened women with charges of prostitution if their imposed medical virginity tests found they were not virgins. Such threats to women's privacy and dignity remain common.

Hassan worked with Nazra to bring international attention to a number of testimonies of women human rights defenders in Egypt who were forced to submit to these virginity tests. Here follows only a fraction of the testimonies collected and published on the Nazra; the stories cover the socio-economic spectrum of women in Egyptian society, archiving the human rights violations against Egyptian women. These testimonies have been discussed and shared by other feminist bloggers in an effort to amplify their stories. Nazra also featured Eltahawy's testimony, showing solidarity and support among female activists and bloggers.

Testimony 1

According to Salwa El-Hosseini, a female 20-year-old hairdresser, uniformed soldiers tied her up on the museum's grounds, forced her to the ground and slapped her, then shocked her with a stun gun while accusing her of being "one of the prostitutes all over the country". [...] the army soldiers claimed that they picked her up from a prostitute hostel and accused her of destroying the country. [...] when she told them to abstain from insulting her parents, one officer responded, "If your parents had raised you well, you wouldn't have gone down to Tahrir".⁵² (Nazra for Feminist Studies, 2011b)

Forcing women to have "virginity tests", the regime wanted to methodically degrade women because they are women. Women were not only sexualised but also carrying the blame for "destroying the country" because they dared to raise their voice and protest. These forms of torture and ill-treatment exploit the stigmas linked to sexual and gender-based violence, and they should be approached within the wider social and historical context of strategies to silence women human rights defenders. By stigmatising female protesters, the Egyptian authorities aimed to discourage women and girls from participating in public life.

Testimony 2

On 4 October 2011, during a demonstration in solidarity with activist Maikel Nabil, a blogger arrested by the military police for a blog post in which he criticized the

⁵² Women human rights defenders were detained in a military prison, forced to take off their clothes, in a room with open doors and windows, while male soldiers watched and took pictures. The women were threatened with prostitution charges if they were found to not be virgins.

military, Sahar Maher was arrested after recording the threats leveled against demonstrators by an army colonel. [...] According to Maher, during investigations, it was suggested that she, a Muslim, is romantically involved with Maikel, a Christian, a hint at the rumors that can be circulated and which can cause her great problems, due to the taboo surrounding the issue of individuals of different religions being romantically involved. (Nazra for Feminist Studies, 2011b)

Testimony 3

In 20 November, Bothaina Kamel, Egypt's only potential female presidential candidate, was also sexually assaulted in Tahrir Square. According to Kamel, she was "beaten all over [and] touched sexually by army officers." Kamel recounts that some army officers tried to halt the assault when they recognized who she was, knowing that she will "talk to all the world". (Nazra for Feminist Studies, 2011b)

These testimonies reveal the hostile environment preventing Egyptian women human rights defenders from participating in the political public sphere amidst profound socio-political changes in their country. The bloggers, together with other prominent female activists, civil society organisations and women's rights organisations have been radically exposing the aggressive practices of a re-masked regime to silence them and prevent their political agency.

Exposing the public claims of senior officials from the Supreme Council of Armed Forces (SCAF)⁵³ reinforcing the hegemonic public discourse about the ethos of women protesting and claiming their rights and their place in the political arena, Nazra for Feminist Studies blogged:

Justifications about the sexual violence, including the "virginity tests", that the "women were not like your daughter or mine. These were girls who had camped out in tents with male protesters" claiming also that "[w]e didn't want them to say we had sexually assaulted or raped them, so we wanted to prove that they weren't virgins in the first place". (Nazra for Feminist Studies, 2011b)

⁵³ Hassan (2011) in her blog post and a dedicated report by Nazra for Feminist Studies provided the political context in which these attacks and claims were made: After his resignation in 2011, Hosni Mubarak - Egypt's president in power for thirty years - handed power to the Supreme Council of Armed Forces (SCAF); an 18-member body composed of high-ranking commanders in the army, air force, and navy. The SCAF, pledged that it would hand over power in the duration of 6 months. Despite this commitment, they held on their power and decided to hand over legislative powers after a parliamentary election. Reports and joint statements issued by civil society and women's organisations expressed their doubts about the SCAF's obligations and commitment to the ideals of the mass protests. The regime's suppressive practices towards women human rights defenders were prevalent again (Nazra for Feminist Studies, 2011b).

Such claims produce and maintain the perceptions that women fighting for their rights have no place in the public sphere or in a patriarchal religious society. At the same time, the policing of female sexuality by militarism in Egypt was used as a justification to the violence and coercive power against women in the name of social stability. The widespread violence and false allegations against women human rights defenders was used to damage their reputation and restrict their ability and agency to challenge the system. Hassan and Nazra (2011), pointing to the justice gap, reported that although the army admitted these crimes, “no investigation was carried out, with perpetrators waking away with impunity”. The excuse used by authorities was that courts and police stations are not places for respectable women. The patriarchal social norms and deeply rooted stereotypical perceptions about women’s ‘acceptable’ place in the private sphere, were used methodically to dismiss violations against women human rights defenders and portray them as deviants in the public discourse: “By portraying these women as threats to society, they are diminished into deviants who are denied any possible support from their communities” (Nazra for Feminist Studies, 2011b).

Despite these realities, in such a critical transition phase in the history of Egypt the military has been also repeatedly challenged by women who demanded equality and access to participation to stop these repressive policies. Hassan with Nazra and other women's rights organisations published several reports documenting the history of violations against women human rights defenders and issued several joint statements denouncing the military policies that push women away from the public sphere. Incorporating these publications in their blogging practice, they were able to refer to international human rights law thus raising awareness among the community about the legal instruments available in keeping the state accountable and to re-claim women’s rights to human dignity and privacy.

The practices of physical attacks, sexual assaults and “virginity tests” against women human rights defenders reduced their value to sexual objects. Nazra posted and number of posts and reports analysing the severe impact on women’s dignity and bodily integrity that such invasive and violent practices had. Not only were these attacks against women’s right to privacy, but women found not to be virgins where exposed to abandonment, violent reprisals and many other physical and psychological risks.

To answer one of the key questions raised by the Egyptian revolution of 2011, and one that is still being asked “Where are the Egyptian women?”, Mozn Hassan in her blog post “A Revolution Just Beginning” (2011) made a crucial analytical link, that the hostility is in fact the lack of political acknowledgement of women’s political agency. Nazra blogged

that there is a long path to substantial gender equality and full political participation of women: “the violations perpetrated against WHRDs take place in a context of non-recognition for the work of WHRDs and non-acknowledgment of the violations that take place against them as human rights violations.” (Nazra, 2011b)

4.2.4 Challenging corrupt systems and structures

In the transitional period after the 2011 uprisings the feminist activists and bloggers devised different strategies to repeatedly challenge the corrupt systems and structures of the regimes in their countries. Eltahawy, cross-posting her article published in *Foreign Policy* in 2012, exposed the concerns about the lack of free or fair elections that hamper revolutionary Egypt after the struggles of the youth movement and the people showing that the system is changing but not towards authentic civil and political rights nor towards democracy: “All candidates come from the previous regime and they are part of the ‘club of dictators’. This shows that the political public sphere is still restricted and based on fear. It is not fair or free.” (Eltahawy, 2012)

Seif has been also critical of the actions of Egypt's interim ruling body, the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF), by providing evidence that known figures of the Tahrir protests have been targeted unconstitutionally: “And you see that it's not just that they're getting tortured or beaten up, but there's an element of the Army trying to break the revolutionary spirit.” (Seif, 2011c)

4.2.4.1 Travel bans and freeze of assets

At this point, I would like to make special reference to the travel bans, asset freezes and the questioning of prominent activists for allegedly violating foreign funding laws imposed by the regimes. Such arbitrary interferences in the rights to movement, to property and assets, as well as to fair public hearing, independent and impartial tribunal, were prevalent in the critical analyses of the bloggers in this study. In their discourse action they link the repression experienced by women human rights defenders, with the understanding that the oppressive political powers felt threatened precisely by women's political action as it was paramount in raising awareness outside the state and in mobilising collective action.

I look into the Case 173, known as Egypt's “Foreign Funding Case”, which emerged as a prominent example in my data. In 2011, Hassan was among the first (along with members from Nazra) from Egyptian civil society to be charged in the Case 173. Nazra was investigated for illegally accepting foreign funding under a Mubarak-era law designed to

impede civil society. In 2013, 43 NGO employees were convicted. This impacted their lives for several years. In February 2016 the government reopened the case, as part of its ongoing crackdown on civil society.⁵⁴

Hassan in her narrative asked a series of crucial questions, to deconstruct the myth of women activists approached as a national threat. With her affirmative rhetoric she reconstructs and claims the “right to a safe public sphere”. This would entail protection of women’s bodies, support for violence and rape survivors so that they can feel empowered to enjoy their economic, social and political rights. With this critique, she also raises the lack of cooperation between civil society actors and the state authorities in this struggle for gender equality.

I do not know of any national threat that might be posed by those who are defending the integrity of women’s bodies [...]. Is protecting the bodies of women against violation a crime? Is providing therapy for female violence and rape survivors a threat? Is speaking about female representation a threat? Is trying to help society produce in full capacity without the exclusion of women a threat? Is working with civil society organizations, politicians and State authorities to empower women a threat? (Hassan, 2016)

Stressing the implications on the Egyptian feminist movement, Hassan marked this crucial point as a “new era of regression” regarding women’s rights, because there was no fulfilment of the right to freedom of association, the basic ingredient to movement building: “how can there be a movement without freedom of association? How can there be a movement if the State does not reconsider its position that our issues are part of some Western conspiracy against Egypt?” (Hassan, 2016). These questions posed with defiance and transparency reaffirms that human rights are at the core of an independent feminist movement which is a political movement: “We’re not this nice acceptable women’s organisation. We think the feminist movement is a political movement. We’ve always had a human rights perspective” (Hassan, 2016).

A deeper analysis of such accusations against Hassan and Nazra reveals that asking crucial questions about women’s access and participation in the public and political sphere are part

⁵⁴ In 2018, the defendants in Case 173, were acquitted in a widely anticipated retrial (TIMEP, 2019). In an online interview I had with human rights lawyer Azza Soliman on 25 June 2018, who was also targeted under the foreign funding case, she expressed the importance of the solidarity and support she received from Hassan and Nazra. Feminist bloggers disseminated the petition initiated by Amnesty International for the arbitrary asset freeze and travel ban against her by the Egyptian authorities. She felt that such coalitions were of great importance in reaching out to the international community for mobilizing support.

of a dynamic form of political action online and offline. Challenging such accusations – at tremendous personal and collective cost – reveals again the absence of political acknowledgement of her/their political role and efforts for social change. This work includes carrying out interviews with women and other actors; working with civil society organisations and political parties; sharing expertise with ministries and governmental departments on combating violence against women and amending the penal law to include a definition of sexual harassment as crime; collaborating with Cairo University for campaigns against sexual harassment; working with officials of the Department of Forensic Medicine in dealing with survivors of violence; contributing to the drafting of the Egyptian constitution and many more actions to influence decision making for gender equality and human rights.

“One question still remains, are all the aforementioned agencies unaware of our existence as a legitimate and publicly known entity? Why has none of them objected? Why did no official, and I repeat official, agency hesitate to meet or work with us under the pretext that we are conspiring against the country or threatening its national security?!” (Hassan, 2016)

In addition, Ben Mhenni published in her blog her speech from her participation to the Oslo Freedom Forum in 2011. She dedicated her words to Tunisian people and martyrs, who fought for the right to freedom of movement, and denounced the travel bans imposed on herself and other activists. This shows that interdiscursive action is at the centre of their blogging strategies connected to actions outside the state. This reveals advocacy actions that could be understood beyond local or regional or international categories to exercise pressure against the restrictions imposed on women activists by authorities - to physically meet and network abroad - under the excuse that they had received foreign funding to work against their country.

Nazra, for example, published a number of blog posts denouncing the travel ban that was issued against Hassan in 2011 in the context of the foreign funding case. Such repressive policies reveal on the one hand and instrumentalised effort to deprive women of their right to free movement and assembly, and on the other hand, how their local–global role was seen as a national threat.

Nazra documented the experiences of a number of WHRDs who had been detained at airports, and provided a feminist analysis in a comprehensive study posted their blog entitled “Reasons May Vary, but Travel Ban is always Patriarchal: A Feminist Analysis of Experiences of Women Human Rights Defenders in Egyptian Airports” (2017).

Emphasising the significance of documenting and providing a feminist analysis of the diverse experiences of WHRDs, they assessed how travel bans are a form of gender-based physical and political discrimination (because they are women and human rights defenders) that intersect with other underlying violations by state and societal actors. The feminist interpretations of women being denied their freedom of movement and travel, as well as the access to their assets, bring up the close links with wider attempts to shut down the public sphere for civil society organisations and WHRDs: “The aforementioned Case no. 173/2011 is a flagrant example, involving decisions by the Public Prosecutor to impose a travel ban on, freeze the assets of, and initiate proceedings against a number of Human Rights Defenders, both women and men” (Nazra for Feminist Studies, 2017).

Such testimonies of patriarchal practices, violence and harassment against women in airports, clearly show that women were targets of class-based, racial and gender-based discrimination because of their political activism. These were not isolated cases but patterns of repression affecting WHRDs in the region.

4.2.5 “Revolutionaries’ smile”: Storytelling, sharing and amplifying stories

Encompassing new communication technologies in their blogging such as Skype to share information from other women activists and bloggers in the MENA region was one of the diverse ways in which bloggers in my sample communicated and helped each other to expose human rights violations on the ground and to seek international solidarity and support.

Ben Mhenni, in her post “A Skype Conference with a Libyan Blogger” spoke to a fellow blogger who described how Libyan activists had been executed as punishment for having spoken out about their country’s political failures’; the blogger also denounced the acts of genocide committed by Kaddafi’s militia and the resulting global apathy.

Kaddafi’s militia was killing the injured people inside hospitals. They did not allow the entrance of humanitarian aids and medicine to most of the Libyan cities and villages. They burnt, killed, tortured and kidnapped thousands and thousands of Libyans. She later condemned the silence of the world’s nations. (Ben Mhenni, 2011a)

Ben Mhenni’s blogging was a space for expression of feelings of solidarity and guilt for not helping enough and for the silence of the international community. With a strong sense of duty and agency, Ben Mhenni showed that the act of sharing this discussion with her audience created a safe space, where these feelings could be expressed to a wider audience

while also extending a call for international support. The local and the global level interweaved in an inter-discursive and conversational way between herself, the Libyan blogger and her readership from around the world. It also exposed the world leaders' apathy.

I felt guilty because I didn't write enough about what was going on in Libya. I took part in some demonstrations in Tunis. I tried to help [...]. But this is not enough. It is true that Tunisians showed a momentum of solidarity with Libyans and with refugees but we are all taking part in the crime against civilians in Libya. The whole world is taking part in the crime. (Ben Mhenni, 2011a)

Ghazzawi in her blog post entitled "Revolutionaries' smile" (2012) also showed her strong sense of duty by sharing the stories of underprivileged and unknown Syrian revolutionaries dedicating their lives for the revolution away from their families. Sharing revolutionaries' stories through her own narrative, Ghazzawi wanted to focus on those voices that have been silenced, but who are spreading hope whilst in detention. Despite feelings of sadness and exhaustion after her own experience, she put sharing the stories of female revolutionaries at the core of her blogging, making her rhetoric not only unique but also meaningful, hopeful and motivating for social change.

What can I do more? and what are these obstacles that are preventing me from doing more? I can write about those amazing revolutionaries who left their families and children and living solely for this revolution, you see them making jokes and smiling at demonstrations, some were detained and tortured, you stand listening to them speak about their experience with detention, and you know that what you witnessed from detention is nothing compared to theirs, those unknown activists, the unprivileged, who don't have facebook nor twitter, but they are the very ones who inspire you and make you truly believe, that there is hope. (Ghazzawi, 2012)

This strong sense of duty and agency is reflected in Ghazzawi's storytelling deconstructing the human realities in detention. Revealing the hard realities of a female activist she met in Adra prison, who had an unwavering revolutionary spirit despite the pain and trauma of torture inflicted on her. Ghazzawi brings to the forefront the complex realities of Syrian revolutionaries. For example, the trust and respect that may build up over time altering power relationships. Holding space for the perspectives of those in detention is a crucial part of the narration and storytelling emerging from feminist blogging. As part of their blogging practice it provides insights and new meanings to political action in the struggle over the public sphere.

I can write about this female activist I met in Adra prison who has been through sever[e] amount of torture, she doesn't smile when she tells you: "it hurts all over" but her eyes sparkle, her body is weak but you know she's not giving up for pain. The physical pain I never experienced did not weaken her revolutionary spirit, and I am left amazed. I can write about relationship between the detainee and the agent who gives you food three times a day. How sense of trust and respect builds up through time. I have so much to write about this subject, but I can't for the agents' own safety and security. I can write about that sniper in Damascus suburbs who fires everyday at a certain time to tell the neighbourhood that he came for duty and to alarm them not to get out. They call him "the merciful sniper". (Ghazzawi, 2012)

Sheery Al-Hayek (Syria) when she was awarded for her efforts to free Ghazzawi from detention, expressed the great concern, sense of duty and responsibility to write and blog about those in detention. Al-Hayek emphasised the political importance bloggers and their practice as necessary for convincing the international community of the existence of a peaceful movement striving for social and political change in Syria. Thus, blogging for political participation from a feminist perspective constitutes an important element for overcoming the political obstacles within state boundaries by reaching out to global audiences: "They are not terrorists, and it's our job to communicate this to everyone in the world. It's those of us who are not in detention that have to carry messages across." (Al-Hayek, 2013)

Thus, in the discourse action of feminist bloggers there is an effort to raise awareness and acknowledge the "true revolutionary voices" delivering the messages of the struggles across the world, despite the defamation and allegations against them by the regimes for being involved in terrorism and other conspiracies. To do so, in 2012 Sherry Al-Hayek used Facebook to campaign through the page "Freerazan" in support of fellow blogger Razan Ghazzawi, with the aim to contribute to the visibility of peaceful actions towards human rights and democracy in Syria.

Another way in which this point is emphasised, is when Seif, reflecting on the "international media obsession", also placed the focus on the stories that need to be told, of those on the ground fighting the regimes and who are often muted from the public discourse. From Seif's narrative, a criticism towards Western media is also expressed and a duty emerges towards the community of revolutionaries to amplify their critical messages in the struggle over the public sphere to international audiences.

As international media obsesses about "twitter revolution", "role of social media", "Role of women" & "Fear of MB". As our media obsesses about "Lack of security", "The Israeli Spy" & "lack of stability". As we obsess about "Constitution 1st", "elections 1st", "National coalition" & "National dialogue" Away from all this media frenzy, a battle is taking place and it is led by the true revolutionaries".(Seif, 2011b)

“Away from the spotlight” (Seif, 2011b) are the stories of the revolutionaries that that are constructed by feminist bloggers as the source and duty for political action, because working on women’s and human rights is an ongoing individual and collective struggle.

4.2.5.1 Empowering each other to “Speak out!”

Nasser wrote in her blog about Heba Al-Thabhani, a female Yemeni college student at Sana'a University who spoke out about the threats by Al Houthi men, who assaulted her in 2014. In an organic way Nasser provided the space and the attention on the voice of the woman who started a storm of resistance to Al Houthis' hegemony of the university's campus. In her blog post Nasser is critical of militarism – together with religious and cultural expectations – imposed on women in universities by political forces. The latter used breaches of the dress code as a justification to inflict violence on women. In this way, she questions the freedom of expression and the independence of universities in Yemen. Her writing empowers women “speaking out” and standing up against violence.

Heba refused to be scared and she decided to speak out following that incident. Once she spoke out, her story took local press and social media networks in the country by storm. More importantly, her issue grabbed massive students' movement inside the university's campus, in solidarity with her and in protest against the Houthis' armed occupation of the campus. Here is a quick talk with my new feminist hero, Heba during a protest held yesterday in Sana'a university (transcript in English follows): (Heba) I was stopped by three armed men inside the university campus...” (Nasser, 2014a)

Women in their blogging practice gave visibility to diverse female voices by holding space for these voices to be expressed and thus, providing alternative knowledge for the situation in their countries and other countries in the region. Also, these served as examples of mobilising other women to resist, speak out and demand protection in public spaces and universities. Feminist blogging, incorporating situated narratives and storytelling,

demanded the rights for those most at risk and provided feminist role models for other women.

4.2.6 Shrinking space(s): Exposing ongoing repression and transitional violence

My data let me to a huge number of examples of repression and regression pre-during-and-post the 2011 Arab revolutions, which the bloggers document and report in great detail using a critical feminist analysis. Due to the limited space, I focus to the key challenges highlighted by the bloggers from a feminist standpoint.

The 2011 Arab uprisings with thousands of men and women protesting in the streets represented years of rage about the corruption and repression of the regimes. Young Egyptians and especially women left fear behind and demanded to be heard. Within a climate of social solidarity, watching Tunisian people and especially youth, topple president Zine El Abidine Ben Ali after 23 years was, according to Eltahawy, “the cleanest and purest form of civil resistance to dictatorship in the Arab world” (2011c).

The forms of hostility towards women reclaiming the public sphere reported and documented in the blogs in this study included mass sexual assaults and gang rapes committed against female protesters. The blatant disregard of these crimes towards women by political parties and movements shows the lack political acknowledgment and listening of women’s realities in their attempt to participate in public political events. In the analysis of the bloggers the violations of women’s rights were key indicators in assessing the transitional governments’ intention to acknowledge the importance of women’s democratic participation in public life. Mainstream Western and European media paid little attention to the perspectives of activists and movements considered ‘radical’ in this context, with not much information readily available to the public. Feminist bloggers were well aware that although this was a paramount moment for women to develop and establish their role in the public sphere, they were paying the price for it, being more exposed to gender-based violence.

Another factor was that men were discouraging women from taking part in the protests or being on the frontline. Hassan has written extensively about the constantly shrinking public spaces for Egyptian civil society and how defending women’s bodies has been considered a crime in Egypt and other countries in the MENA. The disapproval of women activists’ public actions was identified by feminist groups and bloggers as the new challenge faced by feminist movements. They felt that their society had the right to know that their work was attacked by the regime. The role of feminist blogging is understood within the

authoritarian, militaristic context of punishing political activism. Feminists such as Hassan and workers at Nazra faced charges of six months to twenty five years in prison, whilst their role and work providing a ‘safe space’ for the women and girls was publicly vilified, despite local and global acknowledgement by fellow bloggers and activists: “Overall, we are ‘plotting against this country through an illegal entity’ and are ‘parties to a conspiracy against it’. This is, unfortunately, how it is presented to the public, or what the campaign against us says implicitly” (Hassan, 2016).

Women activists, bloggers and organisations being targeted so heavily shrunk the public space even further. It also made it more urgent for the bloggers to stand up to the confusion and manipulation of the public and speak the truth to society. Thus, they connect the inner with the outer and transpose revolutionary momentums into information to the local and international audiences of their blogs.

4.3 GLOBAL VOICES: TRANSCENDING SPACE(S), DEVISING STRATEGIES

The findings revealed a high level of discursive diversification in the blogging practices in reclaiming the local and international public sphere. A few examples identified in this research include documenting human rights violations, demonstrations and protests; announcements and calls for participation in campaigns and petitions; sharing critical information about other activists and bloggers in the region; and insights from participation in civil society actions online and offline.

In claiming the public sphere, blogging for international online platforms has been an important communicative practice, which I explore in detail in this section. The data reveal diverse and creative communication tactics during these intense political times. I focus on the interdiscursive communicative tactics that involved diverse ways in publishing and sharing the blog entries for example, as articles or vice versa in published in global independent media platforms and online global activist forums. Especially the female bloggers who are journalists or reporters made significant use of the international media platforms and social media (Twitter, Facebook and YouTube) offering valuable political commentary. Grassroots activists made use of international activist platforms, such as Global Voices,⁵⁵ Open Democracy, the Amnesty International portals, Raseef22, Majal, and Movements. For example, *Movements* acts as a crowdsourcing space for human rights defenders and activists around the world and provides activists and human rights defenders

⁵⁵ www.globalvoices.org

in dictatorships with the expertise they need to strengthen their voice.⁵⁶ Similarly, Global Voices frames its role as a community, voicing authentic global stories of resistance, justice and identity from the perspectives of those excluded from the mainstream media. Thus, my analysis of feminist blogging is positioned within the context of and in relation to how these practices work together to provide unbiased global social justice news. These discourses work together as alternative media but I argue that these also are also part of an alternative citizenship practice.

Such articles or posts hosted in global activist and media forums/outlets were re-shared/cross-posted in the personal blogs of activists for their readers. This showed interdiscursive tactics and networking particularly to maximise the ‘virality’ elements and to reach out to a wider audience for information sharing and, encouraging mobilisation.

For example, the most popular thematic tag on Shehwaro’s blog was ‘Global Voices’, indicating her cross-posting on that platform. This collaboration was an important element of her blogging practice, followed by her second-most used thematic tag, which was, for obvious reasons, ‘Syria’: “Writing for Global Voices could be an opportunity for me to reacquaint myself with myself, or at least remind myself of who this person whom I live with, and who is me, has become.” (Shehwaro, 2014a)

Shehwaro’s series of blog posts entitled “Dispatches from Syria”, was based on twelve stories that she originally wrote in Arabic then translated into English, Spanish, Hebrew, Arabic, French, Chinese, Korean, and German with the help of a community of volunteer translators (Global Voices, 2015).

Her writing brings us the complexity of Syrian society, showing us the conflicts, coalitions and the hard choices made by women during conflict, war and exile. Her blogging constructs the knowledge of an “outsider within”⁵⁷ by focusing on the insights of people who forced to choose violence as a means of security. “In Syria We Have All Become Killers” (Shehwaro, 2014b) is a typical post, in which she writes about how she learned via a Facebook post about the bombing of a regime security checkpoint, where her mother was murdered in 2012. She reveals her feelings and thoughts about the meaning of peace and life, and a deeper understanding for those calling revenge when human values are lost when death becomes the norm.

⁵⁶ www.movements.org

⁵⁷ A feminist idea coined by Patricia Hill Collins (1986, 1997) about the knowledge production influenced by the positionality of standpoints in a dominant society, especially linking gender and race.

And this is how the murderous regime will ultimately win, regardless of what political change awaits Syria. The regime has succeeded in turning us all into murderers. I feel sad for our children, as they will have to live with us after we have all become either killing machines, or creatures who gloat at murder of others. (Shehwaro, 2014b)

Shehwaro accompanied her blog text with the picture below, which shows an improvised cemetery in Aleppo, Syria. The visual discourse adds to her analysis showing us the lack of space in cemeteries, forcing Aleppo residents to bury the dead in parks and open spaces across the city.



Figure 4.8 Improved cemetery in Aleppo, Syria, from Marcell Shehwaro's blog. Photo by Karam Almasri, copyright Demotix (27 May 2014).

Another example is when Ben Mhenni, making full use of these platforms, contributed to the special coverage called 'Tunisian Revolution 2011' by Global Voices. By cross-posting this article to her blog Ben Mhenni informed her audience that the Tunisian revolution and the widespread mobilisation of bloggers was sparked by the immolation of an unemployed young man called Mohamed Bouazizi (Ben Mhenni, 2010g):

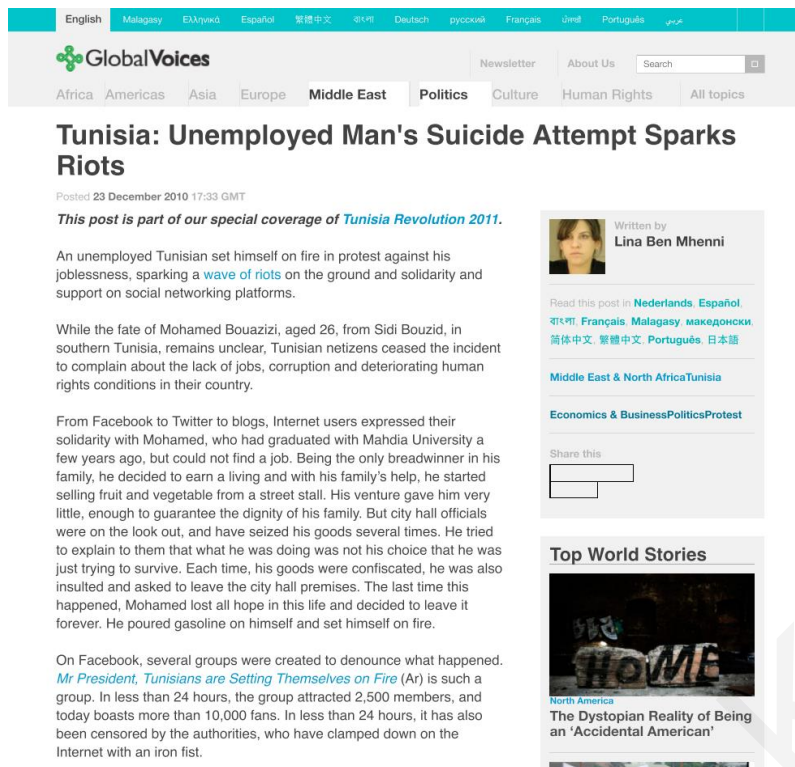


Figure 4. 9 Lina Ben Mhenni’s post on Global Voices (2010g), author screenshot.

Ben Mhenni (2010g), provided a comprehensive view of what was happening politically on the ground by translating quotes of other bloggers and including their statements in her blogging. By translating and sharing quotes from fellow bloggers who played a crucial role in the #sidibouzid movement, she amplified the feelings of indignation about the marginalisation of specific communities. This aspect of blogging contributes to bringing marginalised voices to the centre of political rhetoric, as the government had moved to imposing a complete blackout to censor media, blogs and websites that disseminated the story of Bouazizi.

Some bloggers wrote about what happened and expressed their anger. Writing in a Tunisian dialect, *Boukachen* wrote a post entitled *The Sidi Bouzid Holocaust*:

Translation	Original Quote
	“ What happened is not something new. This miserable situation has been ongoing in the remote areas for many years. It is the result of the combination of the climatic conditions and the marginalization of such areas, coupled by the total indifference (of the authorities). But the story does not end here as our depraved media exercises a full blackout of this incident.

Tunisian Girl added:

Translation	Original Quote
	“ The Tunisian government did not find another solution but to censor the websites disseminating the story and imposing a blockade on the city of Sidi Bouzid, where people are expressing their anger by protesting in the streets.

On Twitter, the furor is also continuing, with the hash tag [#sidibouzid](#) trending among Tunisian users.

Figure 4. 10 Ben Mhenni (2010g) holding space for the quotes of fellow bloggers in providing a holistic analysis of the riots, author screenshot.

In 2012, Ben Mhenni continued to denounce the corruption of the transitional government, for example in an article published in *Your Middle East*, and cross-posted to her blog under the title “Tunisians feel that the government has betrayed them. Their dreams and hopes have been stolen” (Ben Mhenni, 2012e). She provided insights into the betrayal felt by the Tunisian people, who continued to be oppressed by worsening living conditions. Even people in remote areas of Tunisia were under threat by government-sanctioned violence, which included terrorising the elderly, violence against women and arrests of young men.

The strategy of cross-posting has been a key finding, because it was a strategy to maximise readership when exposing the corruption of oppressive governments and their effort to silence opposition. Cross-posting in her blog the article Ben Mhenni published in *The Star* (Canada’s largest daily newspaper), Ben Mhenni describes how her journey started with verifying information about the uprisings from remote areas and sharing it with others through her blogging.

We spent days and nights in front of our computer screens — reading, writing and uploading photos and videos. After that I had the opportunity to travel to Sidi Bouzid, Regueb and Kasserine. I have been subjected to tear gas and soldiers’ fire.

I have met the families whose children were fatally shot by police, interviewing them and taking pictures of the dead. (Ben Mhenni, 2011e)



Figure 4. 11 Screenshot shared by Ben Mhenni (2011e), cross-posted on her blog under the title “My country, Tunisia: ‘For years, the regime kept up appearances’”.

Another example was when Mona Eltahawy strategically promoted *HarassMap* – a local initiative in Egypt that helped women report harassment via email, text message, Twitter or Facebook – in *The Guardian*. The initiative also aimed to take away the shame and stigma experienced by survivors of sexual violence and to tackle police apathy in taking charges seriously (as they themselves were often perpetrators of harassment).

HarassMap not only offers women a way to take action — send a text message, write a tweet — in the face of a situation of paralyzing violation, it replies with

information about services available such as counseling, legal aid, and how to file a police report. (Eltahawy, 2010)

This is an example of the innovative ways in which feminist bloggers and social media activists amplified their message by crisscrossing online and offline spheres, and local and global contexts. The ‘glocality’ of these collaborative discursive actions among fellow bloggers and activists promoted a virtual solidarity and built coalitions that reached global audiences. From using social media technologies creatively, to offering training on video journalism, they made sure to bring awareness to women’s problems, needs, and voices, and to offer the space for expression.

Ben Mhenni also wrote on Global Voices about the collaboration among Tunisian bloggers to raise awareness about students being imprisoned. The screenshot below shows one of the many examples of how the bloggers redirect their readers to their writings which are published in these global activist platforms by posting a screenshot of the website and a URL link. The tactic of cross-posting articles in global activist platforms and media outlets blurs the lines between inner with the outer. Sharing personal stories and narratives (inner) with global audiences (outer) exposing the ongoing human rights violations in their countries. Even more importantly this type of organising builds upon solidarity and support that is being expressed among bloggers and readers who are perceived as a community, in the particular example (one of the many) against students’ imprisonment.

Tunisian Bloggers against Student Imprisonment

Tunisia: Bloggers Against Student Imprisonment
 Monday, January 19, 2010 @ 23:21 UTC
 by Lina Ben Mhenni - sat

Countries: Tunisia
 Topics: Cyber-Activism, Education, Protest
 Languages: French, English

The recent trials of a group of Tunisian students and their sentencing to prison terms ranging from six months of three years after organizing a sit-in at a university accommodation to claim the right of girl students in housing prompted bloggers to launch a support campaign calling for their freedom.

A Facebook group, entitled No to Students Imprisonment and a blog: Free Jailed Tunisian Students were created. Tunisian bloggers wrote about this story.

Facebook explains :

« Tunisian Students were jailed from 6 months to 3 years for protesting against the housing problem they are facing. I completely disagree with this sentence, the trial is a political trial that was disguised. Please spread the word and protest against the tunisian dictatorship.

Carpediem blogged about the issue and said:

« Qui de plus injuste et normal quand on est jeune.

Recent Articles also in Middle East & North Africa

- Tunisia: Bloggers Against Student Imprisonment
- Sudan: Journalist Hasan Akel Still Detained
- Albina: Does Islam Bring Happiness or Misery?
- Egypt: Muslim Brotherhood Slants New Head
- Algeria: Indigenous March for Autonomy

Recent Links also in Middle East & North Africa

- Tunisia Blogger Riyadoun argues whether one should still accept the saying that a man is worth two women in liberty or should it be interpreted differently over a day's life then late reasons to validate his argument.
- Zinan al-Hadidi writes about the second phase of a campaign that started in February 2009 by Abdel Jaleel, who is asking all women to boycott all lingerie shops that employ men, starting from the 12th of February, 2010, and continuing for ten weeks.
- Michael Collins, the Middle East Institute blog writes: Article that the work resulted in one bad day.

To read the whole post click [here](#)

Posted by [lina ben Mhenni](#) on [janvier 19, 2010](#)



1 commentaire:

ABDELHAMID mardi, 19 janvier, 2010

Nice Work ! Good job done, keep up your head up my friends !!

Figure 4. 12 Screenshot and URL link accompanying Lina Ben Mhenni's blog post redirecting readers to her blog post in Global Voices.

Ghatta's blogging practice revealed the creative and strategic use of transnational blogging platforms such as the Medium, Raseef22 and Majal. She redirected her readers to her blog posts, which was a successful strategy for larger outreach, access to information and overcoming censorship.⁵⁸ The screenshots from Majal reveal how these interdiscursive practices employed by bloggers are part of a wider net of web circles acting as mini public spheres ensuring that local action becomes global. These practices address issues that are kept invisible from the mainstream public sphere, such as the rights of migrant workers (class and race), the stigmatised LGBTQ community (gender) and artists that express their dissent through music. These young voices are front and centre in expressing courage and innovation in the transnational public arena, which is a daring act.

⁵⁸ To show the power of transnational activist platforms: When the Arab Spring protests intensified, joint actions like 'Crowd Voice' played a critical role, specifically by the archiving and preserving thousands of pieces of media (e.g. citizen videos) that the international media could use when covering the events. The fact that the 'Crowd Voice' website was censored in Bahrain and Yemen shows the alternative power they held which was seen as a threat to the oppressive systems.

WHY WE EXIST

Every project we undertake connects back to our core beliefs.

With courage and innovation, Majal addresses issues that receive little or no attention: From rights of the invisible lower income migrant workers, to the stigmatized Middle East LGBTQ community, to those seeking to express dissent through music.



Local action became **global**

Founded in Bahrain in 2006, Majal began as Mideast Youth, serving marginalized populations in the Middle East and North Africa. After a decade of local impact, credibility, and creativity, the scope of our work now goes well beyond the region, and we still have much more to do.

A daring act

مجال

In Arabic and Farsi, Majal translates to "opportunity" or "to give way". In Hindi slang, it means daring or brave. When pronounced in Spanish, it's "Mahal", which in Tagalog means love. So in a word, **Majal embodies**



what it is meant to be - a daring act of love that creates opportunities for people around the world.

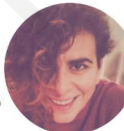
VISIT OUR PRESS ROOM

A remote team that's pretty close.

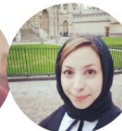
With team members and initiatives throughout the Middle East, India, Mexico, and beyond, we've scaled our projects to a broader, more global audience and rebranded as Majal in 2015 to reflect a renewed transnational positioning.



Esra'a Al Shafei
Founder & Director



Abir Ghattas
Outreach Director



Rima Kalush
Co-Director of Migrant Rights.org



Vani Sarawathi
Associate Editor for Migrant Rights.org



Weyam Ghabbian
Mideast Tunes Program Manager



Lubna Juqqa

Co-Host of Mideast Tunes Radio Research & Arabic Editor at Migrant Rights.org



Mona Kareem



Melissa Tyas

Senior Researcher at CrowdVoice.org



Julia Gómez

Researcher at CrowdVoice.org



Namita Malhorta

Researcher at CrowdVoice.org

Figure 4. 13 Author screenshot from the Majal website.

Amplifying underrepresented voices

We help build communities that celebrate, protect, and promote diversity, and social justice.

Figure 4. 14 Author screenshot from the Majal website.

We're an ecosystem of platforms with two complementary goals:
Freedom of Expression & Access to Information.

[CROWDVOICE.ORG](#)
[MIDEAST TUNES](#)
[MIGRANT RIGHTS](#)
[AHWAA](#)
[MAKING OF A CENTURY](#)
[CROWDVOICE.BY](#)

Figure 4. 15 Author screenshot from the Majal website collaborating with bloggers and activists.

Another example, is the videos used in the blog posts. They often address war, poverty, corruption, freedom of expression and gender equality analysed as prerequisites for successful democratic political transitions. For example, Nasser included in her blogging practice a video meeting with Global Voices assessing the four-year mark of the uprising in Yemen. This collaborative and audio-visual blog post provided information from the ground addressing the humanitarian crisis and poverty standing in the way for real political change. This shows how blogging in its diversity transcends online platforms and contributes to raising awareness internationally about local realities. It also provides information that mainstream media would not be able to report, showing alternative knowledge. In the video, the bloggers discuss the ways in which the political "transition" in Yemen is very problematic because the Western reporting is usually from the Al-Qaeda angle, distancing mainstream media from the actual problems of Yemeni people –for example, access to electricity, food, security, and schooling. The mainstream media keep the attention away from the fact that the army hijacked the movement of the revolution leading to a security vacuum, and to the challenges of sectarianism. Nasser and the other bloggers, bring up the complex realities of Yemeni people. Due to regional and international interference the political authorities that in fact are tribal religious

dictatorship, hijacked the political discourse. Thus, the transitional period was in fact described as "anarchy", and to mitigate the damage from the 2011 revolution, the political system was re-packaged by the political elites with whom dictators shared the power. The poverty led to a humanitarian disaster in Yemen, that pushed people reconsider turning to the previous regime. The Houthis took advantage of that by making promises for a second wave of the revolution. This is how dictatorial power has been re-packaged, not based on democratic values or dialogue but on the fear and the extreme difficulties of people.



Figure 4. 16 Screenshot from the video embedded in Nasser's blog post. The bloggers assessed the social and political developments in post-revolution Yemen.

Despite these realities Nasser used a positive and empowering discourse to affirmed her belief in the power of social groups to bring about change from the gains of those who fought for human rights. This reveals another role of feminist blogging, which goes beyond the sharing of unbiased information from the grassroots, but a social and cultural need to keep the revolutionary spirit alive in the region by staying organised and connected.

I concluded with a positive note because we really can't afford to be completely pessimistic. Revolutions' martyrs didn't sacrifice their blood and soul for us to give up on their (& our) demands. We must have a blind, deep & huge belief in the power of the people, and the potential lying ahead of us. Kudos to the martyrs & let's continue the struggle! (Nasser, 2014b)

Uncovering the stories of those under deliberate and complete blackout and supporting local initiatives to have a wider outreach, Ghattas shared the initiative 'Gaza Font: Every Letter Hides a Story Gaza Font' on the blogging platform Medium, to shed light on Gaza's hidden stories. She invited others to join the global discussion using the hashtag

#UncoverGaza, a way not only to support but also to create memories and celebrate these voices.

Little did we do when Gaza was under siege and bomb showers; little we can do now, and in this tiny space of hand that we can give, let's join the discussion #UncoverGaza, download and use the font, read, talk and spread these stories in every way possible. (Ghattas, 2015)

Nasser, in an interview with Aswat.com (meaning “voices” in Arabic),⁵⁹ advised her fellow bloggers and activists in the region who face censorship and threats to keep writing against injustices in the political and social processes in their countries.

A smart activist and dissident writer is one who never gives a chance for authorities to silence them. By silence I don't only mean censorship and arrestment, but I also mean eliminating you. I advise activists and writers to tell the truth because it's always revolutionary. (Nasser, 2011c)

Intersectional and unique narratives are brought to light using global media platforms for more influence. This dimension of blogging shows knowledge-sharing from local standpoints to global audiences, often challenging Western ideas democracy and gender stereotypes in their countries, while also reconceptualizing Arab feminism and women's role in socio-political transitions. Through the dynamic nature of these mediums and the interactive abilities enabling different bloggers to network and mobilise, the margin is brought to centre. This shows a unique relationship between the act of feminist blogging and the transnational media and activist platforms, which serve as an ecosystem of web-circles and interweave with the blogosphere.

This diversification of discursive practices, networking and organisation of action sheds light to a different sense of political participation. An alternative citizen practice whereby feminist blogging facilitates a transcendence of local boundaries and reaches out to global audiences, blurring the lines between inner/outer, private/public, and local/global.

4.3.1 “I want to be like her”: Networking and shared empowerment

Participating face-to-face and then blogging in regional and international forums, feminist bloggers found another way to transcend space, exchange information, seek support, and

⁵⁹ This statement from Aswat also shows their role as an online space for activists and reformers that was frequently used by feminist bloggers in this research: “we are an uncensored online space for activists and reformers from throughout the Middle East, North Africa and Iran working to make governments more responsive to citizens, transparent in operation and effective in delivering results that matter in people's everyday lives”.

empower each other in the struggles for human rights and democracy. Those who were able to travel found that these forums provided them with a safe space to network, learn from each other through dialogue, and find much needed political listening, acknowledgement and solidarity.

Furthermore, through dialogue, they were able to recognise the misconceptions of mainstream media about the socio-political developments and conflicts emerging from the revolutions. As many events were happening in the MENA region, the women soon reached a consensus that there was no global interest in the aftermath of the revolutions, especially in Tunisia and Egypt, but also in Lebanon, Syria and Yemen. It was only through their own participation in activist forums that the bloggers could speak from their personal perspectives and highlight the lack of concrete change in their countries. They also denounced the suffering of women, youth, and social groups that fight for social justice by counter-revolutionary forces.

Ben Mhenni blogged about her participation at the Oslo forum for activists and bloggers, sharing that it had been a great opportunity to network, but also to raise awareness that the post-2011 revolutionary momentum had not resulted in greater freedom of speech in Tunisia.

Freedom and freedom of speech are just myths for us. We are not enjoying freedom of speech as the people outside Tunisia think. The battle is continuing and despite the dark side of things, I am hopeful and faithful in the Tunisian people especially the young ones who showed and are showing a big resistance. (Ben Mhenni, 2011f)

Nasser blogged about her speech at the ‘Women after the Arab Spring’ seminar⁶⁰, expressing the empowerment and solidarity she felt by taking part and speaking with fellow women bloggers, Middle East correspondents and academics. Meeting fellow blogger Ben Mhenni from Tunisia, Nasser expressed the influence, admiration, inspiration and empowerment she felt. Even though during this historical moment there was not an organised big union or coalition among Arab women, the influence of the virtual sisterhood created among bloggers emerged as a mobilising force.

Personally, that is what fuels me with energy all the time. I remember when I first watched a report on TV about the Tunisian blogger, Lina Ben Mhenni [she

⁶⁰The seminar was organised by Operation 1325 in Visby. Nasser wrote that the seminar attracted lots of participants who wanted to know the speakers’ thoughts on developments and how it could affect Arab women.

hyperlinked the name so that her readers can visit Lina's blog] and I secretly told myself, "I want to be like her." She had a great influence on me. (Nasser, 2012c)

These examples reveal how the blogging practice of women combined with participation to feminist activist forums was an emerging citizen practice. Salwan Daher, blogging on the Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID) forum, revealed the mobilising power of online and offline feminist political participation for women. The focus of the forum was the processes of transforming economic power to achieve social justice and gender equality.

I'll be blogging for the young feminist wire⁶¹ at the AWID Forum, check my first post below. Here's the link on the Wire! [URL link] Looking at the AWID Forum programme, I felt like a little girl in a sweet shop [...]. Finally, I sadly had to pick several of them, wishing my superpowers included duplicating myself. (Salwan Daher, 2011)

These forums served as 'safe' spaces for the bloggers in this research, whereby the most intense and interesting feminist discussions on democratic transitions were taking place both online and offline. Blogging played a central role in this process. Within this context Salwan Daher wrote that sharing the stories of women from Tunisia, Morocco, Egypt and Iran had a crucial role to play in understanding the dynamics of change that each revolution brought. Feminist activists and bloggers, by engaging in such forums were well aware that for transitional democratic processes to succeed, feminists needed to make sure social justice and labour rights remained in the picture as key demands.

Not only were Arab countries in a transitional democratic process, but that they were first and foremost engaged in a revolutionary process: words have their importance, as emphasizing the revolutionary process keeps social justice and labor rights demands, key demands of the revolutions, in the picture. (Salwan Daher, 2011)

⁶¹ Young Feminist Wire is an online platform created in March 2010 through the Young Feminist Activism (YFA) programme by the Association for Women's Rights in Development ([AWID](http://www.awid.org)). The online community for and by young feminists works on women's human rights, gender equality and social justice around the world. Information retrieved from: <http://yfa.awid.org/>

4.3.2 “Stand with women revolutionary power”: Solidarity and support among bloggers

I now focus on the tremendous solidarity and support expressed among bloggers, as a key communicative pattern. The women bloggers in this study used their blogs as a platform and a medium to hold space for the voices of fellow activists and bloggers. The examples of discursive solidarity and support that I cover here include a) the bloggers giving updates on other bloggers and b) credential sharing that allowed them to update on behalf of bloggers in trouble with authorities.

Ghazzawi, for example, provided her audience with updates on fellow blogger and revolutionary Shehwaro who was detained and released. The following blog post brings up how blogging through conveying specific calls for mobilisation and action transcends spatial/local and authoritarian boundaries.



Marcel Shehwaro at Bloggers' Meeting 2013

Figure 4. 17 Image shared by Razan Ghazzawi featuring Marcel Shehwaro at a bloggers' meeting in 2013 accompanying her blog post, author screenshot.

Ghazzawi put up a photo of Marcel Shehwaro from a bloggers' meeting in 2013 in a blog describing the latter's kidnapping (date, time, place) together with another activist, Mohammad Khalili, in Aleppo because she refused to wear the veil. She named the court to which Shehwaro was transferred and detained in the liberated areas.

Ghazzawi informed her readers that Shehwaro gave her Facebook credentials to a friend to post a message on her behalf and a fellow blogger, Joseph Daher, translated it in English to maximise the virality of the message and to exercise political pressure. Here follows the message of Shehwaro as featured in Ghazzawi's blog post (2014) in solidarity and support in exposing the regime's crimes and to exercise pressure for her release.

I am Marcell Shehwaro I am detained by the Sharia' Council because of not wearing the veil in the liberated areas This is the story as it happens: We were with a youth group involved in a revolutionary activity at the Jisr Al-Haj square. The activity was consisting of putting photos of the martyrs of the revolution in Aleppo and planting trees at the roundabout. Then a leader of the Army of the Mujahideen called Abu Hussanein came and asked me to wear the veil because this area was under the control of the Mujahideen Army. After my rejection of the order, a car came full of armed elements of this group and they asked me to come with them. The young men with me did not let them take me and this led to shootings and fights, between the young men and the armed men and many different parties intervened.

In the end and after a long discussion [...] I needed to wear the hijab and then they would let me leave. I refused and they detained with me Mohammad Khalili at the Sharia Council.

Note: I am author of The Post, quoting Marcel after she gave me the Password of her account and asked me to Post and tell everyone she is fine... (Ghazzawi, 2014)

Ghazzawi posted all the messages in her blog in solidarity, support and virtual sisterhood towards Shehwaro. She reaffirmed the demands of the revolution from a woman's perspective and called for freedom from all kinds of authority in Syria. She also provided updates in her blog, informing local and international audiences that after a protest was held in front of the court demanding the immediate release of Shehwaro and Khalili, both were released.

Freedom to my friend, freedom to the woman that you are, the revolutionary, the Syrian. Freedom to your revolution from all kinds of authority that are facing this beautiful revolutionary spirit. Stand with Marcel, stand with women revolutionary power, stand with the revolution. (Ghazzawi, 2014)

4.4 FROM MARGIN TO ALTERNATIVE POWER

In this section I present the analysis showing the emergence of alternative power; narration, storytelling and situated forms of knowledge (as we have seen in previous sections) have a prominent role in providing this feminist analysis. There was a wealth of findings, but due to the limited space I focus on the following key aspects: 1) resistance, 2) producing alternative and feminist knowledge, 3) community-building, and 4) coalition-building and transnational feminist movements.

4.4.1 “Did you say an isolated case?”: the interweaving of resistance and power

“And I am against and I will always be against any kind of censorship. No one should decide for me. I have the right to choose for myself.” (Ben Mhenni, 2010c)

Resistance is one of the top coded themes of the blogs, cross-cutting the concepts analysed in my findings, revealing different expressions and strategies in which blogging was used by women activists to destabilise power and challenge hegemonic discourses. With their affirmative rhetoric, including their emotional tone, combined with metaphors, poems and different styles of writing and visuals, women’s blogging reflects different expressions of individual and collective resistance.

There were many examples showing that feminist blogging is in constant dialogue with oppressive authorities/powers. Ben Mhenni, for example, putting tremendous emphasis on freedom of speech, in post entitled “No no no no to censorship” (Ben Mhenni, 2010f) featured a single powerful visual – a picture of herself – as a way to express her anger and opposition to censorship exercised by the Tunisian regime on her. The picture focuses on her face and a pin saying “I want my YouTube”. Her look is fierce, symbolising her defiance towards the oppressive political powers (looking at them in the eye).

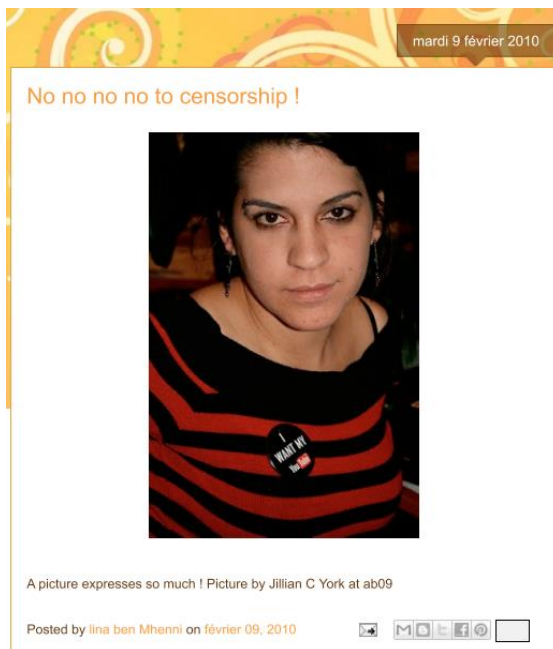


Figure 4. 18 Image from Ben Mhenni’s post (2010f), author screenshot.

Ben Mhenni highlighted a key issue: why the Tunisian authorities perceive those who fight for fundamental rights and civil and political freedoms as a threat. Her affirmative rhetoric, she presented her thoughts, opinions and her computer – the medium of her writing – as her weapons to continue fighting for freedom of speech. And so, continuing to write and blog become powerful political acts against patriarchy, authoritarianism and police brutality.

Her phrase “Giving up? You must be joking!!”, could be interpreted as a reflection of the dialogue with the oppressive powers, discursive resistance destabilising and renegotiating power. She notably uses “joking”, a word that has been historically used by patriarchal politics as a tool and weapon against women who want to access and participate in politics, often seen as not good enough or holding valuable/ important opinions. I understand this phrase by Ben Mhenni as an act with which she inverts this patriarchal concept against her oppressors, emphasising that they must be “joking” to think that she will stop questioning authoritarianism and patriarchy.

Opinions and thoughts from activists like her are perceived as a disturbance to the status quo, placing blogging as a practice destabilising power.

She never stopped writing. She misses her readers, and she is still writing. Writing is life. Writing is being. Writing is everything about her life. She never understood why they want her to stop from doing it. Now, bereft of her words, writing has become a fight! She’s fighting using either her pen or her

keyboard. Her weapons: a laptop, [...] and some thoughts, some opinions ... Their bullets never succeeded in impeding her... bullet after bullet she is becoming stronger more mature ... She is going to fight again and again, she is struggling, she will never give up. Giving up? You must be joking!! OPINIONS. Why do OPINIONS and Thoughts disturb so much? (Ben Mhenni, 2010i)

Ben Mhenni continued to criticise the repressive authorities, despite offline and online threats and censorship of her social media accounts. Using a proxy to access her blog and sharing screenshots of her hacked accounts, she affirmed that she would keep writing the truth as long as she was physically able. Her writing had become a political purpose.

Hacked buStill Writing !



Today, my e-mail account and my Facebook account were hacked. My page Tunisia girl disappeared. But unless they hack me , I'll keep on writing , writing , and writing....

Posted by [lina ben Mhenni](#) on [janvier 03, 2011](#)



Figure 4. 19 Screenshot of Ben Mhenni’s hacked Facebook page as positioned in her blog post (2011c), author screenshot.

These findings can also be understood as an ongoing battle between hegemonic discourse (the oppressive regimes) and “internet citizens” (the bloggers or “netizens” as Ben Mhenni refers to them, 2010).

Ben Mhenni challenges hegemonic discourse, for example, when the protests were presented as isolated cases by the traditional political public sphere. By asking questions such as “Did you say ‘an isolated case’? You can’t stop us from writing!” (Ben Mhenni, 2011b, 2010i), Ben Mhenni defiantly enters in dialogue with the oppressive powers and exposes the corruption of the regime. Blogging thus becomes an action of personal and

collective ‘truth’, a form of political action in a discursive fight with the hegemonic patriarchal discourse and oppressive powers.

4.4.1.1 “We’ll fight for our freedom!”: Affirmative rhetoric in action

Following the collapse of the Ben Ali regime in Tunisia, Ben Mhenni continued to write about the ongoing challenges in Tunisian society, asking questions about the powerful and those who were still systematically silenced and deprived of their place in the public sphere. Once Ben Ali fled the country the international mainstream media soon followed.

What remained, and became the topic of Ben Mhenni’s posts was the uncertainty about the future, the unanswered questions of the people who fought in the streets for their civil and political rights, and a great deal of civil unrest. Her writing revealed the ongoing assaults, kidnappings and violence against innocent Tunisian people for demanding democracy, signifying that the dictator left but his regime still prevailed, using old tactics of corruption and spreading fear and panic among society. In her words:

Nothing is clear. We talked about a Revolution. We even said that we fulfilled our revolution. The whole world congratulated us and changed their direction to watch another revolution. Journalists who rushed to Tunisia from the four corners of the world, packed up and went less than a week after that the dictator packed up and left carrying away an important share of the country’s wealth. Two weeks after the fulfilment of the revolution. The situation in Tunisia is more than critical. (Ben Mhenni, 2011j)

The powerful picture below which she included in a one of her blogs acts as a window to Tunisian society reflecting the concerns about the previous and emerging political domain. Ben Mhenni provided a translation of the graffiti on the wall in English for her readers. The upper sentence written in Arabic says “Let’s clean Tunisia from what remained of the RCD regime” and the second sentence written in French “Thanks Facebook!”. Symbolically there is a window on the wall above the graffiti and on the ground below the text there are bags of garbage. Using this powerful visual and providing this information in Arabic, French and English, Ben Mhenni brought the mood of the Tunisian streets directly to her readers.



Let's clean Tunisia from what remained of the RCD regime

Thanks Facebook

Figure 4. 20 “Merci Facebook” picture from Ben Mhenni’s post (2011j).

The role of feminist blogging can be also understood as part of cultivating a shared empowerment coming from collective achievements and the ongoing fight for “real” freedom and democracy.

However these criminals forgot that Tunisians gave a lesson of courage to the entire world. They also forgot that Tunisians broke the fear barriers. Tunisians will never abandon their fight for real freedom and for real democracy! Counter - Revolution forces will not succeed in stealing our achievement. Tunisians let's be patient! Tunisians let's be united. (Ben Mhenni, 2011j)

4.4.1.2 “Absolute Power Corrupts Absolutely”: Questioning oppressive structures

In her post “Lunatic Asylum” (2010e) Ben Mhenni shares her personal reflections on social polarisation and the political struggles against an oppressive regime. She characterises the anger brewing in Tunisian society in the months leading to revolution that kicked off towards the end of 2010. In her blogging, power is constantly reconstructed and renegotiated. Her writing in this post is bold and creative, full of metaphors as she converses with power and oppressive authorities:

*“Some are continuously clapping their hands in approval
 Others are all the time protesting and yelling in disapproval
 Some are thanking and praising without any conviction
 Others are Just writing petitions and organizing demonstrations
 Some are gazing insolently and shouting non sense decisions and enacting some
 stupid laws
 Others are Just listening and going through with a haunting look of uncertainty
 and awe
 Some,- bare-faced -, are embezzling a whole country without having to pay
 Others are Just perishing in prisons for a loaf of bread, an opinion, a word , or a
 cry
 Some live in palaces , wearing Versace, and driving Hummers
 Others are Just hungry, sleeping in metro-stations , and wearing rags.
 Some are developing torture and interrogations tactics.
 Others are Just experiencing these techniques*

*Some are oppressors
 Some are Just oppressed
 Some are persecutors
 Some are Just persecuted
 Some are rulers
 Others are Just ruled*

And I am Just a silly Tunisian girl dreaming of Change!” (Ben Mhenni, 2010e)

In the first part of her text Ben Mhenni refers to those in power as "some" (yellow highlight), in contrast to "others" (orange highlight) referring to citizens who protest and fight for their civil and political rights at vast personal cost. She talks in dichotomies such as “some” and “others”, to show the contradictions and conflicts in Tunisian society - between those in power and those in the margin claiming their civil and political rights. She provides personal reflections and insights on the constant class battles, as well as individual and collective power imbalances under the authoritarian regime. Her written words reflect her inner voice and feelings: anger, sarcasm and resistance. Her text reflects not only the polarities in her society but also acts of defiance to the ongoing conflict between the personal and the political. Blogging thus becomes a discursive conflict with power and authority.

Bloggng also becomes a discursive practice reflecting inner voice, feelings, hopes and dreams for social change communicated to the outer world. The blog becomes a space where critical utterance is expressed and authority is challenged. In the second part of her text, she exposes the power imbalances and dichotomies among the polar opposites: oppressors–oppressed; persecutor–persecuted; and rulers–ruled. Using the word "Just" in all the lines referring to “others” (the marginalised/oppressed) she challenges the notion of

that those protesting against the power/oppressive regime lack value or meaning. By breaking grammatical rules (capitalising the letter "J" in the middle of the sentence) she shows the significance of those marginalised but also the contradictions in relation to the word "just" as an adjective, which means to be fair and rightful; a value that is much needed in her society. She concludes with sarcasm towards the oppressive regime by writing that, she is "Just a silly girl" to dream of social change (also capitalised C), which in her perspective seems an unachievable task. Capitalising the letter J in the word "Just" throughout her text places an emphasis on the continuing resistance and fight against any kind of authoritative rule (political or grammatical).

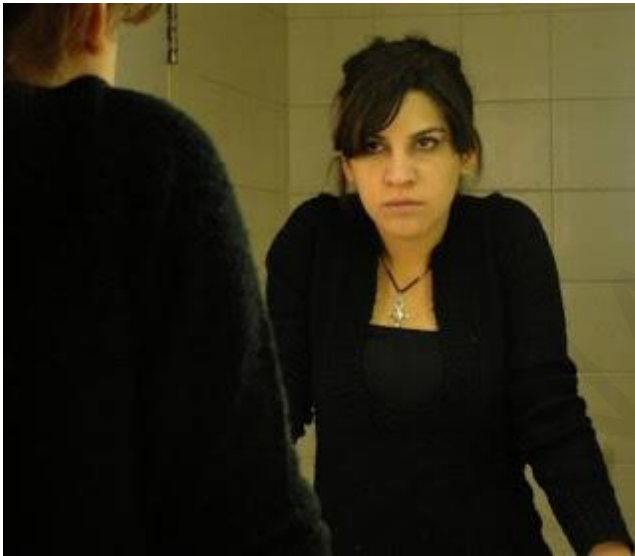


Figure 4. 21 Image from Ben Mhenni's post (2010e) on critical utterance.

This picture of herself accompanying her blog post is very powerful as it reflects this personal-political battle. A polarised composition with no central elements. In fact, in the centre is the mirror which is an invisible barrier. The angry face and persistent eyes of an angry blogger and feminist activist looking in the mirror as if she is looking at the oppressors. Dualism, separation and conflict between "some" and "others"; the "oppressors" and the "oppressed"; the "persecutors" and the "persecuted"; the "rulers" and the "ruled" ... and herself just as reflected in her text: courageous, defiant and disobedient.

Ben Mhenni's criticism of fundamentalist Islam marked her a target and since 2012 – when her name was found on the hit list of a local terrorist group – she was appointed a police officer for protection. Her blog post entitled "Being on a death list" expressed her voice of resistance, showing us another way in which women used rhetoric to affirm that defending democratic values should not be a position of fear.

I am not afraid because I am defending principles I strongly believe in. No one is paying me to do this. It is my own choice. I am not the victim of a brainwashing as many of them are. I won't stop writing and denouncing their instrumentalization of our religion for political goals. Nevertheless, if anything happens to any Tunisian or to me because of these cowards, the government would be the sole responsible for this. Last year Tunisians had a dream and we are going to fulfil it. No one will steal our hopes and wishes. (Ben Mhenni, 2012b)

In 2013, following e-corruption and the censorship of blogs in Lebanon, Ghattas raised important questions about the state's lack of transparency and accountability. She challenged the decision to block specific blogs under the excuse of controlling gambling websites.

What if the order was to block something more important than gambling? What if the judge orders to block the Minister's personal website? [...] or Abirghattas.com? [...] What is the meaning of highest judge? [...] Lebanese magic can give a monopoly of anything to anyone, would we then block websites too? Nothing should be blocked, not because of an excuse such as monopoly. When you have criteria you should apply them, because without any criteria anything can be forbidden. But Who CARES... right :)? (Ghattas, 2013a)

In another post "The Internet in Lebanon; Absolute Power Corrupts Absolutely" Ghattas provides a critical perspective of how the internet has been used as a political tool by powerful men for their own interests further escalating the systemic corruption of the country.

The sad truth that we all know whether we like to admit it or not, is that the Internet in Lebanon is a political tool and Youssef is a powerful man, a power that seems to be always in his favour... (Ghattas, 2013b)

4.4.1.3 Challenging local and Western media

Another point that emerged from the bloggers' discursive resistance was the act of challenging both local and Western media content. For example, images in Yemeni media in the post-2011-uprising era promoted misleading and misogynistic attitudes; Nasser used her blogging and visuals to counteract these attitudes and reinforce that women's voices were in fact important in the public dialogue. Since the beginning of Yemen's 2011 uprisings and the conflict that followed, matters of life and death (i.e. violence, poverty, hunger) monopolised the public debate. Often Arab media condemn the way Western

media portray Arabs, but at the same time they deliberately ignore how they portray women in their countries. Nasser wanted to bring this crucial issue in the political public discussion. She offered a counternarrative to the dominant discourses that often claim that amidst such crises is not the right time to talk about these issues. Cross-posting in Raseef22, Nasser denounced sexism in Yemeni political commentary and provided a feminist critique of mainstream Yemeni media discourse.

For example, when ousted president Saleh is meant to be demeaned, he's being portrayed with full make-up and jewellery so he can supposedly look like a woman. In that way, there is an association being drawn between a demeaned status for men and being a female; an expression of an insult is channelled by describing the other as a female. (Nasser, 2016)

Examples like this show how deeply rooted misogyny is in society; the message is that being a female is humiliating, the portrayal is considered an insult. Such patriarchal perceptions keep women away from politics and thus contribute to their marginalisation as a social group from the political discourse and subsequently the public sphere.

Nasser collected images during the political developments in Yemen and she tackled “image politics” on two levels: 1) how Western media used images to portray Yemen, and 2) how Yemenis used images to narrate stories about each other. In other words, Nasser’s feminist analysis reveals internal contradictions in the projection of the uprisings in Yemeni and Western media. These contradictions contribute in the spread of misleading information and misogynistic political images. In some cases, such visuals designed and shared by social media users, found their way to the streets during the protests as posters.

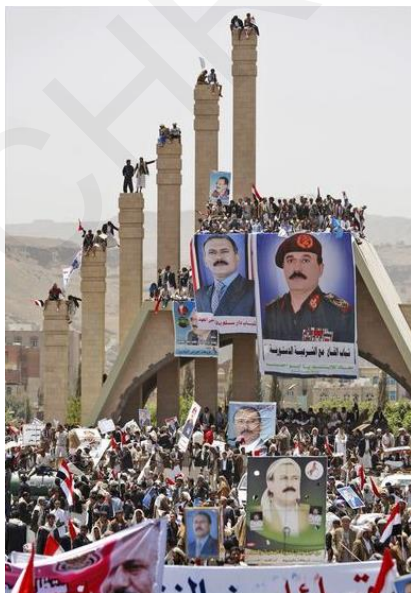


Figure 4. 22 How Western media portray the political processes in Yemen, image from Afrah Nasser's blog



Figure 4. 23 Sexist projections in Yemen on social media, images from Nasser's blog (2016).

Nasser, to create a counternarrative, chose to include in her blog pictures that re-construct women's role in the public sphere and political struggle. Here follow a few examples of the images included in her text that depict women in assertive roles as protesters and human rights defenders.





Figure 4. 24 The role of Yemeni women in the uprisings, images from Nasser’s blog.

Last picture: Translation provided by Nasser: “I am Shima’a Al-Ahdel with the Uprising of women in the Arab world. My brother is ashamed to say my name and my mother’s name”.

Eltahawy, cross-posting in her blog an article she published in *The Star*, she critically and sarcastically talked about the Western media regarding their disbelief for the revolutionary momentums in the region. The social and political conditions in Tunisia such as police brutality, corruption, nepotism and unemployment, issues that were underlying in Egypt and the neighbouring countries fuelled the solidarity movements because activists made this connection. These conditions in the Arab region together with harnessing the power of the social media inspired a movement of regional revolutions.

When activists in Cairo protested in solidarity with Tunisians, they made that connection: “Revolution till victory. Revolution in Tunisia. Revolution in Egypt,” they chanted (and then told the rest of us via Twitter).⁶² How could they not make the connection? Corruption, nepotism and unemployment taunt them in both countries. Activists in Jordan and Lebanon also held solidarity protests. And that’s why Tunisia counts. (Eltahawy, 2011f)

Within this context, the bloggers in this research brought to the surface the reasons why Western political analysts are biased, offering a feminist analysis. Specifically, Western political analysts projected a stereotypical image of Arab people as inferior, passive, apathetic and timid because of their societies’ lack of democracy, and that without “iron-

⁶² In 2011, the Egyptian government blocked Twitter after thousands of protesters took to the streets of Cairo to demand an end to the 30-year-rule of President Hosni Mubarak. This shows that the regime was aware of the power of social media as a tool for the protesters to expose the regime’s corruption and violence.

fisted” men (dictators), they would not have a victory against the regimes. This stereotypical perception was exactly what feminist bloggers identified as the regimes’ paradigm that fuelled Western support for dictators such as Ben Ali. This kind of “hypocritical” support from the western countries has been denounced by feminist bloggers. This has been identified as a key obstacle to the promotion of true democratic and human rights values in international politics.

Eltahawy was critical of the analysts who also rushed to convince the global opinion of the false picture that the Tunisian uprisings will fail based on the robust economy and great education provided under Ben Ali. Eltahawy’s deconstructing the mainstream Western narrative of the media, affirmed that such analyses have serious implications both on transitional awareness raising but also on local communities:

Analysts often refer to the “Arab Street” to characterize a region of more than 300 million. There are hundreds of Arab Streets, obviously, and they will absorb the lessons of Tunisia and adapt accordingly. [...] Naysayer: Stop raining on our revolution! (Eltahawy, 2011d)

There are serious implications of Western analyses portraying a diverse region with complex politics in a dangerously simplistic way. Such analyses promoted a distorted picture of the socio-political events and were disempowering for local communities. Another counternarrative of such essentialising Western narratives, came from Nasser who was critical of the “Arab Spring” label used by Western media and political analysts. Deconstructing the label, Nasser affirmed:

To begin with, I don’t like the term “the Arab Spring” anymore. I honestly think what we are witnessing is not a seasonal event, but it’s a political movement for all those struggling Arab countries who are fighting for over one year and half for democracy and social justice. (Nasser, 2012c)

However, local governmental media in Yemen did not avoid this term either, because they deliberately ignored the collective solidarity among protesters in the region. For example, Nasser (Yemen) informed us with her blogging that while Yemen's governmental media outlets said nothing about Libya's victory, Yemeni activists and revolutionaries celebrated in solidarity Libya's victory occupying the Change Square in Sana'a and other public spaces.

In this section I have shown the different expressions of resistance emerging from feminist blogging with the creative use of language and social media technologies. These are only a

few of the dialogical resistance practices that were employed in the blogging practice of women for challenging state power but also for questioning Western political and media analyses during a critical and historical moment of their countries' socio-political processes. These far-reaching developments were perceived and portrayed in the Western world in ways that were not conducive to the local struggles and understandings of social change, human rights and democratic values. Such examples reveal that mainstream western media do not always project the socio-political developments of these countries in the MENA region in a culturally aware or gender-sensitive approach. Feminist blogging teaches us that during such a crucial time for social change, 'glocal' understandings from the grassroots must be at the core of social and political analyses. These implications ask us to rethink how Western mainstream media construct revolutionary realities. What impact do such analyses have on local communities? Do they connect back to the core values of human rights and democracy? Do they amplify underrepresented local voices?

Women bloggers identified and criticised the power imbalances taking place in the media field and beyond. Through narration and storytelling, they revealed alternative forms of power emerging from their and fellow activists situated knowledges. Their blogging, as citizenship practice consists of many small and big acts of resistance coalescing in widespread parallel movements producing knowledge and different sets of meanings reconstructing the public sphere. Feminist blogging could be thus understood as a dynamic medium and space whereby a parallel re-negotiation of power is expressed and inspires others. In the section to follow, I present the findings that show how community building has been a significant part of the alternative political power of feminist blogging in the 2011 Arab revolutions.

4.4.2 “You are certainly not alone”: Online community-building

The commitment of feminist bloggers to community-building continues a long-standing tradition within feminist movements, especially with the creative use of social media. In this section, I focus on the conversational narratives constructed through the blogging practice of women that bring up new layers of understanding about online communities based on solidarity and empowerment, both among bloggers and between bloggers and their readers.

4.4.2.1 “You can’t stop us from writing!”: Community-building among bloggers

In 2011, Ben Mhenni exposed the hacking of her email and Facebook accounts. In her post ‘You can't Stop us from Writing!!’, she denounced the censorship towards herself and

other bloggers for more than a year depriving them from their right to express themselves freely. Not only did the government censor their websites, but they also faced privacy breaches. The hacking of their websites was framed as an act of rape, which is a grave and systematic violation of human rights and gender-based violence against women, in line with international human rights standards. This perception highlights their claims as women and as part of the collective to their rights to privacy, integrity and freedom. Even with the awareness that she might put her own safety at risk, Ben Mhenni nevertheless chose to publish a blog directly addressed to the Tunisian authorities; an act of resistance and defiance from the perspectives of the bloggers. The following excerpt shows how writing and blogging reinforced a sense of community that contributed to a constant dialogical renegotiation of power among the powerful and the marginalised; the oppressor and the oppressed.

The act of hacking is an act of rape which we are not accepting and which we are going to fight.

You can censor

You can hack

But you can't stop us from writing!!!! (Ben Mhenni, 2011m)

Her writing revealed the sense of duty she felt towards her readers, agency and community to continue her fight for human rights through writing and showing the world what was happening. This is an example of how blogging blurs the lines between the local and the global. Ben Mhenni also revealed a sense of gratitude towards those supporting her fight and expressed her pride for being a feminist and a human rights defender. Ben Mhenni reiterated her determination to challenge the repressive authoritarian forces, despite fear of retribution.

[...] the leader of aggression who keeps catching me and that I will name one day, that yes they scare me, but that it is this fear that makes me every day even more determined to challenge them and to show the world that a Tunisian woman who has only weapon her passion for freedom is to challenge the repression. (Ben Mhenni, 2012f)

Finally, Ben Mhenni described the “happy days of April-May 2010” as the days of claiming rights through protests. She described them as “happy” because of the shared empowerment and activism with fellow bloggers to exercise their citizenship. Even with the knowledge that there was still way to go.

4.4.2.2 “The world is not looking away. We are watching.”: Solidarity and support from commenters

The conversational narrative in the comments sections of the blog posts revealed an insightful dialogue, especially in the posts where dominant power structures are challenged, personal struggles and resistance are expressed. Overall, in the posts where bloggers expose the violence and censorship they experienced, the comments encourage the bloggers to continue to resist, and they also acknowledge the value of authentic reporting on a grassroots level.

Although it is not possible to provide a full analysis of the readers' commentary here, I would like to draw attention to some key examples that emerged from the blogs. The bloggers made efforts to nurture relationships and connections to their readership. I am interested in these relational aspects because they facilitate dialogue, expression of solidarity, and the creation of virtual-bonds.

For example, Ben Mhenni in her blog post entitled “Sorry” (2011) informs her readers that she reports from the ground covering the unrest with the counter-revolution forces, meeting and talking to people, taking photos. She apologised for not posting regularly and informed her readership about her visits in neglected areas, the extensive violence against activists and militants, fires in buildings and in public documents. As some these facts were evidence of the government's crimes committed against the country and Tunisians, Ben Mhenni promised her readers that she would write soon for updates. Revealing honesty and duty towards her readers, blog posts such as this resulted in a number of responses/comments from her readers. In the commentary of Ben Mhenni's blog the readers emphasised the importance of her activism, writing and blogging and she was often perceived as a heroine. The comments left by readers reveal solidarity, encouragement and support that creates a different kind of community; her own virtual community. In addition, the readers' comments offered reassurance of her visibility and outreach but more importantly, public greeting, political acknowledgement. The power of the 'glocal' witness, is revealed in the following quote as one of the many examples from the data:

The world is not looking away. We are watching. We care, and we want to help. We are proud of you, because you have come a long way. But we know that many challenges face you, and it will certainly take at least many months, perhaps many years, for a new and better Tunisian government to be organized. (Eivind, 2011)

Commentary like this encouraged women to keep blogging and participating in their own way, reminding that the corruption of the authorities would eventually collapse: “A fish rots from the head down. You keep your head up and moving. I will cheer you on!” (Anonymous commenter, 2011a).

Responding to the feelings of solitude and sadness expressed in Ben Mhenni’s blog post (2011), the readers showered her with comments expressing solidarity. The readers acknowledged her achievements not only for her country but also for the region: “You may feel like that but you are certainly not alone. I (and I am sure others) follow you and continue to be amazed at what you have achieved not only for your country but for the greater region” (Anonymous commenter, 2011b).

Feminist blogging offered a “safe space” where writing facilitated empowerment, inspired mobilisation for women’s marches and positive influence for other women to create their own blogs and websites, pointing to an ever-expanding virtual sisterhood: “I’d like to thank you for the efforts you have put in writing this site. [...] In truth, your creative writing abilities has encouraged me to get my own, personal website now” (Sportsfunia.com, 2012).

4.4.2.3 “You are the government”: Situated knowledges that destabilise power

The readers engaging in the comments of the blogs affirmed their indignation for Western governments that failed to provide support for democratic change but also used the blog as a space for providing a list of supportive strategies in mobilising for social change from the grassroots.

The brutal censorship and threats against women activists and bloggers were perceived by readers as evidence that the pro-regime politicians saw the blogs as a threat to their hold on power. The removal of a single dictator would not remove the infrastructures of parties that embraced an entire regime. This reality was discussed among blog commenters who analysed issues like the dark money that funded the pro-regime politicians, and the online radicalisation that propped up their army and police brutality. Furthermore, the attacks against revolutionary activists and bloggers by the Tunisian regime were understood by some as evidence of the activists’ emerging power. One reason for this disruption and destabilisation of power cited by the commenters was the fact that authoritative politicians had no alternatives to offer for a democratic society. The commenters expressed several times their belief that the old order would soon be over in Tunisia, and emphasised the

determination and fearlessness of the bloggers in documenting all the injustices taking place as a radical act against repression.

Their days are numbered. They live in fear. They have no ideas to offer the country and the people except more repression and more torture. We need to document everything because they can run but they can't hide and the day will come when they have to face the music. (Anonymous commenter, 2011c)

One commenter provided a list of strategic steps for resilience and community building, which would facilitate social change in Tunisian society and help it move towards democratic values. Specifically, the commenter urged Ben Mhenni and the community of bloggers to seek collaboration with local communities providing basic needs such as food, security (like the church/mosque) helping build resilience. Ultimately, this reader made a powerful argument offering/suggesting a discursive shift; to approach themselves as the “legitimate government” trying to reclaim their country after a coup. This visionary approach is revealed in the following statement:

Politically, stay on message. The old guard must go. Don't think of yourselves primarily as insurgents, don't think of your main goal as taking down the old government. Think of yourselves as the legitimate government, leaderless and disorganized after a coup, trying to retake your city/country. (Anonymous commenter, 2011d)

In this regard, the discursive dialogue in this blog comment reflects the power held by bloggers and activists to present themselves as a legitimate alternative to government. The alternative power emerging from feminist blogging thus lies in the political greeting and acknowledgement that had been denied in the traditional public sphere (in their countries). A power that has been acknowledged by readers focusing on their greatest resource; the collective power of the masses, the power of the people who are able to see their acts of help.

You **are** the government. Start acting like one, if you haven't already. Your resources are limited, but you are on the side of the people who surround you - - and if they see you acting to help them and re-establish order, they will help you. They are your greatest resource. On the one side, you want to be building up what stability you can. Find out what people are lacking for day-to-day existence and what they need most urgently, and what they have to offer. Use the latter to help with the former. (Anonymous commenter, 2011d)

This strategy was positioned by the reader within the context of maintaining the revolutionary momentum reclaiming the ownership of their homeland.: “Work out a roadmap: what is the ultimate goal? What are possible ways of getting there? Who is committed to being involved, and under what conditions (if any)? Another kind of resource audit, but looking in the other direction” (Anonymous commenter, 2011d).

These kinds of discussions contribute to the creation of virtual bonds perceived as the essence of political participation. The kind of political participation that re-establishes order in a way that builds on the long-unmet needs of people. In this passage, another reader becomes part of the blogger’s community engaging in dialogue for destabilising power and (re)negotiating power for democratic social change. Using the comments section of the blog as a safe communicative space, the commenter posts the democratic demands of a local human rights organisation – using capital letters to signify importance in the demands – but also to make a strong statement of agency in re-building Tunisian society. The demands of Tunisian civil society provide insights of the constructed meanings of democracy and how they envision substantial political participation. These include a free and secular state, gender equality, legislative equality, peace and acceptance of all communities in Tunisia, determined to build a society based on civil and political rights, human dignity and privacy.

[The authorities] MUST support our call for Peace, Unity, Tolerance and Equality. [...] HAVE TO ORGANIZE HIS SUPPORTERS AND PROTECT TUNISIA'S ALL HOUSES OF WORSHIP & PRAYER: JEWISH, MUSLIM AND CHRISTIAN FROM CRIMINAL GANGS OPERATING WITH TOTAL IMPUNITY IN TUNISIA! [...] 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! We uphold Privacy and Human Dignity Civil Rights as the basic fundamental law of our Tunisia. We all must fight any form of corruption and any form of nepotism in Tunisia... Organisation de l'État libre et laïque de la Tunisie (Anonymous commenter, 2011e)

The readers perceived themselves as co-citizens with Ben Mhenni – in an imagined global community but at the same time holding the ultimate power in their hands. Through these virtual bonds, an alternative sense of power is constructed. The lines between the local reality in Tunisia (as constructed by Ben Mhenni for her readers) interweave with the constructed realities of her readers in other parts of the world (based on their own

experiences) and at the same time a unique identity of a common citizenship is created in the feminist blogosphere. This aspect of 'glocality' is an important part of this political practice.

But I am very proud of Tunisian people and I give all of you my solidarity in these difficult moments of transition. Be patient, be surrounded by people you trust, protect yourself every time in every place, and continue building democracy and strengthening civil society. We are the government, politicians have no idea (at least most of them, maybe not all) about our problems so we cannot expect nothing of them. A big hug from Spain! (Rita La Cantaora, 2011)

Ben Mhenni's blogging, in the following excerpt, fulfils a need for her readers for information and solidarity. Thus, the blogging practice of women could be understood as a public space facilitating information and community. Readers from their own home, from their own countries, from their own social location, followed the revolutions, socio-political processes and transitions from the blogs of women, and actively expressed their support revealing a sense of transnational solidarity. One anonymous commenter here talks about the fact that the news in traditional and mainstream media do not offer a complete picture of the socio-political developments on the ground.

Congratulations, Lina! At home we follow tunisian (sic) revolution by your blog (news are less and less frequents). We knew Tunis some years ago and could feel what the situation was like there. Have all our support from Spain and keep on with your blog (we need to know how revolution's going on there). (Anonymous commenter, 2011f)

Ben Mhenni's blog had readers and followers from all over the globe, showing her global outreach and influence. Some discovered her blog from local newspapers and the news on television (traditional media).

Norway is far away from Tunisia, in every way, still, your situation is reported daily in the main news, and many people care. [...] How did I even find your blog? Because you where described in a newspaper here, as a blogger from Tunisia that honestly shares important information, and bravely does so under her own name and picture. I'm proud of you - the world would be a better place with more people like you. And I'm not gonna look away. (Eivind, 2011)

This sheds light on the transnational influence and outreach of blogging as social practice that it is both political and objective, truthful and valuable. Here I would like to clarify that

I am not arguing for an absolute objectivity nor truth. What I argue here is that the situated knowledges of feminist bloggers allow for objectivity that is stronger and embodied (in line with Harding), not value-free. By acknowledging political and historical contexts in their knowledge production, these multiple subjectivities contribute to stronger objectivity which is based on community, as well as cultural and not detached individual knowledge.

I saw something about you and your work on TV. Great that you are courageous and that you write about everything that happens in your blog. There are lots of news about Tunisia on TV and they really try to show a lot and they try to show the truth. But it's also very good to read the blog of you, someone young, who undergoes this coming change! (Anonymous commenter, 2011g)

When Eltahawy cross-posted to her own blog an article written about her entitled 'The woman who's explaining Egypt to the West' (2011), she received 92 comments, showing the conversational aspect of blogging with readers. At the same time, Mona's social standpoint was discussed and assessed by the readers. The ability to talk in Westernised terms about Egypt was perceived by some commenters as inauthentic, as they claimed that she is talking about all women in Egypt from a position of privilege.

She seems to be adopting a Western feminist stance. I don't believe that the discursive emancipation of Arab women and men will come by trying to cross the boundary from uncivilized to modern. [...] we need to be careful of adopting Mona or any other Arab woman as the voice of ALL ARAB women as her opinions may be widely divergent from the majority, and she may occupy a stance of privilege she herself hides. But furthermore, we need to be careful of people who pose as 'native informants'... (Nata, 2011)

Others appreciated her alternative and critical voice of analysis, which stood in contrast to Western media, that the readers found did not adequately cover the 2011 Arab uprisings and revolutions, and especially women's role within them:

Having grown up largely in the Middle East, I trust pretty much nothing in terms of American reporting on the region. It's a relief to finally see someone who actually knows what they're talking about covering events there and it being referenced in the Western media. (CassandraSays, 2011)

Although the analysis of reader reactions is not the focus of this study, I have acknowledged in this section some key examples of engagement that revealed the richness of the conversational narratives that point to online community building which would

benefit from future analysis. The political acknowledgement, appreciation, solidarity and support expressed by commenters brought to light important aspects of the 'glocality' of feminist blogging expressed from different social positionings and debated in a global context. Thus, inclusivity and intersectionality are highlighted by these conversations. These multiple subjectivities enrich the public dialogues taking place in these overlapping online spaces. These dialogues provide us with a more holistic, collective and community-based knowledge.

4.4.3 Producing feminist knowledge is power

In this section, I explore different examples in which feminist bloggers actively amplified feminist voices and shared valuable information with their readers. In order to mainstream feminist values, Hassan and Nazra for Feminist Studies, like the majority of the feminist bloggers in this research, stressed the role of blogging in producing feminist knowledge. Being aware of the negative representations and perceptions of Arab women in the cultural sphere that block the attainment of their rights, they emphasised the importance of cultural information and knowledge about the role of women in history and in contemporary society. Their blogging practice, as it emerges from the findings, could be positioned within the aim of making information that generates knowledge about women's role in and understandings of history and society, widely available. Producing feminist knowledge brings together the specificities of local and regional contexts (micro-macro levels together) in transnational feminisms. Nazra in particular, aim to produce:

[...] feminist knowledge that is able to respond to the specific nature of the local and regional contexts; this feminist production of knowledge should be accompanied by continuous efforts that aim at developing the Arabic terminology in relation the feminist cause in Egypt and also in the Middle East and North Africa. (Nazra for Feminist Studies, 'About us')

Another example of sharing feminist knowledge identified in the majority of blogs, was the dissemination of writings, art projects, and interviews of and with other women. This shows that feminist bloggers held space for other voices and perspectives to be expressed. For example, Nasser blogged about Dr. Elham Manea in a post called "A Fearless Yemeni Writer". This was one way of providing her readers with inspiring content about potential social, political, cultural and religious changes, with a view to end injustice and discrimination.

I carefully read her [Dr. Elham Manea] pieces because she mostly writes about the Taboo topics in the Arab World; "Sex, Religion, and Politics" - I'd add a very important taboo topic that's "Women's Rights" in the Muslim Arab countries which she mainly focuses on. (Nasser, 2012a)

In this way, the blog becomes a space where information and knowledge are shared and discussed, and feminist empowerment emerges. In addition, one-way communication from journalists was considered by the bloggers as not enough in order to mobilise social change. The readers want to be able to discuss current socio-political developments in the world, in their states and in their communities. This brings up the dialogical and integrated understanding of political participation at the course of this study.

I was struck by the ways in which this aspect has been highlighted by readers who affirmed that information from the blog constitutes alternative knowledge, and that is powerful in building transnational solidarity, compassion and understanding. In this regard, Ben Mhenni emphasised the power of interactivity and dialogue emerging from blogs and chat forums. One commenter said: "To get information about your situation, Tunisia, its media and the Arab Spring I read your blog. I believe the internet is a great 'place' to broaden one's horizon and for compassion with people of all nationalities" (Anonymous commenter, 2011h).

Emphasising the issue of unbiased information, Ghazzawi expressed that getting real information out is challenging, partly because Syrians online are not the same as Syrians protesting offline. Although this is not always the case, using proxies and social media like Facebook enhanced the power of blogs to dynamically reveal different standpoints and credible information from the ground to global audiences and also to organise collective action.

Most laptops or computers in Syria have proxies on their desktops. Even though Facebook was blocked, some Syrians create accounts and used proxies to access their pages. In the past four months, Facebook has become a tool not only to publish news, but to organize, and more importantly to get a sense of what your friends and acquaintances think about the current events in Syria. (Ghazzawi, 2011)

Nasser also affirmed this difficulty in getting 'real' information out. Yemeni women's participation in the 2011 protests has been impressive. However, Nasser stressed that the mainstream media were not aware that those women were to a large extent affiliated to the second largest political party, Al-Islah (similar to the Muslim Brotherhood). This

suggested that women's participation in the protests was a "decorative move" by the regime.

However, the women who took the streets independently, challenging ousted president Saleh's regime and Patriarchy -which obliges a gender-based segregation between the two sexes in public space- did not receive the same worldwide attention; even worse, they were doomed to be hit by the walls of Patriarchy. (Nasser, 2016)

Nasser brought this aspect to the surface, informing us that at the beginning of Yemen's 2011 uprising, an effort by women and men to hold a mixed-gender protest was violently attacked and dispersed; women especially had the biggest share of humiliation and assault. These are important aspects of women's struggles over the public sphere during such a crucial period. The situated knowledges that feminist blogging reveals points to the role of women bloggers in creating memory and co-creating history. In Ben Mhenni's blogroll (the sidebar of the blog's main page), she features an adaptation of Karl Marx's words to echo these positionalities that are part of a collective effort to be politically and historically present. Ben Mhenni's use of this quote also reveals a promise for political action that connects feminist blogging in producing feminist knowledge and its role in co-writing and archiving history. These connections could be understood as a monitoring practice to assess real social change: "Anyone who knows anything of history knows that great social changes are impossible without feminine upheaval. Social progress can be measured by the social position of the female sex" (Ben Mhenni, Blog's Homepage).

4.4.4 Coalition building and the post-revolutionary realities for feminist movement(s)

The blogs documenting the diverse struggles for social justice and the fight against police brutality, as well as transitional neglect, have been platforms that gave women and members of their marginalized communities the space to express their authentic voice. Women's storytelling and narration contested the male dominated public discourse and the stories of mainstream Western media. But, the new political realities meant women had to work together to mobilise society because their political role and contribution as activists was understood as a necessity.

The coalitions created among women activists in Egypt to reclaim public space was a conscious decision, regardless of their own differences, to build an inclusive movement. Cross-posting her article published in The New York Times, Hassan (2011) affirmed this goal of the Egyptian feminist movement to dismantle the stereotype that there is only one

type of Egyptian woman (who is not capable of engaging in politics). She brings up the ways women collectively forced their way into the political public sphere. Women joined the political sphere and wanted to run for elections; young people formed new social groups; and women's rights coalitions emerged to ensure political presence in the new post-revolution era. Movement building and the creation of women-friendly spaces for democratic dialogue were identified as actions that build the foundations of social change.

It is their own real work that is laying the foundation of change. This is how movements are built and how spaces are protected. The revolution was the work of different generations that struggled to protect the space and widen it for others. This is our challenge now — to continue building on what we gained and expand it. We cannot allow ourselves to be overwhelmed by the obstacles ahead. (Hassan, 2011)

In the case of Yemen, with the absence of a cohesive feminist movement, Nasser in her blog post entitled “In the face of political storm, Yemeni women stand firm” used the revolutionary momentum to raise awareness about feminist history in her country, to make feminism more accessible and empower women. By calling upon the history of Yemen, ruled by three queens: Queen of Sheba from ancient history (the most known in history), Arwa Al Sulayhi and later Asma'a Al (less known from the 11th and 12th centuries respectively), she affirmed that each woman has been part of a historical women's movement. Being conscious of the danger of romanticising history, she said: “However, it's not enough to romanticise historical facts because, today, women in Yemen are suffering more than ever with Yemen's overall problems and, accordingly, they need empowerment more than ever” (Nasser, 2012b).

The transitional realities for the local feminist movements following the uprisings meant that they had to be cautious of the emergence of state feminism used by the regimes as a process to recruit women in political structures to ostensibly promote a progressive political stance. In this process, state feminism, which abided by the androcentric politics, did not have a real impact nor the legitimacy to be representing the Egyptian grassroots feminist movement. For example, Hassan and Nazra convened with women's NGOs in Egypt to denounce the illegitimacy of the National Council of Women that did not effectively represent Egyptian women's demands. With the dissemination of a joint statement in blogs and websites, they initiated a collective act to destabilise and renegotiate power. They effectively exposed state feminism and called for the dissolution of the

National Council of Women. They also demanded the establishment through consensus of a temporary committee composed of independent and ethical women experts.

Firstly: We refuse the illegitimate National Council of Women or its representation of Egyptian women and the feminist efforts in Egypt and confirm the illegitimacy of its representation in international events. Secondly: We call for the rapid dissolution of the National Council of Women and the prevention of its leaders of benefitting from any authorities in representing Egyptian women internally or internationally. Thirdly: We reconfirm the demand [...] to establish through consensus among the national forces a temporary civil presidential council that will be responsible of establishing a temporary committee composed of women's figures well known for their independence, integrity and efficiency, [...] to represent Egyptian women at the local, Arab and international levels and ensure women's participation in shaping the political life during the current period. (Nazra, 2011a)

Another example of this affirmative rhetoric expressed in coalitions, is the cross-posting of a joint statement by 48 organisations (Nazra, 2016a) urging the Egyptian government to drop the foreign funding case against Hassan and Nazra. Within the same week, there were several solidarity statements issued and cross-posted in the blog of Nazra from the Egyptian feminist organisation coalition, as well as from 130 academics who expressed their solidarity with Hassan and Nazra (Nazra, 2016b, 2016c). The large-scale dissemination in websites and blogs addressing the specific case positions feminist blogging in a wider collective political action and mobilisation demanding political respect, listening and acknowledgement for women's rights activists in Egypt and reaches out to international audiences for support. The affirmative discourse of the solidarity statements of the coalitions, using sharp and angry language, included demands for the state to stop targeting women human rights defenders (WHRD) and civil society organisations that carry out legal and transparent activities.

Instead, the Egyptian state should be taking all measures necessary to acknowledge the important and pivotal work WHRD Mozn Hassan conducts in the advancement of women's rights, provision of support services for survivors of sexual violence and a feminist discourse that is against all forms of violence and extremism. It should also provide the direly needed space for WHRDs similar to Mozn Hassan to operate and provide the important input needed for the state to holistically advance women's rights... (Nazra, 2016a)

Other ways of coalition-building among female bloggers included jointly writing a month blog post under a common theme (Seif, 2010). Shehwaro (Syria) blogging to mark the third anniversary of the Syrian revolution, informs us that revolution anniversaries were used as communicative hooks for joint actions aiming to keep the revolutionary dreams and values alive. Shehwaro's writing brings new layers of understanding about the social and political context in which activists had to coalesce. In this regard, bloggers and activists were not able to meet face to face due to electricity cuts and restricted access to the Internet, so they used Facebook to organise the third anniversary of the Syrian revolution. Within this context, Shehwaro informs us about the complex and contradictory realities in Syria. For example, some social groups opposed the revolution simply by hearing the word "freedom", and for this reason Shehwaro informs us that the members of the coalition collectively insisted to include the word and use the motto "freedom, justice, dignity". This was a strategy to maintain the language representing the initial values that sparked the movement. Reflecting on the many changes of the slogan Shehwaro acknowledges the power of language and how words have been used by political groups to accommodate their interests hampering democratic values. These included political and economic interests, and the desire to appease Western media by adopting their discourse.

Within this context, feminist blogging is also positioned in coalitions for peace, built to counteract and shift those public discourses that promote conflict, civil war and binary clashes. It represents an effort to reconstruct what was happening as a revolution for freedom from all kinds of oppression and a struggle for human rights, social change and justice.

Because we are the children of this revolution, we decided that we needed to remind people that what is happening in Syria today is not a crisis, or a conflict, or a civil war, or a clash between two forces. What is happening is a revolution: a dream for change, rights, humanity, freedom, justice and dignity. These are the reasons we chose this year's slogan. (Shehwaro, 2014c)

Shehwaro shared the below picture in her post depicting herself and fellow-activists preparing the martyrs' memorial to commemorate the third anniversary of the Syrian revolution. This visual enhances the effort by coalitions of bloggers and activists to keep the revolutionary spirit alive, despite the large-scale trauma and personal cost involved in committing to human rights and freedoms, democratic values and peace.



Figure 4. 25 Syrian martyrs' memorial, image courtesy Marcell Shehwaro.

To conclude this section, in mobilising and organising collective human rights action and mobilisation, the ten case studies in this research showed that feminist blogging had a paramount role. In sum, I observed the following types of action:

- 1) Sharing URL links to promote civil society campaigns and awareness actions for the release of detainees (banners, pictures, event programmes, press releases).
- 2) Sharing URL links to promote other blogs and online platforms cross-posting articles and posts.
- 3) Announcements and calls for participation in protests, strikes and citizen rallies.
- 4) Blogging about networking activities including the participation of the bloggers as speakers in conferences or civil society events. Reporting on the debates, networking and knowledge sharing that took place during these events.
- 5) Incorporating audio-visuais in blog posts for cross-posting online discussions on gender equality and other human rights issues.
- 6) Coalescing to mobilise collective action through cross-posting joint statements and disseminating these discourses through social media platforms.

These reveal the multiplicity of strategies devised by women to spread their political analyses and opinions. The examples discussed in this chapter also demonstrate the transformative power that these actions hold for political participation in the digital era and for transnational feminisms in the making.

4.4.5 (Re)constructing feminism as overlapping feminist spaces

The women activists and bloggers on the ground emphasised in diverse ways the importance of creating feminist spaces that can be understood as being situated and inclusive. Spaces from which women gain a sense of feminist worldview that comes from being part of a community, holding agency and interacting and co-participating with other women. My findings revealed that these overlapping and transnational public spaces become places of expression, solidarity, empowerment, that can lead to destabilisation of power and movement building.

Well aware that political revolutions cannot succeed without social, cultural and sexual revolutions, feminist blogging strategically contributed to the creation of multiple overlapping feminist spaces, operating as parallel public spheres. Within the context of political participation in these counterpublics, diverse voices have a role in transforming transnational feminisms. Through their own positionalities and history, the organic local feminist movements, especially in Egypt, Lebanon and Tunisia, but also to different degrees in Syria and Yemen, have been extremely adaptable and resilient in order to face turning points, progress and regression, achievements and setbacks. This resilience and adaptability at each turning point, were a necessary price to pay in the face of accusations related to the liberation of women as a foreign concept. Specifically, Hassan names this androcentric tactic of political dominance as, “immorality and debauchery, to feminists losing years of their lives in prison or under house arrest in exchange for the rights they demanded” (Hassan, 2016).

Feminist bloggers contest dominant discourse in their countries that feminism is an imported idea from the West. They keep reminding us that feminism is rooted in each woman’s voice every time she stands up to oppression, exploitation and injustice. Ghazzawi affirms that the organic composition of the local feminist movements bringing together different voices is not a result of western influence, but rather shaped by the inheritance of many years of personal and collective (conscious and unconscious) fights. Thus, Ghazzawi through her blogging practice connects local grassroots movements to feminist ideals and reconstructs feminism to accommodate these ‘glocal’ voices engaging in politics across movements.

Feminism is not an imported idea. Every time a woman stands up and refuses to be abused and exploited, every time she speaks up against her abusers, every time a woman believes in her capabilities and pursues her needs and ambitions, every time she resists being a victim or an object or an inferior being, she is being a feminist.

And we don't need any Western movement to teach us that — we've been doing it all along! And even though some of you may not call yourself a feminist, we're sure you've been doing it too. (Ghazzawi, 2009)

Social media enabled more than ever the creation of virtual bonds between feminist networks, attributed as a crucial factor to solidarity and collaboration by feminist activists in this research. For instance, Salwan Daher understands the role of blogging and social media as legitimate public spaces offering opportunities for solidarity, knowledge sharing, and political collaboration among feminists.

Sharing has become caring and the virality of a message can be measured in terms of Facebook Likes, Twitter Retweets and Tumblr Reblogs while blogs and Facebook pages and groups are now competing with online forums as places where activists and sympathizers share experiences, exchange ideas and draft campaigns. (Salwan Daher, 2011)

Salwan Daher blogging about the feminist debates, revealed the importance of an emerging global feminist solidarity as part of an organic, progressive and subversive movement. Remaining alert and critical of conservative forces has been identified as the organic fuel of the transnational feminist movements that need to invest in their parallel socio-political realities. In this sense, learning from each other and building solidarity across movements has been identified as instrumental power for collective mobilisation and organisation.

...as feminists, we are part of a progressive, subversive movement, which organically implies always remaining vigilant of conservative forces. [...] We not only need to remain vigilant and alert in developments, as we have always been, but we also need to draw parallels with other countries and learn lessons from the past, as has been mentioned by Sudanese and Iranian feminists at the forum, to try and build a global feminist solidarity network that is enshrined in the universality of women's rights. Talking about solidarity and a Feminist International really nails down what this Forum is about: bringing out and mobilizing the forceful, inspiring, so-strong-it-could-move-mountains collective power of women. (Salwan Daher, 2012)

These transnational solidarities, investing in the universality of women's rights, whilst maintaining a critical, intersectional and inclusive stance, provide us with new meanings of these parallel and networked public spheres. In these dynamic processes, feminist voices, spaces and power are interconnected to destabilise authoritative and patriarchal politics.

4.4.6 (Re)defining political participation and the public sphere

Women's participation in politics became one of the most important debates on the feminist political map following the 2011 revolutions, with Tunisian, Egyptian and Lebanese activists playing a central role in the debate. Participation took many forms including taking part in demonstrations and elections whether as candidates or voters, as well as in development and NGO work, political parties, social movements and pressure groups. However, there was a clear difference in the room available in the traditional political sphere for substantial participation.

Nazra posted in 2013 the 'Analytical Paper: The Rights of Women to Public Political Space'. The paper provided readers with a feminist analysis of the notion of the public space, the private space and political participation as a way to encourage public dialogue on women's access and participation in the public political sphere.⁶³ Political participation was defined in relation to the traditional political sphere.

Political participation was defined as the individual, collective, organised or spontaneous actions undertaken by female and male citizens to influence decision-making processes. Within this conceptualisation, the ability of citizens to publicly express their opinions during decision-making processes was central and positioned within the framework of elections as candidates, creating different types of unions and movements, or election within political parties and appointment of individuals to legislative councils, municipalities, and other representative bodies.

Nazra constructed the meaning of the public sphere as the field in which political participation (not confined to one faction) is activated. It is the space in which individuals and groups should be free to express and discuss their concerns based on equal rights and responsibilities. It is considered as the main space in which public opinion is formed, made of diverse opinions. To get a better understanding of the public sphere, one must look deeper in the relationship between public authority and the private space.

In the case of Egypt (and other authoritative regimes under study), the private sphere is also controlled by the state, resulting in great restrictions for women, accelerated when women decide to engage in politics. One example cited by Nazra was the local family law that for years has been ignoring social and economic developments, restricting spaces for

⁶³ Referring to Egypt's considerable political developments during which women were very actively participating. Such political developments were renewed and manifested in a new wave of the Egyptian revolution on 30 June 2013, leading to a coup overthrowing Mohammed Morsi from power and the assignment of the president of the Supreme Constitutional Court as an interim president.

women to be politically active: “Thus, boundaries between public and private life vanishes and the two spaces become part of one political and cultural system that cannot be understood without reading two spaces in relation to each other and their impact on women”⁶⁴ (Nazra, 2013).

Different social, economic, and political factors have been restricting women’s access and ability to be politically active in the public sphere. Nazra point out that during such crucial times these factors should be considered in order to shape an understanding of citizenship which would be based on equality regardless of age, sex, race, or any other divisions. However, women as citizens are not entitled to the same social, economic, and political opportunities, and they lack economic resources, knowledge and social capital, depriving them from accessing and enjoying their rights.

This is also true when institutionalised gender inequalities, discrimination and socio-economic difficulties faced by women are linked to decades of poor governance, conflict and war. Thus, existing inequalities are perpetuated and amplified in ways that impact women’s participation online and offline. In this regard, Nasser posed a crucial question about women’s access to politics “How could we expect them to be politically involved?!” (Nasser, 2012c). With this question Nasser brings up the opportunities denied to women, when the regime systematically keeps them in the dark about their rights. Such negligence includes the high numbers of illiteracy (67%), child marriage and violence against women, or because they live in rural areas with no access to state facilities, health services, schools, water, proper roads, or water. Nasser informs us that women's protest in Sanaa’s Change Square was, to a large extent a political expression, reaffirming their political role in the uprising. By bringing up these multiple and intersecting inequalities, she also informs us that gender equality was at the heart of the women's rights struggles.

However, different political and anti-Saleh parties used women as a decorative tool to serve the parties' political agendas. Many of the non-partisan and politically independent women, as Nasser was, believed that bringing about a radical political change would benefit women's rights. Six years later, Nasser cross-posted in her blog an article she

⁶⁴ One example excluding women given by Nazra for Feminist Studies in 2013 was the suspended Egyptian Constitution: “The Egyptian Constitution which was written and passed in a context in which one intellectual current; legislative elections law which does not include any positive points for female candidates and even hinders the participation of Egyptian women in legislative elections; and family law which obstructs the development of an environment constructive to women who can't enjoy their basic personal rights and thus hinders their abilities to take part in the public space, especially the political one. Social and cultural challenges faced by women willing to participate in public political life, should be read in conjunction with the laws previously mentioned as these laws were not written and adopted separately from cultural conceptions deeply rooted in the minds of legislators.”

published in the New Arab, reflecting on the effects of the humanitarian crisis resulting from the Yemeni war in 2014 on women's lives. While the UN Women supported the "Yemeni Women Peace Pact" in 2015 to enforce women's inclusion in peace talks, Yemeni women continued to be the most neglected political group as they "bear the brunt of the war".

Women's biggest problems used to be the institutionalised gender discrimination and socioeconomic hardships as a result of Yemen's longstanding poor governance. Today, however, their biggest problem is war. As Yemen has been ravaged by famine, cholera and bombardment, yesterday's problems seem like the good old days. (Nasser, 2018)

During this important transition, the institutions in the MENA region failed to encompass smooth democratic political processes and to create legitimate spaces for women to tackle the legal and justice gaps. For instance, women bloggers being in the position of both insiders and outsiders in their communities, informed us that the protection available for women was incompatible to their diverse participation in the protests and beyond. The laws in place were not adequate to prosecute perpetrators of sexual offenses either during the demonstrations or elsewhere.

Furthermore, it was evident in the case of Egyptian politics, and in the other countries under study, that the political public sphere after the revolutions was monopolised and restricted by Islamist groups that had no political intention for opening up to diverse public dialogues with other political factions.

Thus, the public space became monopolized by one faction and turned into a stage for authoritarian conflicts between different groups of people with different attitudes, instead of being a free space in which discussions, intellectual activities and different ideologies are formed. (Nazra, 2013)

This has been identified in the narratives of feminist bloggers as a missed opportunity for women to engage freely in political activism as citizens that should be enjoying their rights as equal humans in their societies. The lack of political acknowledgement together with the exploitation of women by the regimes to give the impression that they hold liberal attitudes, was exactly what Shewharoin her writing calls all women to resist in order to be "taken seriously" as political actors.

We are used as pawns by dictatorships to motivate or repress their populations without bloodletting. We are used as symbols by political movements to signal

liberal attitudes they don't believe in. We are used as tokens by players in the international community to promote the idea that 'Syrian women' have a decision-making role in the political process when the truth is that all Syrians, men and women alike, have been excluded from making any decisions when it comes to Syria. (Shehwaro, 2017)

This instrumentalization of women's political action on the ground by political parties to promote particular ideological values and attitudes, was an aspect identified by Mozn Hassan and Nazra as a wider structural problem to be tackled with the establishment and mainstreaming of feminist spaces capable (if they are allowed) to transform socio-political structures and push women's rights as priorities in the governmental agendas.

Thus, the presence of women in public political spaces is a structural issue that affects all institutions working in the state starting from civil society institutions and the way they deal with political participation of women[...]Thus, dealing with women's issues should not stop at analyzing statistics and figures but should discuss the whole system and work on the creation and integration of possible feminist spaces that have effective role in the formation of social and political structure itself and are capable of pushing particular issues as priorities for the government ... (Nazra, 2013)

Now I would like to turn to the more diverse and dialogic understandings of political participation beyond the traditional politics, constructed in feminist blogging. Nazra and Hassan posting in 2013 emphasised the diverse forms of political participation emerging from women's agency that should be accepted and not stand against women's engagement in the public sphere. By expanding the notion of political participation, in their affirmative rhetoric, feminist bloggers and activists wanted to reclaim and guarantee the ability of women to criticise their everyday realities and to express their visions for their society as equal partners.

The aim is that women's problems are not to be reduced to sharing of posts and seats but to be widened to include their capacity to form discourses tackling their issues and engaging with the different structures of the state so that their presence in the public space becomes a political presence in itself, even if it aims at opposing the politicization of the public space which strongly developed in the previous decades and still goes on. (Nazra, 2013)

So, what is the role of political activism as it emerges from the feminist constructions of blogging? Feminist blogging is positioned in the narratives of the women in this study at the intersection of patriarchy in the digital era and within an environment of ever-expanding conceptions of the public sphere encompassing interconnected counterpublics. Ben Mhenni cross-posting her article 'What activism means today?' (2011k) in the *Kraut Magazine* provided her own definition of political activism by including cyber-activism as a response against those who approach cyber-activists and bloggers with disbelief thinking that they are "rich" people comfortably hiding behind their screens and claiming that they are "the heroes of the revolution". Providing us with an extensive comparison of what political activism used to be and how it has developed in the case of the Arab world in the digital era makes an important argument; that feminist blogging is an emerging citizenship practice whereby grassroots activism is combined with online activism which is more efficient and reliable. With the use of advanced information and communication technologies and tools such as mobile phones, computers, e-mail and social networks, women were able to have global and 'glocal' outreach and mobilise transnational solidarity for social justice and democracy.

What recently happened in the Arab world is a proof of the importance of cyber-activism and its efficiency. Indeed, when it was almost impossible for journalists to produce and share information due to the media blackout and oppression imposed on them by the dictatorships, cyber activists insured this job. (Ben Mhenni, 2011k)

Cyber-activism is understood as collection of information that is then actively and strategically shared on the Internet to raise awareness and mobilise actions to advocate for social change on specific causes. Online activism is inextricably linked to grassroots activism, positioning feminist blogging within a social group of cyber-activists who had a tremendous role in truth finding, dissemination of information, organising demonstrations, campaigns and mobilising citizens. In Sidi Bouzid (Tunisia), for example, those who witnessed the immolation of Mohamed Bouazizi, whose death was the catalyst of the Tunisian revolution, shared pictures and videos on the Internet, mobilising cyber-activists in other parts of the country and the region. Several travelled around the country to record the uprisings in person, raising awareness and mobilising others by launching online campaigns using Facebook, blogs and Twitter.

These dialogical understandings of political activism point also to the virtual bonds created among cyber activists, identified as a crucial element of the transnational sisterhood and solidarity, thus signifying community and movement building. The creative use of the

Internet and technological tools, feminists succeeded in reaching out to other activists, feminist communities and networks for support. Thus, they managed to overcome the regimes' attempts to hide information about clashes between the security forces and citizens by blocking certain blogs, websites and Facebook groups, pages and profiles.

The alternative power of feminist blogging as a form of online activism has been described by Ben Mhenni in the ability to bypass the regime's control over information and the internet and thus, exercise political pressure. This destabilisation of power as an ongoing effort, challenged the corrupt system in an effort to enable democratic processes.

We have to get rid of the whole corrupted system and to succeed in our democratic transition. [...] This is why honest cyber-activists should be vigilant and continue the battle till the end. The duty of a cyber-activist never comes to an end. (Ben Mhenni, 2011k)

However, the Internet has been described as double-edged sword, as it has been also used by counter-revolution groups to harm efforts for democratic dialogue. Ben Mhenni replaces emphasis on the fact that everything begins with the individual voice of each activist to be vigilant and honest to the community.

This is what activism means for me but before everything it is to be engaged, to be honest, to have principles and to be ready to sacrifice everything for your cause and in order to help and assist people who really need your help. Moreover, I strongly believe that people who are in lack of sensitivity and feelings cannot make good activists. You cannot help others if you do not feel their agony... (Ben Mhenni, 2011k)

Indeed, recording what they see daily, including news events, on their blogs, sharing videos, photographs, and accompanying them with write-ups, feminists in this research showed us that voice and opinion can be critical and visible. Thus, these standpoints and situated knowledges provide us with access to different axes of domination by providing us with alternative visions, to become accountable and engaged. We have indeed seen that traditional and online mainstream media started to rely and collaborate with feminist bloggers for publishing and cross-blogging informative pieces. Within this dynamic practice, Ben Mhenni in her blog post 'Are bloggers a Threat to Governments?' identified another contribution of blogging for political participation: citizen journalism. Bloggers were often the first on the ground, filming events in real time as they occur with their digital cameras (Ben Mhenni, 2010a).

Sawlan Daher attributed cost-effectiveness, user-friendliness and interactivity, as the key reasons why social media is paramount in the transnational feminist struggle. It provides platforms for activists to engage in dialogue, mobilise and get organised:

Because they are cost effective, user friendly and interactive social media have become paramount to the feminist struggle, not only because they provide platforms for activists to mobilize and organize themselves as well as enabling users to create online safe spaces but also because they allow activists to challenge mainstream media and ideologies: women can tell their version of their stories at last without being dependents on editors or worrying about getting access to more traditional media, something that is very difficult to achieve indeed, especially if a person doesn't have the right connections. Opinions and analysis can now be written on a blog, shared through social networks and commented on with no external interference, or specific guidelines. Besides, video social media like Youtube offer an alternative to viewers from State-owned and privately owned television: with an increased use of smartphones, citizens have been able to share images many public powers would have rather kept secret. (Salwan Daher, 2011)

It should be stressed here, that social media on its own was not perceived by the bloggers as powerful in bringing mobilisation without political action on the ground. The toppling of dictators should not be attributed to the power of the internet and social media. Rather, a key aspect that emerged from the narratives of feminist bloggers in all their diversity, emphasised the power of the voices behind the blogs and social media: "Social media have not overthrown a single dictator in the Middle East. That's not the point. Instead, focus on the daring voices they host, and you begin to recognize the tectonic shifts they're nudging along" (Eltahawy, 2010).

For example, feminist bloggers have put street harassment in the public discourse, despite government renunciations to the contrary; the written testimonies, video and pictures shared online exposed the systematic attacks against women in downtown Cairo for example. One voice at a time, feminist bloggers and activists with the creative use of the social media are dismantling oppressive authority. These diverse, youthful and daring women's voices are part of the most marginalised groups in a region led for centuries by men.

To conclude, the discourses I document show that blogging provides a much-needed space for intersectional expression, resistance and solidarity. Revolutionary momentums became transposed by a new generation of feminists into parallel mobilisation, quickly spreading the word and posing questions that would not otherwise have been asked. Especially, during socio-political transitions and war women's voices remain silent or not given a platform to speak. These data show that the power of witnessing is even more significant when one is in physical danger. MENA is one of those regions where feminist bloggers documented and reported facts from the ground archiving socio-political history. Feminist bloggers using affirmative rhetoric, narrative and storytelling invite us to listen to their stories because their voices matter. The situated knowledges of radical defiance and disobedience in the blogging practices of women strategically seek to disrupt patriarchal power structures. I have demonstrated the epistemic advantages of focusing on women's experiences and meanings constructed through their political commentary via blogging as the "outsider within" their societies (Collins, 1986). Through this alternative type of resistance and coalition-building, a new politics emerges. I bring together and discuss these aspects through the lens of my integrated feminist standpoint framework in the following chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE - THE 'GLOCALITY' OF FEMINIST BLOGGING: FROM MARGIN TO CENTRE

The guiding research question in my study is: What is the role of blogging in transcending local boundaries to inform global audiences about human rights violations and to mobilise collective action? In this chapter, I interpret the findings of this research, using feminist standpoint theory together with critical discourse analysis as my methodological and analytical tools. I discussed earlier the feminist constructions of political participation and the public sphere as these emerge from feminist blogging in the five specific socio-political contexts covered by the ten blogs. In these contexts, the blogging practices and strategies of women during the 2011 Arab uprisings played an instrumental role in challenging authoritarian regimes. For women and their communities, the idea of freedom and democracy felt real after decades of dictatorship, corruption and human rights violations. While the oppressive systems were trying to figure out the revolutionary dynamic and power of the Internet in upscaling the levels of resistance, female activists and bloggers were working towards a radical new architecture of the public sphere and reaching out to global audiences. In line with feminist literature, women's narratives and insights in this study brought up new meanings that reconstruct digital public space(s) and alternative modes of political participation beyond the nation state (Baksh and Harcourt, 2015; Fraser, 2014, 1992; Harcourt, 2000, 2014; Young, 2000).

We have seen that the traditional political public sphere during the 2011 revolutions in Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, Tunisia and Yemen was far from unitary and violently exclusionary for women activists and human rights defenders.⁶⁵ Feminist bloggers and activists show that when democratic values do not apply to all systems and structures of a country, then inclusion and participation are not ensured for all. The 2011 Arab uprisings in many ways disappointed women's dreams to be equal partners in the political public sphere, which was far from a democratic or mediating space between the state and the civil society (as in Habermasian and westernised understandings). For example, legal and constitutional changes in Egypt (as well as in the other countries in different degrees) did

⁶⁵ In the case of Yemen, this momentum resulted in a vicious cycle of violence and civil war since mid-2014 and the takeover of power by the armed group Houthis. In a war-torn Yemen, the justice system collapsed impacting everyone. Specifically, the institutionalised discrimination against women accumulated over long-standing poor governance. In the case of Syria, this momentum resulted in a devastating war causing the biggest humanitarian crisis in our times. In Lebanon, in October 2019, we witnessed a new wave of revolutions whereby women activists took an even more radical stance demanding their civil and political rights.

not result in a more inclusive political communication, nor in a more democratic dialogue. Especially during these periods of conflict and socio-political transitions, the narratives of the bloggers in my research revealed the many layers of political regression for human rights and gender equality.⁶⁶ These results showed that inclusion in the public sphere and discursive democracy is not achieved simply through legal or abstract statements for equality of all citizens.

Inclusivity as raised by a number of feminist standpoint theorists is a crucial criterion for political legitimacy in upscaling the concept of the public sphere beyond the nation state (Chambers, 1995; Fraser, 2014, 1992; Young, 2000). The ability to access and participate in the public sphere (in its traditional sense) had not been possible for many marginalised groups, particularly women in all axes of difference. These are “muted voices” in the public political discussions and struggles, as articulated by Gould (1996). These inclusivity gaps were documented in the narratives of the ten feminist bloggers. They used their blogging practice to open up the political dialogue to address difference and diversity, and to challenge the constantly shrinking public space for women’s voices as articulated by feminist standpoint theorists (Bickford, 1996; Chambers, 1995; Gould, 1996, Harding, 1996, 1993; Collins, 1997).

In the sections to follow, I demonstrate the role of feminist blogging as an emerging form of political participation as revealed in the critical discourse analysis of the ten blogs. I build on the theoretical framework of Young (2000)⁶⁷ to show how the knowledges produced via feminist blogging expand the notion of the public sphere through inclusive political discourse action: 1) narrative and situated forms of knowledge, 2) affirmative rhetoric and 3) public greeting and acknowledgement. I employ these expressions of the different positionalities via feminist blogging, to highlight the ‘voice’ element in my research – the micro-level – featured in Annex V and Figure 5.1. In tandem, I use Harcourt’s (2000) ‘glocality’ as a key concept to explain the diverse discursive strategies taking place in the feminist blogosphere, as they unfold from these situated knowledges. I fine tune the concept of glocality to apply to the feminist blogosphere because this glocality brings up the alternative power of transnational feminisms organised as, what I refer to, ‘glocal counterpublics’. I also bring this aspect in dialogue with Fraser’s (1992, 2014) concept of ‘subaltern counterpublics’ in view of transnationalising the public sphere.

⁶⁶ In this aspect, reflecting on the Cypriot patriarchal politics I recognised a similar pattern happening whenever power is renegotiated in the context of the Cyprus conflict, women’s voices and demands are sidelined with the excuse that this is not the ‘right’ time for gender equality.

⁶⁷ See page 21 for Young’s (2000) suggestions for a more inclusive political narrative in the public sphere.

The glocality of feminist blogging highlights the interlinking space and power elements in my analysis – the meso and macro levels - featured in Annex V and Figure 5.1. This is because the mobilisation and coalition-building among these glocal communities provide new understandings of the public sphere, as well as of transnational sisterhood.

I conclude that the glocality of feminist blogging provides us with a dialogical understanding of voice, agency and space that reconstruct political participation. These three general analytical levels interweave in ways that show the alternative political power of blogging. To do so, I propose a Schema (Figure 5.1) to visualise glocality as it emerges from my findings, that is a dynamic way of organising from grassroots action to global mobilisation and from margin/exile to glocal counterpublics. The discussion in the respective sections of this chapter correspond to these different elements featured in my Schema. In the final section of the chapter, I argue that this Schema could help in the analysis of political blogs because it intersects and interconnects these different levels and elements in an integrated framework. Specifically, the situated knowledges produced by feminist blogging reveal the glocal discursive strategies that point to new directions in transnational feminist solidarity and coalition building of the 21st century.

5.1 Situated knowledges: Feminist blogging, voice and agency

As we have seen in the findings chapter, the blogging narratives of each of the ten women writing about the political situation in their countries reflect their social, political and historical positioning. In line with the literature, these positionalities produce situated knowledges from their experiences that comprise manifold standpoints and interests, on which an inclusive public sphere should depend (Haraway, 1991; Harsock, 1996; Smith, 1987; Young, 2000). In their blogging practice, women wrote in war and exile or from their marginalised position in their societies. They strategically expressed their feelings, opinions, stories, documented the protests and the political demands pointing to new understandings of political voice and agency.

Feminist blogging, shown in the previous chapter, is a valuable part of women activists' identity. It represents their efforts to express their individual opinion, to be heard and be visible, and also to empower themselves and others to fight for social justice. Some of them had created their blogs to counteract the lack of feminist content on the Internet. Their participation to the protests and their act of blogging, were linked to many years of political activism inherited from their families. It represented multiple 'personal

revolutions' against the oppressive regimes. 'Revolutions' were constructed as multiple personal gestures of defiance and resistance emerging from their life's circumstances and seen as an intergenerational duty to support human rights.

Specifically, narration or storytelling, which is among the three elements of making the political sphere more inclusive highlighted in Young's theory (2002), was a means and a strategy employed by women activists in their blogging practices to:

- 1) Highlight marginalised perspectives, explain and describe the traumatic experiences of other revolutionaries who were being systematically silenced and abused.
- 2) Express their own experiences of discrimination and injustices (specifically, censorship, violence and detention).
- 3) Empower those silenced and expose violence, corruption and oppression.
- 4) Provide their own conceptualisations of socio-political processes and account of events based on human rights values, gender equality, accountability and justice.

In doing so, there are powerful dimensions of the affirmative rhetoric expressed through women's blogging as a window to their positionalities. Their affirmative rhetoric is another element in line with Young's (2000) theory on inclusive political narrative. The emotional tone of the discourses, particularly anger, despair, defiance, sarcasm, courage, solidarity, pride, feminist love, shared empowerment, were all combined with metaphors, wording, grammar, poems, creative text and different styles used in their writing. To make their arguments even more powerful they creatively incorporated in the text of their blogs: pictures, visuals, videos, screenshots from social media, banners and campaign posters. By providing insights about the ways in which blogs treat revolutionary events and social relations, women constructed feminist versions of their political realities, social identities and new social relations in the public sphere. Blogging as an alternative form of political expression allowed women to inform their audiences, and being genuine voices from the grassroots, they raise global awareness.

As noted earlier, these insider and outsider standpoints offered testimonies in the blogosphere that can be re-read and reflected upon, connected the inner with the outer, and create links that are community based, in line with Huff's (1989) theory on feminist journal writing (a visual representation of these aspects is featured in Annex V- Mind

Map). The bloggers also produced valuable knowledge about individual identity and agency that shaped their blogging as political practice leading to or being part of collective political action. Despite death threats, censorship and detention, the discourses constructed show that anger and defiance are also political acts that can challenge society's expectations and norms about a woman's role and 'proper' behaviour. Those in the margins of the traditional public sphere seek via feminist blogging political listening, acknowledgement and social justice. Thus, these voices from their own positionalities, have a crucial role in feminist knowledge production.

5.2 Feminist blogging in the struggle over the public sphere: diverse strategies

Women's blogging discourses revealed diverse ways in which blogging as social and political practice was used in a very exclusionary and constantly shrinking public sphere. Specifically, their affirmative rhetoric, narration and storytelling, reflects the struggle of women activists to overcome the lack of political listening and public acknowledgement of their role as political agents.

An important pattern I encountered in my data about the use of language, was that a higher number of blog posts were written and published in the English and French languages during periods of escalated conflict in the bloggers' countries.⁶⁸ This finding on the choice of language, in this case English, is a key commonality in the discursive tactics, to reach a wider audience beyond the local contexts seeking political listening and public acknowledgment (Bickford, 1996; Young, 2000) but also to mobilise transnational solidarity.

Here, I provide a compilation of the diverse discursive actions and strategies employed by the bloggers in claiming local and international public spheres. Using Young's framework, I based my analysis on the narration, storytelling and affirmative rhetoric of these situated knowledges. First, the diligent documentation of the revolutions in Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, Tunisia, and Yemen via blogging revealed different aspects of political action and discourses from the 'outsider within' point of view (Collins, 1986). The blogs were informed by activism on the ground, managing, in this way, to share critical information about those excluded from the public sphere and specifically women's perspectives of

⁶⁸ Some blogs included posts/entries written in English, Arabic and French. For the purpose of this thesis, I focused on the blog posts written in English.

different axes of domination (Collins, 1997; Haraway, 1991; Hartsock, 1996; hooks, 2000 [1984]).

The discourse action of feminist bloggers included: detailed reporting, precision in chronicling, and critical view from the protests. Such revolutionary moments included: strikes, riots, rallies, sit-ins, and demonstrations organised by human rights defenders, lawyers, university students and academics, bloggers, workers, and citizens.⁶⁹

An important example of this practice was the bloggers reporting on the humanitarian situation and recording citizens' views and needs, often in remote villages and towns, as well as interviewing journalists and bloggers to report on the situation of censorship and freedom of speech. Thus, an alternative voice emerged giving visibility to humanitarian issues, institutional neglect and corruption affecting women, girls and communities that traditional/mainstream media would not be able to nor be willing to report. These insights and political commentary of feminist bloggers reflected their counter-hegemonic political action, and the power of turning trauma into visions and actions for social change.

Second, feminist blogging acted as a space where patriarchal and military violence, detention, systemic corruption and other individual and collective human rights violations, were documented, reported and contested. In this way they infused their blogging practice with critical understandings of the political processes by putting diverse female and feminist voices and political analyses at the centre of attention. Blogging about the Egyptian virginity tests and sexual violence inflicted on women human rights defenders was a key example in the affirmative rhetoric expressed through the blogging practices of women in this study with a local and global outreach. I will come back to this in the next section.

Third, the powerful images and audio-visuals incorporated in the affirmative rhetoric of the blog texts provided us with an uncensored understanding of the unlawful attacks and violence exercised by the regime towards activists, bloggers, journalists, and citizens. This strategy also served as: a) collection of evidence for such crimes, b) radical acts of creating

⁶⁹ On the one hand, blogging about grassroots action served as documenting local history; on the other, it offered global audiences necessary information to mobilise against the multi-layered discrimination and violent attacks on feminist activists and human rights defenders (pressure from the outside).

memory about what happened during the events, and consequently as c) acts of resistance.⁷⁰

Fourth, the active participation in online human rights and feminist campaigns contributed in raising awareness about local human rights issues: child marriage in Yemen; sexual harassment and rape in Egypt; initiative for books for Tunisian prisoners and campaigns for the release of missing and detained human rights activists. These actions revealed that feminist blogging was a glocal activity at the meso level strategically connecting the local (micro) and the global (macro) level.

Fifth, interactive engagement, networking and online advocacy employed in the blogging practices of female activists in this research brings new layers of understanding about the creative use of social media channels such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube to reach wider audiences.⁷¹ The dialogue and conversational commentary by blog commenters revealed connections to maximise outreach and influence, and collective political agency that points to new understandings of online political communities. These results support Young's (2000) theory of affirmative rhetoric and political greeting. These results also support other feminist standpoint literature, such as Bickford's (1996) theory that emphasises the conversational aspects, and Braaten's (1995) communicative theory that emphasises intersubjective action for an inclusive public sphere. This emerges as an important element in the feminist blogosphere in making political dialogue more inclusive and participatory, that ideally respects differences and allows us to consider the specific needs and positionalities of women from different groups. I return to this aspect in the final section of this chapter.

The sixth element – diversification – is the cross-posting in online activist and blogging platforms such as the Global Voices. Specifically, the bloggers publish their articles in collaboration with online blogging and media platforms that act as forums for freedom of speech and activism. I discuss the value of this finding further in the next section.

5.3 'Glocal' voices: transcending spaces using online advocacy platforms

I now conduct a closer examination of the ways women's discourse action transcended the traditionally restrictive local political sphere to inform global audiences. I employ

⁷⁰ The analysis of the visual discourses in the blogging practices of women is an area worthy of further research.

⁷¹ In their blogging practice, the women in my study also used other social media such as Twitter, Facebook and YouTube to maximise the dissemination (virality) of their political commentary. This is an area worthy of further research from a feminist standpoint.

Harcourt's (2000) theoretical concept of glocality to discuss how cross-posting and collaborating with online platforms contributed in claiming the local and international sphere(s) and thus, reconstructing political space and action.

Harcourt (2000), when she talks about "cyberevolution" as a new era for women, uses the term 'glocality' to describe "the politics based on place-based needs", that are connected through networks, weaving together different groups in ways that can no longer be placed into "national", "regional", or "international" political categories. The networks and platforms hosting and linking various feminist bloggers together, in the process, become or create spaces that are neither local nor global, but could be better conceptualised as glocal. Glocality is a useful term on which I build to map how these situated voices, as expressed in the feminist blogosphere strategically become glocal and politically engage with global audiences. I use the term in my own Schema (Figure 5.1) to visualise, interpret and provide an imaginary of the diverse strategies through which these voices connect grassroots action within multiple spaces and communities. Thus, I further develop this concept by exploring the links between the glocality of blogging and its transformative power to transnational feminist solidarities and movements (as shown in Annex V - Mind Map).

In line with Fraser (1992, p. 123) and her well-known concept of 'subaltern counterpublics', my findings show that feminist blogging can create parallel discursive domains in which marginalised social groups produce and circulate counter-discourses. This interdiscursivity among bloggers and commenters creates oppositional understandings about their identities, interests and needs. They strategically transcend beyond the nation-state and move to a transnationalised public sphere. In line with Fraser's (2014) suggestions, they construct through blogging communities, networks and platforms, new addresses for public opinion. They construct transnational public powers that have the organisational ability to share knowledge, strategies and solutions to transnational problems. Thus, these findings address the creation of new transnational powers and their accountability to new, transnational public spheres (Fraser, 2014, p. 33). One of the interventions I make is that the glocality of feminist blogging as strategic political practice creates new transnational public powers, which are also accountable in transnational public spheres. Feminist blogging is strategically glocal, because of its ability to mobilise transnational solidarity. The affirmative rhetoric, dialogue and political acknowledgement in women's blogs reveal their strategic potential for exercising political pressure, destabilising power, and enhancing transnational efforts to mitigate human rights violations and oppression.

Blogging in online platforms with global readership has been an important communicative practice that emerged from the analysis of the blogs. The bloggers had to transcend the social public space which is a male-dominated domain, and the only one in which political decision-making takes place. The bloggers emphasise how most women still have limited access in this domain. Through the act of cross-blogging and cross-posting their writings, feminist bloggers in this study participated in online activist and blogging platforms, such as Global Voices, Medium, Jezebel, Raseef22, Majal, Movements, Open Democracy and Amnesty International portals. They also published their articles in online press, such as The Guardian, The Star, The Washington Post, and The New York Times. They engaged in these global advocacy spaces to give wide visibility to the needs and demands of the revolutionary voices from the ground, in exile and/or the diaspora.

Their affirmative rhetoric published in these online platforms included the translation of texts from fellow bloggers who write in Arabic; voices that myself and others would not otherwise have been able to access. It is important to highlight here that the diverse discursive strategies that take place in the blogs not only chronicle and document personal and collective struggles for social change. Feminist bloggers also used cross-posting for collaborative visibility and transcendence of space(s) for a common cause. Such articles or posts written by feminist bloggers and hosted in global activist and media forums/outlets, were then re-shared/cross-posted in their personal blogs resulting in a rich conversational narrative in the comments sections. I will analyse the commentary in the following section, but I want to stress here that it is important to acknowledge these glocal strategies beyond the interactivity inherently enabled by social media. These communicative strategies are interdiscursive and dialogical with a common cause to raise awareness and mobilise. Their glocality maximises the ‘virality’ of the messages, to thus achieve greater outreach to inform a wider audience, as well as to encourage transnational mobilisation.

The act of cross-posting and cross-blogging shows that feminist blogging is part of an ecosystem of diverse online platforms that collaborate with bloggers and activists for common social and political goals. Below, I sum up the glocality of the feminist blogosphere based on my findings on the act of cross-posting and publishing in online advocacy platforms:

- 1) The affirmative rhetoric in women’s writing encompasses powerful images, videos and social media features for virality, all aspects to maximise dissemination of and

access to information. This contributed in critically assessing the complex socio-political realities in Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, Tunisia and Yemen.⁷²

- 2) Freedom of expression and access to information are two complementary goals.
- 3) These online platforms serve as crowdsourcing spaces for women human rights defenders and activists across the MENA region and internationally.
- 4) These spaces provide those fighting for human rights in dictatorships with expertise to strengthen their voice.
- 5) They serve as spaces where underrepresented voices can be amplified and help build communities that protest and promote diversity and social justice.
- 6) They provide a much-needed space for solidarity and support among bloggers.

These are elements of a political practice that is part of a wider net of web circles (as shown in Figure 5.1) transforming local action into global, whilst the two levels remain in dialogue. Such actions included, for example, participation in virtual and face-to-face forums while blogging. This reveals ways in which feminist blogging transcends spaces for networking, interactive engagement and shared empowerment among bloggers and other feminist activists. The dynamic nature of blogging brings to the forefront diversity of meanings and understandings of political participation. The bloggers with their critical feminist analyses shed light on “place-based needs” from the grassroots and challenge the distorted Western views that concrete democratic changes were taking place.

For example, Shehwaro’s collaborative blogging with Global Voices for her series “Dispatches from Syria”, shows that blogging platforms not only serve as a community of translators and supporters in amplifying these voices. Intersectional narratives are brought to light to discuss complex politics and war. Online media and activist platforms are used strategically for more influence. This dimension of their blogging shows knowledge-sharing from local standpoints to global audiences, often challenging Western ideas of democracy, and gender stereotypes in their countries. These glocalities, in line with Harcourt and Escobar (2002), reconstruct in this study Arab feminism and women’s role in the socio-political transitions making the public debate inclusive and meaningful. Thus, based on my findings I argue that the concept of glocality (Harcourt, 2000), contributes in

⁷² Giving visibility to the hard choices made by women during conflict and war in the specific cases of Syria and Yemen.

an integrated analysis for a better understanding of the significant political work of women in the feminist blogosphere connecting from different local spaces and shared virtual spaces.

At the intersection of community, identity, democracy, and social justice movements, online activist and media platforms can fill a cultural gap in the media landscape. The findings of this study reveal that women’s glocal engagement in the feminist blogosphere fills a transnational political gap by bringing together local realities and global perspectives. Engaging in these online platforms, women’s experiences and voices from the margin, exile, and diaspora, are brought to the forefront, offering political analyses in global spaces. This diversification of discursive practices and organisation of action sheds light on different constructions of political participation in the digital era, that are closely linked to local grassroots feminism and organic social movements. The case of the feminist blogosphere reveals the transcendence of local boundaries and reaches out to global audiences by blurring the lines between inner - outer, private - public, local - global as shown in the Schema (Figure 5.1 - ‘Visualising the process of glocality’) I propose below.

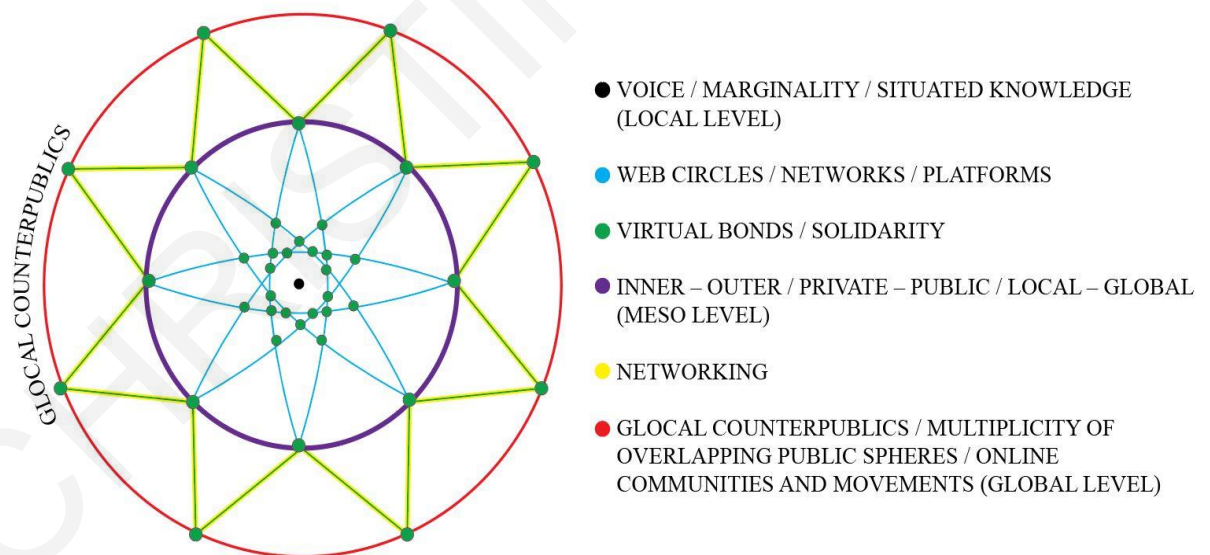


Figure 5. 1 ‘Visualising the process of glocality’ in feminist blogging organising from grassroots political action to mobilising feminist movements in the 21st century.

This glocality challenges the sense of polarity between the local and the global – as if the two were far away. Instead, it positions the global as very closely mapped onto the local (Harcourt, 2000, pp. 693–4). I fine-tune this concept in my analysis to argue that local–global transcendence is used by women to strategically spread information and mobilise collective action. This interactive engagement via feminist blogging in different types of spaces – physical and geographical, organisational, cultural, social and political – reveal that the global and the local are neither mutually exclusive nor hierarchically organised. They strategically transcend and move between various national territories and digital spaces, expanding our understandings of the public sphere. Thus, in line with Harcourt’s theory the fact that these glocalities are strategic, is key. They produce knowledge from the grassroots and highlight marginalised voices, but they also seek support for collective action. I build on Harcourt’s concept of glocality to more accurately account for the transformative potential of blogging on feminist politics of the 21st century (Harcourt, 2000, 2014; Harcourt and Escobar, 2002). The feminist blogosphere consists of blogs of women doing diverse and strategic political action. It could be understood as glocal spaces that are produced by connecting various social movements in networks of opposition. These glocal voices have the ability to connect places to global political processes. They are strategic and potentially transformative because they are simultaneously place-based and global (Harcourt and Escobar, 2002).

With this Schema, I highlight the relationship between the situated knowledges expressed in the blogs of women activists, and the glocality of their discourse action in the struggle over the public sphere. I argue that in the case of the feminist blogosphere, it is these glocal voices, that with their strategic affirmative rhetoric produce situated knowledges. The discourses I document show that blogging provides a much-needed space for intersectional expression, resistance and solidarity. It also serves as a space within a space created by connecting the local (inner/micro-level) with the global (outer/macro-level). The Schema (Figure 5.1) is a visual representation of the process in which women in their blogging practices employ these discursive strategies of transcendence, interweaving voice, space and power at the micro, meso and macro levels. I provide a detailed mapping of these levels also in a Mind Map (Annex V) based on which I discuss this alternative political space, which encompasses multiple and overlapping glocal public spheres. I will return to this integrated and dialogic reconceptualisation of political participation at the end of the chapter. But first I would like to provide a closer look to the intersectional dialogue,

resistance and solidarity within these communities that could be understood as ‘glocal counterpublics’.

5.4 From margin to alternative power: online communities of resistance and transnational solidarity

In this section, I look deeper at the glocality of feminist blogging as a form of strategic resistance to mobilise support and solidarity. The dialogic action revealed from these situated voices of resistance in their struggle to move from the margins to the centre of the public sphere, enacts online communities, coalitions and mobilises transnational feminist solidarity. Understanding these communities as glocal counterpublics disrupts authoritarian discourses that view efforts of collective social change as imported ideas from the West. They also disrupt Western, neoliberal, and neo-colonial discourses that privilege the power of pro-regime political classes, and view the collective action of the masses as homogenised and powerless. I suggest that the concept of glocal counterpublics allows us to put at the forefront the strategic connections between feminist bloggers and their communities of resistance and the transformative power they hold for mobilising transnational feminisms.

The feminist understandings of resistance constructed in the blogging practice of the women in this study were a cross-cutting theme, framed as a constant fight against authoritarianism, militarism, neo-colonialism, neoliberalism, and the patriarchy. The act of blogging was framed in women’s affirmative rhetoric as a “weapon” (Ben Mhenni, 2010) of information and truth against oppressive systems. Resistance, individual and collective, had the following features:

- 1) Resistance through women’s narratives and testimonies took different expressions that interacted with each other.
- 2) Resistance was constructed as individual and collective political practice, closely linked to expressions of anger, disobedience, and defiance aiming at a destabilisation and a re-negotiation of power, especially in times of socio-political turbulence and militarist intervention.
- 3) Resistance is dialogical among bloggers and commenters, but also different groups of women human rights defenders, groups of citizens in different synchronous and asynchronous contexts. This brings new layers of understanding with regards to

discursive democracy in the feminist blogosphere (as a manifestation of the alternative power of feminist blogging as political praxis).

- 4) Constructions of feminist resistance emerge from this study in support of mass protests, public assemblies, sit-ins occupying public spaces, solidarity actions (blurring the lines between online - offline; local - global) connecting the inner / individual with the outer / collective (as shown in the Figure 5.1 and Mind Map – Annex V).
- 5) Circulating discourses through networks and online platforms (as shown in the Schema, Figure 5.1), and using creative text and powerful visuals form the ground, highlighted personal experiences of censorship and violence, and encouraged conversation among the bloggers and the readers.
- 6) Feminist resistance constructed through blogging is not homogeneous. Different forms of feminist resistance exist simultaneously and are in dialogue with other discursive practices (e.g., writing in other mediums, collaborative projects, joint statements with civil society actors).

In these ways, feminist blogging becomes an act of resistance merging the micro (individual) and macro (collective) levels. This glocal process of strategic resistance shapes its transformative power by 1) producing knowledge that challenges oppressive structures, systems and authority; 2) asking uncomfortable questions to challenge patriarchal glocal institutions and hold them accountable for the sexism, white supremacy and apathy reflected from the Western media and political analysts; and 3) forming coalitions to mobilise transnational feminist protests.

5.4.1 Blogging communities through the commenters' eyes

I focus now on blog commentary as an example of a strategy used by women human rights defenders to connect and engage with different communities. I discuss the conversational narratives as part of the virtual bonds created by shared solidarity (Figure 5.1) and empowerment both among bloggers and their readers, but also among fellow bloggers. The political acknowledgement expressed is significant to the practice of the women in this study; it allows me to understand them as a political community, rather than as individual bloggers. This analysis attempts to bring up some of the relationships established as part of their participation to the aforementioned glocal counterpublics, to combat physical violence, sexual harassment, and censorship.

The conversations taking place in the comments sections of the blogs revealed insightful dialogue about the transitional socio-political processes. Specifically, in posts expressing anger, resistance and challenging the oppressive regimes, the commentators expressed solidarity and stressed the importance of the blogger's actions. When the bloggers exposed the violence and censorship they had experienced, the commenters encouraged them to continue to be radical, brave and resistant voices. When the bloggers questioned the biased political analyses often featured in mainstream and Western media, their readers responded with encouraging comments confirming that the information they shared was considered valuable and respectful to marginalised perspectives on the ground. This commentary reveals public greeting and political acknowledgment of their critical, authentic reporting from the grassroots. Their actions were valued within imagined online communities seeking democracy and human rights.

Denouncing the many cases of censorship, corruption and violence, these voices come to the centre and interact with others in ways that would not be possible without the Internet and new technologies. Yet, it is the affirmative rhetoric of women and the political greeting and public acknowledgement (Young, 2000) that contributes to the creation of virtual bonds and community building. For example, the solidarity and support taking place in blogs or groups of blogs addressing the 2011 Arab revolutions construct these spaces as “mini-public spheres” – a concept used by Young (2009) – and as “counter-public spheres” – Fraser (1992) – doing important political work.

The commenters in the blogs offered women activists greeting and public acknowledgement, in line with Young's (2000) suggestions on inclusive politics. These findings also support what Bickford (1996) describes as “political listening”, an important element of democratic dialogue. All these are fundamentals which are absent from the traditional male-dominated public sphere. For example, meaningful participation in local politics, justice systems and processes were not ensured in the post-2011 period. However, blog comments such as “The world is not looking away. We are watching”; “the old guard must go”; “you will prevail” and “you are not alone” reveal that women experience new relations through their blogging practice that signify a strong sense of community beyond national and geographical confines. Thus, the online community-building that emerges from these feminist blogging practices reveal that intersubjective politics allow for more respect towards differences and democracy. The conversational politics happening in blogs allow us to consider the specific needs and acknowledge the positionalities of women from different groups (Braaten, 1995).

The commenters perceived themselves as co-citizens with the bloggers. Using statements such as “you are the government”, they provided supportive strategies in mobilising from the grassroots to rebuild their communities. The bloggers were perceived as a legitimate government with citizens being their greatest resource for social change and thus, an online community that could potentially have an impact on the ground. Additionally, it has been revealed that the lines between the experiences of local realities in the country of each blogger are in dialogue with the constructed meanings of democracy of their readers in other parts of the world. Respecting their own “place-based needs”, they also shared a common citizenship created under the blogging community; a woman-friendly space for information, where knowledge is shared and reproduced. Eventually, feminist empowerment and solidarity emerged through these parallel dialogues that respected differences. This is communicative thinking that builds on diversity and inclusion. It provides us with a feminist understanding that expands public spaces / sphere.

I am not the first one to highlight the community-building taking place in feminist blogs and the potential of online participatory communities as cultures and citizenship practices (Harris, 2008, 2010; Keller, 2012, 2017). This study, however, highlights the conversational qualities of these glocal communities as strategic spaces especially within authoritarian contexts, which are both relational and political. I argue that the significance of public address, political listening and acknowledgement offered to women activists through these communities, is what provides them with the power to come together and mobilise. Connecting from different local spaces and shared virtual spaces, women in their blogging practice construct new, inclusive and meaningful ways of understanding the public sphere and strategic political participation. These findings reveal, as I show in Figure 5.1, an ongoing and dynamic political process of instrumental political work connecting local organic grassroots activism with global societies.

5.4.2 Political acknowledgement, coalition-building and the potential transnational feminist solidarity

Here, I expand Young’s (2000) framework of “inclusive political narrative”, to argue for the significance of glocality in the blogging practices of women, for coalition-building and in mobilising collective action. Feminist blogging provides us with new understandings about how this is done in an inclusive and diverse way pointing to a distinct moment for 21st century feminisms and transnational sisterhood in the making. The networks and community bonds created by these glocal counterpublics merge the local experiences with

global coalition building. This enables political listening and acknowledgement that transcends physical, geographical and traditional political boundaries. This type of collective political listening and acknowledgement brings up personal and collective empowerment that destabilises hegemonic power and shapes a different form of citizenship.

In line with Hartsock (1996), the alternative knowledges and visions constructed by feminist blogging not only provide us with access to different axes of domination, but also move beyond survival modes opening up possibilities for changing systematic power relations. The examples of coalition and alliance-building put into practice within the women's blogging practices for collective action, constitute important functions of groups and individuals that are excluded from the public sphere.

The affirmative rhetoric and discursive practices of feminist blogging reveal the importance of global feminist spaces and their instrumental power for organising collective human rights mobilisation. Blogging creates and contributes to glocal feminist spaces from which women share knowledge from diverse approaches and standpoints. The glocality of the act of blogging contributes in the establishment of online communities, holding agency and co-participation. The findings of this research show these overlapping feminist spaces become places for expression, solidarity and empowerment, but also enable transnational movement-building. The alternative power of blogging brings up new aspects and new directions for the future of today's feminisms because of the glocality of these situated knowledges and online communities of resistance.

In the specific historical moment of the Arab revolutions, feminist bloggers placed positionality as a crucial aspect of information-sharing and knowledge production. They knew that revolutionary political momentums would not succeed if they did not follow social, cultural and sexual revolutions (Eltahawy, 2019). Especially in times of violent retaliation, their blogging practice held space for fellow activists, channelling the voices of those in detention with wider communities calling for immediate action. These glocal voices emphasise the resilience of the feminist movements through the course of history. Specifically, their ability to adapt to fluctuations of progress and backsliding, successes and failures and paying the price for claiming their rights and demanding gender equality. The voices also contest the idea that feminism is an imported movement. Feminist blogging shows us that every time a woman speaks up against oppressive powers and abusers, she resists to being seen as inferior in the political struggle. A political struggle

that women in the MENA region have been engaging in all along, without following the lead of any Western movement.

As I show in my Schema visualising glocality (Figure 5.1), the discourse action of women bloggers, together with the creative use of social media and online platforms, contributed to the creation of links between feminist networks and individuals active on the ground. These interactive engagements and networks increased transnational solidarity, organisation, mobilisation and collaboration. The virality of a lot of the texts in the blogging practice of women is true to the motto, “sharing is caring”. This is measured by a volume of shares, cross-postings, likes and retweets (which deserve further analysis). Blogs and Facebook pages are now equally important as online forums and spaces where activists from different social and political backgrounds share experiences, exchange ideas and coalesce for transnational actions. These actions, that include campaigns, demonstrations, strikes, and petitions, are often accompanied with occupying public spaces collectively.

The narratives of exiled and diaspora bloggers shed light to how feminist blogging contributes in building transnational feminist solidarity as part of what Salwan Daher calls an “organic, progressive and subversive movement” remaining alert to different and coexisting oppressive forces (whether authoritarianism, neo-colonialism, militarism, or the police). Although these struggles had been happening over many waves of revolutions and socio-political transitions to disrupt oppressive systems, the feminist blogosphere emerges as a place of “discursive democracy”. Women participate in overlapping and interconnected public spheres. They draw parallels with other countries, share lessons from the past and build transnational solidarity and sisterhood. This solidarity and sisterhood in making is what I propose has fourth-wave characteristics in feminist politics of the 21st century, and is enshrined in the universality of women’s rights. As I show in the Mind Map (Annex V), by connecting with less prominent voices, a diversity of standpoints and approaches are expressed. Public greeting, political listening and acknowledgement (Young, 2000) are part of the conversations taking place in these glocal counterpublics. The glocal voices behind the blogs thus strategically strengthen the political work of coalition-building and alliance formation (Hartsock, 1989).

These transnational solidarities are part of sustained feminist effort in the course of history to disrupt nation-state boundaries and provide strategies for meaningful solidarity (Harcourt, 2014). With their glocal strategic action, bloggers tackle difficult issues of

transnational solidarity and accountability across feminist movements. For example in the literature, Sara Salem (2019) talks about the moments of disconnect between Western feminists and feminists from the Global South and the connections between feminists across the colonised and post-colonial world, to argue that these tensions also represent possibilities for transnational feminist solidarity. The potential to open up transnational solidarity in the 21st century is grounded on anti-imperialism and anti-capitalism. Such conditions existed in revolutions in the Global South in the 1950s and the 1970s and their connection was that they represented a double critique, pushing back against imperialism and local dictatorship alike. Indeed, these conditions are important in debates about representation because transnational feminism allowed women to address and challenge “the simplistic notion of a universal sisterhood by pointing to the multiple divisions that separate women from one another while at the same time not seeing these divisions as barriers to solidarity” (Salem, 2019). By turning to women’s situated knowledges of oppression through their blogging practices, this study reveals the strategic role of focusing on questions of imagined futures rather than identity. This is a crucial ground of transnational solidarities.

In today’s rising capitalist, white supremacist, and patriarchal crisis, there is an urgency for solidarity among political positionalities. For example, the affirmative rhetoric, narratives and situated knowledges from feminist blogging remind us that the main point of feminist solidarity is diversity, as opposed to a shared sex. There is more than one feminist standpoint. Mohanty and Alexander (1997) emphasise that as women we coalesce “because we believe that we can only be free and live better lives with the end of capitalism, white supremacy, Western empire, and patriarchy”. They assert that transnational means:

A way of thinking about women in similar contexts across the world, in different geographical spaces, rather than as all women across the world; an understanding of a set of unequal relationships among and between peoples; and taking critical antiracist, anticapitalist positions that would make feminist solidarity work possible.

(Mohanty and Alexander, 1997)

Collective resistance brings together an organised feminist solidarity through empathy, which is at the core of what Vachhani and Pullen (2019) call “infrapolitical feminist resistance” emerging from the grassroots level. It’s a form of “affective solidarity” that challenges neoliberal barriers to gender equality. The feminist bloggers from the MENA

region in this study, showed just such resistance and affective solidarity through empathy and support.

Feminist blogging as political activism had a great input in reflecting on the transnational feminist movements of the 21st century. It provided us with a snapshot of the dynamic and strategic engagement in glocal spaces, from which transnational feminisms operated during such a crucial moment. Feminist blogging has shown us formal and informal ways in which gendered power relations define and inform everyday life. The extent to which they destabilised or transformed glocal hegemonic systems that constitute patriarchy, is not easy to answer (Baksh-Soodeen and Harcourt, 2015). However, feminist blogging as citizenship practice served as a window to transnational solidarity and feminist movements as key epistemic communities that can inspire and lead in shaping political spaces and institutions, and transforming international political economy, development and peace processes.

New lessons emerge from this study for transnational feminisms. Lessons that are at the core of feminist solidarity in the making that make creative use of all the digital tools to bring together the intergenerational and diverse voices in a transnational dialogue. The mobilisation of feminists blogging and demonstrating against oppression and violence, to change legislation, and achieve justice, equality and dignity for all, are part of multiple calls to overthrow patriarchal political economic and social systems (Abou Habib, 2020a). The discursive practices of feminist blogging bring to the surface key elements of digital-age transformations and future paths that can be diverse, inclusive, political and powerful. Feminist blogging during the 2011 Arab revolutions played an instrumental role in connecting with local movements building transnational solidarity and sisterhood which is still expanding and developing into instrumental power. I support that it is these sustained dialogical narratives among movements and glocal counterpublics of debate, that put flexibility at the centre of feminisms of the 21st century. The diverse glocal strategies of feminist blogging in the struggle over the public sphere provide us with a new paradigm of collective mobilisation and organisation.

Drawing on my findings, feminist blogging is seen to engage with feminist politics and history. I have not had a discussion directly with bloggers about their own positioning in feminist history in relation to the dominant wave metaphor used in describing feminist history. Nevertheless, I draw on the textual analysis of their blog posts to understand whether it would be useful to have the concept of a “fourth wave” within a digitally

mediated socio-political context. Feminist authors reflect that the wave model metaphor may contribute to a generational tension (Chamberlain, 2017; Keller, 2017). Nonetheless, feminist politics take different forms than in the 60s, 70s, 90s, or even a decade prior. This illustrates the complex context in which feminist bloggers engage in the politics of the MENA region, but also in the feminist blogosphere.

The Schema I propose, based on my findings, portrays the glocal ability of feminisms to be constantly evolving and adjusting to everyday realities in a world of patriarchal politics, sexism and militarism. Indeed, the Internet revolutionised feminist organising, writing and networking. I maintain that it is these glocal voices that make the public sphere more inclusive by producing situated knowledges with their affirmative narratives. The diversity of strategies and feminist standpoints revealed from the discourse action of feminist blogging in this research, indicates that it would be more accurate to understand this dynamic engagement as fourth-waves. We must recognise the plurality and complexity of transnational feminist movements as glocal feminist communities that coalesce in multiple and powerful ways. Even in times of great tensions within movements, the glocal voices in the feminist blogosphere keep the dialogue open to less-prominent voices and across movements. They demand inclusivity and accountability.

5.4.3 Reconstructing political participation: Feminist blogging interweaving voice, space and power

Based on my critical discourse analysis, a dialogical understanding of political participation can be framed under three broad interwoven analytical levels – voice/agency, space and power – that answer my research question and these to the Mind Map (Annex V). In the Schema I proposed (Figure 5.1), I further develop feminist standpoint theory, as I demonstrate the dynamic process of organising from grassroots action to global mobilisation and from margin and exile to interwoven public spheres as emerging from the discourse analysis of the ten blogs. Furthermore, I illustrate the integrated way in which voice, space and power come together via feminist blogging as a form of political participation in the digital era. The Schema shows the dynamic relationships that emerge through the experiences of women in specific socio-political and historical moments.

Different social, economic and political factors shape women's citizenship in ways that institutionalised gender discrimination (in society and the law), as well as socioeconomic hardships, hamper women's political agency. In the context of authoritarian regimes, Nazra for Feminist Studies has highlighted that the private and public spheres become part of one

political and cultural system that hampers women's ability to be politically active or to have a legitimate voice in decision-making. These factors were diligently reported and challenged by the feminist blogosphere and were discussed as a result of long-standing poor governance. Feminist blogs provided their readers with feminist analyses that challenge the notions of public-private space and frame political participation as the ability to discuss diverse and controversial issues. These conditions, through women's eyes and glocal voices, cannot be seen separately from today's neo-colonial militarism and capitalism, nor outside the relationship between police forces and the army.

State institutions in Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, Tunisia and Yemen, were unable to encompass smooth democratic political processes and to create legitimate spaces for tackling justice gaps. Instead, following the 2011 uprisings, politics and public spaces became monopolised by pro-regime or opposition forces and gave rise to authoritarian conflicts, and in the case of Syria and Yemen, devastating wars. In this context, Ghazzawi introduces a non-binary perspective of looking at Syrian politics. Women's political agency was not taken seriously during this crucial moment of renegotiation of power. Women were also denied protection in legislation that would be compatible with their participation and the revolutionary movements. Instead, during these crucial socio-political processes, women were used as tokens by political forces to signal liberal attitudes they did not believe in.

The diverse forms of political participation such as blogging and the creative use of social media were put in the forefront by feminist blogging practices as a way to guarantee the ability of women to offer their own political critique, their realities and glocal politics (Harcourt 2000, 2015). Feminist blogging revealed the tremendous ability of women to form discourses that tackle their everyday problems and address collective feminisms, to enhance their political presence. In many of the blogging narratives (presented in Chapter Four), this aspect is highlighted and enriched by feminist understandings of cyber-activism including citizen or street journalism, signifying a new era for feminist politics in the Arab world and beyond. When it was almost impossible to share information from the ground, due to media blackouts and oppression, feminist activists documenting and reporting from the grassroots, ensured their blogging would have online and offline outreach. Vigilantly blogging while the Internet and social networking sites were used by pro-regime forces to harm, they continued to expose human rights violations in real-time, seeking truth and political listening. The situated knowledges produced and constituted by discourses of defiance and resistance sought to strategically disrupt patriarchal structures. The fact that traditional media relied on and utilised bloggers during and after the 2011 Arab

revolutions, to report from the ground are important measures of outreach and influence. Their alternative power lies in their glocal ability to share information and mobilise collective action, which is precisely the reason they were seen by the oppressive political elites in their countries as threats to their governments and political systems.

As I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, I discussed the above interwoven themes of situated knowledges, argued for their glocality and their strategic transcendence across geographical, national, physical and digital spaces to provide us with an integrated view of feminist blogging for political participation. Specifically, feminist blogging invested in the cost effectiveness, user friendliness, and interactivity of the dynamic medium, provided parallel platforms for the marginalised voices behind these tools to mobilise and organise as well as enabling readers to create and engage in online spaces, chipping away at oppressive regimes, one voice at a time. These conversational narratives as we have seen in the findings chapter shed light on an alternative “discursive praxis” of activists to challenge mainstream media and ideologies.

The diversification of blogging as political practice not only points to the strategic agency of glocal voices of blogs in revolutionising the concept of political participation through inclusion, dialogue and coalitions; together with the creative use of online platforms and social media, they re-construct the very notion of the public sphere. The diversified blogging action shows us that through the process of glocality, the discursive practice of women transcends spaces and produces alternative knowledge. Feminist blogging practices of the ten activists in my study bring alternative and intersectional perspectives into this dialogue from the MENA region, an area that has been going through a multitude of diverse challenges and political processes excluding these voices. They have put emphasis on individual voice behind each cause associated with their blogging practice. This facilitated empowerment and a strong motivation to serve the community. This integrated and dialogical understanding of political participation, together with the creative use of blogs and social networking sites were paramount in the transnational feminist struggle (Annex V- Mind Map).

The glocality of feminist blogging reconstructs political participation pointing to a new generation of feminist sisterhood and solidarity, what the literature calls a fourth wave of feminism (Abou Habib, 2020a; Salem, 2019). These critical standpoints reveal problems and raise questions that would otherwise not be asked. Transnational feminist movements do the difficult work of cross-coalition-building to place local voices from the protesting

streets at the forefront of global political platforms. Feminist blogging, we have seen in many ways, bypasses the complex politics in the MENA region to challenge the corruption of multiple oppressive systems. It expands the notion of political engagement to encompass diverse forms of political action that fall outside the traditional confines of political party structures. It emerges as a space within a space. In addition, in my glocality Schema (Figure 5.1), I note that via feminist blogging these situated voices inform global audiences about human rights and seek to mobilise collective action. They transcend confining local spaces and patriarchal, authoritative, neo-colonial militaristic politics through the glocality of the blogosphere. The political becomes more closely linked to the personal, blurring the lines between public and private, outer and inner, micro and macro levels and finally the local and global.

Feminist constructions of political participation help us overcome mainstream approaches in the literature that focus in the context of liberal and neoliberal democratic processes from the Global North. The findings of this research illustrate that an integrated feminist analysis is necessary in order to provide a dialogical conceptualisation of political participation that places situated voices and agency of those silenced at the centre. What is at the heart of this research is the glocal power of feminist blogging for transnational feminist activism. It addresses the challenge of translating across cultures and histories the meaning of women's engagement in the movement. This is where this study takes its strength as it tackles the ways in which solidarity could be built in a respectful manner towards cultural differences (Harcourt, 2014). As a form of political participation, women activists strategically blogged not only to claim their rights and exercise glocal pressure, but also to hold space for other voices to be expressed and amplified. These were the means and the methods of protest employed, to challenge oppressive and unjust systems.

With this discussion, I attempted to contribute to the debate on the meaning of solidarity from non-Western traditions as it is useful in our understanding of social and political activism as a whole. The feminist blogosphere, as part of glocal counterpublics, provided understandings of the squares and public spaces that women occupied. Their blogs provided a reconstruction of the socio-political context, the history, and the culture; all significant in the fight for political participation. The strategic local and global coalitions of feminist blogging during the 2011 Arab uprisings were part of transnational feminisms in their effort to bring their "place-based needs" to the centre of public dialogue. Transnational feminisms were indeed part of the events and supported the possibilities for women to protest, negotiate and challenge the status quo, as well as to share knowledge

and strategies to fight sexual violence, censorship and other human rights violations. Their participatory projects were part of transnational movements and protests for freedom of speech, assembly and violence-free society, in squares, streets and other dark places. Together with shared anger, resistance and courage, they produce feminist knowledge to build strategies for change.

In all, when it comes to the structural transformation of the political public sphere, the academic, social and political discussions have no closure. And, this is important because as we have seen from the findings of this research, the dialogue must remain open both at the theoretical and the applied levels. One question that remains open according to Habermas⁷³ is: “How do we ensure that the digital public spheres do not work at the expense of a shared and discursively filtered political process of opinion and action?” (Czington, et al., 2020)

As far as I can assess the realities emerging from the ten-year developments explored in this thesis, transnational feminisms have shown us some important relational ways to solve this problem with digital communication, strategically transforming political action and upscaling the political public sphere. Transnational feminist solidarities from the MENA region have been striving all along to bring into the public dialogue issues of authoritarianism and neo-colonial powers that intersect with patriarchy and globalised capitalism (Abou-Habib, 2020b, 2020c; EuroMed 2020; Grami, 2018). I argue that the answer may be glocal as to acknowledge and bring into the dialogue the issues emerging from the power struggles of women and those marginalised. Habermas’ work may have provided a grounding for the creation and strengthening of supranational institutions and democratically-legitimatised transnational steering mechanisms based on the rule of law. In this way he envisioned a solution whereby human rights can be protected and globalised capitalism will be put under control (Habermas, 1996 [1992]; Winter, 2020). But again, is this enough in authoritarian environments and democratic regressions? Who makes the law? Who is the judge? And who can “discursively filter” the political processes?

⁷³ Amidst increased totalitarian tendencies and constantly rising social inequalities, the core of Habermas’ critical theory is its unwavering commitment to the ideal of communicative reason (Winter, 2020). Following his 90th birthday in 2019, Jurgen Habermas in a recent interview, he discussed his social theory in the context of the crises we are currently facing (Czington, et al., 2020). After the passing of almost three decades since the publication of the *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, Habermas acknowledges that digital communication brought profound changes in the evolution of the public sphere.

CONCLUSIONS: THE FUTURE OF FEMINIST BLOGGING AS POLITICAL PRACTICE

As feminists, we are part of a progressive, subversive movement, which organically implies always remaining vigilant of conservative forces. (Salwan Daher, 2012)

6.1 Reimagining pathways to political participation

In this concluding chapter I will highlight some of the major contributions this thesis makes both at a theory and applied level proposing a Schema for the analysis of women's blogging practices in the MENA region. While this thesis expands current literature in ways that differ from the white, Westernised interpretations and analyses there remain areas that are worth of investigation and for further research.

In a feminist forum in 2012, Paola Salwan Daher blogged that women, in order to be heard and taken seriously must remain vigilant and alert in the socio-political developments in their countries. In affirming that writing is a fight which they are not willing to give up, feminist bloggers were watchful and strategically sought to disrupt patriarchal forces outside the mainstream political sphere. Salwan Daher, like the other bloggers in this study, bring up the significance for feminist politics of drawing parallels with different socio-political contexts and the positionalities of women. This process as my thesis has shown, is framed as part of a subversive movement building transnational feminist solidarities. What I argue in this thesis transcends political institutions and state interests and expands the notion of political participation through mobilization of the collective women's power.

While Western political analyses focused on simplistic and pessimistic understandings of a diverse region, such as in mainstream British and American daily newspapers, women's blogging strategies instead revealed the complexity of the situations and a new imaginary of pathways to political participation that can lead to greater civic engagement and potentially transform politics. I used a feminist standpoint analysis – bringing different theorists in complementarity – to explain the ways in which feminist blogging during the 2011 Arab uprisings and revolutions was practiced by women activists as a form of political counter-hegemonic practice. In line with this thinking, the basic thesis of this study is that an integrated analysis of feminist blogging as a form of political participation in the digital era (Annex V- Mind Map) is necessary at the micro, meso and macro levels (voice, space and power). In short, an integrated analysis is best placed to reveal the critical

perspectives of marginalised groups that can strategically bring these three levels into dialogue.

The originality of this work lies in two levels. The first is its theoretical contribution to feminist standpoint theory, by revealing its untapped potential and by taking it a step further through an integrated framework of dialogic understanding of the local (micro) and global (macro) levels.⁷⁴ The second, is the study's socio-political and historical contribution to women's struggles in the MENA region. Specifically, I bring to the academic discussion a moment in 'Her-stories' (instead of History) in the MENA region. This supports the efforts of feminist scholars and practitioners who stress the importance of critical non-Western perspectives in public dialogue.

Although the scholarship in the fields of political communication, media and cultural studies is helpful in acknowledging the role of the Internet and the social media in revolutionising the way people communicate and mobilise political action, these have a number of limitations as was shown in Chapter One. Women's voices are still underrepresented on the Internet and in the blogosphere, just as they are in the field of science and technology. In Chapter Two, I brought together feminist standpoint theory and critical discourse analysis as part of an integrated theoretical, analytical and methodological framework. This theoretical approach helps me to document and discuss the experiences and voices of those excluded from the public sphere. It also offers a profound critical feminist analysis of the structural and institutional inequalities in many authoritarian and oppressive systems. Feminist standpoint theory and critical discourse analysis was also a successful approach to expose patriarchy, racism and misogyny as normalised in the respective countries and taken-for-granted as cultural relativism by Western politicians, analysts and media. I used Young's (2000) suggestions of inclusive political narrative to counteract the focus of communicative reason dominant in Habermasian understandings of the public sphere. I put emphasis on the political narrative of feminist bloggers to bring up the diversity of standpoints, especially in contexts of political oppression from the perspectives of those marginalised from the public discussion.

The concept of the public sphere – which has gone through different theoretical assessments since the 1960s – is a conceptual pillar that I have used to link the practice of

⁷⁴ In other words, feminist standpoint theory is at the forefront of understanding the evolution of feminism(s) and defining their future paths. Connecting feminist standpoint theory with practice, this study also contributed important insights into what might constitute the heart of feminism(s) in the future.

feminist blogging to political participation. I have demonstrated in Chapter Two the contemporary relevance of feminist standpoint theory that focuses on communicative thinking, rather than communicative reason (in Habermasian and Western terms) to understand the public sphere. I demonstrated the contemporary importance of the feminist standpoint in research addressing the lives of marginalised social groups due to the authoritarian tendencies prevailing in capitalist societies, which in turn exacerbate gender inequalities. Also, I demonstrated how Westernised, male centred understandings of the public sphere and political participation have limitations in acknowledging the realities of social groups that are marginalised from the public dialogue.

I employed Young's theory on inclusive political narrative to demonstrate the importance of factors such as: greeting and public address; affirmative rhetoric; narrative and situated knowledge for an integrated and feminist understanding of political participation. These are conditions that enable alternative forms of political action to expand the notion of political public sphere in the digital era. Specifically, through my analysis I bring in dialogue the concept of glocality, developed by Harcourt (2000), to understand the transcendence of these situated knowledges through local–global space(s) via blogging. Based on my findings, I fine-tune this concept to apply it to the feminist blogosphere, and propose a Schema (Figure 5.1) to visualise this as a form of participation within glocal counterpublics. I demonstrated that these discursive strategies (such as detailed reporting, amplifying marginalised voices, participation in online advocacy platforms and cross-posting) signify new directions and characteristics of today's transnational feminisms (Fraser, 2014; Harcourt, 2000). Thus, bringing feminist standpoint theorists⁷⁵ together in complementarity to analyse my data facilitated the production of alternative visions and knowledges that reveal critical perspectives of political participation. They strategically upscale the notion of the public sphere.

As Chapter Three, pointed out my critical discourse analysis focused on 269 blog posts written by ten female activists from Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, Tunisia, and Yemen. It covers the period between 2010 and 2013, when multiple civil and political uprisings in the Arab world followed the Tunisian revolution and the overthrow of dictator Ben Ali. This large sample allowed me to make a deeper comparative analysis and brought out the diversity. I was able to find commonalities, differences and make comparisons of the blogging practices, strategies and perspectives of women in the five countries and their emerging

⁷⁵ As part of my integrated framework and analysis.

political role in the MENA region. The methodological tools and templates I developed to facilitate the data collection, management and discourse analysis are based on the integrated feminist standpoint theoretical framework. Thus, these may provide a useful set of guidelines for other researchers who may choose to carry out an online-textual discourse analysis of political blogs in other oppressive contexts.

I identified and analysed the multiple discursive ways in which blogging as feminist practice (re)constructs and (re)conceptualises political participation despite the social, political, economic, cultural and legal constraints imposed on women in the case-study countries. Chapters Four and Five were structured in four key sections revealing the integrated and dialogical reconstruction of political participation from this analysis: situated knowledges (feminist standpoints), diversification of strategies in feminist blogs, the glocality as strategic potential, and the alternative power of feminist blogging. The structure I used for the presentation and discussion of the findings reveals/indicates respectively the interlinking voice (micro), space (meso/transcendence) and power (macro) elements expanding the notion of political participation (Annex V - Mind Map). Thus, using an integrated and complementary theoretical framework and analysis, I argue that the alternative visions in feminist blogging produced from the different standpoints (multiple subjectivities) reconstruct political participation in emancipatory ways that expand the notion of the public sphere.

Feminist blogging as political activism has a great input in the transnational feminist movements of the 21st century, an aspect worthy of further analysis in relation to social movement studies and theories. This study provides a snapshot of the dynamic and strategic engagement in glocal spaces (e.g., blogs and online advocacy platforms) from which transnational feminisms operated during such a crucial socio-political moment. Feminist blogging reveals the formal and informal ways in which gendered power relations define and inform everyday life. I also demonstrate the transnational possibilities of feminist blogging in producing feminist knowledges from new modes of political participation and online media.

New lessons emerge from this study for transnational feminisms contributing to the debates on inclusive and meaningful solidarity. For example, the mobilisation of blogging communities against oppression and violence, and for legislative change, justice, equality and dignity for all, are part of multiple calls to overthrow political economic and social systems that are patriarchal (Abou Habib, 2020a). The discursive practices employed by

women bloggers bring to the forefront key elements of digital-age transformations and future paths that can be diverse, inclusive, political and powerful. Feminist blogging during 2011 Arab revolutions played an I important role in connecting with local movements building transnational solidarity and sisterhood, which continues to expand and develop into instrumental power. In this process from margin to alternative power – as illustrated in the Schema (Figure 5.1) – the production of feminist knowledge constitutes resistance and power.

At the trajectory of new evolutionary stages in contemporary social movements, the conversations taking place in the blogs reveal newly formed communities that protest and promote diversity and social justice. Even more importantly they also offer political acknowledgement and public greeting to women. This highlighted the value of communicative democracy through intersubjective and dialogical participation. I maintain that it is these glocal voices that make the public sphere more inclusive, by producing situated knowledges with their affirmative narratives. The diversity of strategies and feminist standpoints revealed from the discourse action of feminist blogging in this research, reveal four key characteristics of constantly evolving feminisms of the 21st century: a) mediation with internet communication, b) intersectionality and inclusivity, c) democratic, organised political activism, and d) engagement in glocal processes that forge/organise cross-movement synergies and mobilise to exercise pressure. Thus, it would be accurate to understand this dynamic engagement as new waves or modes in feminist politics of the 21st century.

Feminist constructions of political participation also help us overcome the mainstream approaches in the literature that focus on liberal and neoliberal democratic processes from the global North. The findings of this research illustrate a dialogical conceptualisation of political participation that places situated voices and agency of those silenced at the centre. In this regard, although the Internet, new media technologies and social media played a crucial role, this study shows that the true power lies in the revolutionary voices behind these tools. Digital tools do not hold the exclusive power to topple authoritarian regimes, rather, the power lies in the voices behind them.

More specifically, the integrated analysis of this study reveals that the act of feminist blogging can be part of a dynamic citizenship practice engaging in multiple, glocal and interconnected counterpublics. The element of glocality allows voices from the margin to be visible and destabilise power through the creation of online communities that are

inclusive and intersectional. Women's glocal engagement in the feminist blogosphere fills a transnational gap, by bringing local realities and global perspectives together. Engaging in online platforms such as Global Voices, Medium, and Majal, women's experiences and voices are brought from the margin, exile and diaspora to the centre, offering critical political analyses. This interactive engagement in the ecosystem of online platforms fills a cultural and political gap, transcending local boundaries and oppressive systems. The way that local, grassroots standpoints thus reach out to global audiences are illustrated in my Schema (Figure 5.1) through the dialogic and strategic process of glocality.

In other words, this Schema (Figure 5.1) demonstrates a dynamic and strategic process in which feminist blogging can organise from grassroots political action (micro level), engage in online advocacy platforms (meso level), to global mobilisation and transnational coalition-building (macro level). This Schema brings out the 'glocality' of women's blogging narratives and actions; from exile and margin, to interwoven transnational public spheres, in the struggle for social change, human rights and democracy. This contribution may constitute a model for future analysis of blogs for political participation.

Moreover, the findings of this study offer new levels of understanding about the ways in which feminist blogging provides the space through which transnational coalition-building shapes 21st century feminist solidarities. This sisterhood in the making is accessible to women from different geographical and political spectrums and provides them with the opportunity to engage in feminist dialogue. Thus, transnational feminisms can be forged through the feminist blogosphere in the MENA region, as Arab women's stories often remain excluded from international attention.

In addition to filling the gaps in the literature, this study also highlights the potential of blogs/blogging to build social/feminist movements locally and transnationally, by mobilising and organising collective action and within feminism. These 'glocal' voices through their blogging practice, they interrogate power relations of subjection and objectification of women. Through the narratives of women in their blogging practice emerges an insight into extreme forms of violence and torture (sexual violence, rape, virginity tests, torture and unlawful detention of activists) that have gone unnoticed by Western politics and media and dismissed by their governments during and in the post-2011 revolutions period with no reparation. These voices remain vigilant and alert of the political processes, they critically interpret them and strategically transnationalise the public sphere for greater pressure beyond national borders. Their role in building coalitions

across movements for mobilisation against human rights violations reveals the collective power of transnational feminist solidarities in the making.

Finally, this study also contributes to women's studies and political sociology looking at citizenship and political participation in the digital age. In doing so, I have demonstrated opportunities, constraints, and new forms of challenging power structures, especially in the context of an ever-shrinking human rights environment and the current resurgence of authoritarianism in a number of countries.

6.2 Constraints and limitations

There are limiting factors in this research, as in any research project. The fact that I do not have knowledge of the Arab language was perhaps the most important limitation, which was partly mitigated by the fact that the scope of this research was on the transnational aspects of feminist blogging. In this regard, as previously stated, I chose to analyse blog posts written or translated in English, and I maintained communication with Arab-speaking feminist activists who would be able to support me with background or contextual information when needed.

Discourse analysis is a time-consuming process and can require years of data collection, management, and analysis. As a doctoral candidate, I had to structure the project so that it could be completed within the available time. I had been studying and had an active role in feminist politics in the MENA region prior to beginning this thesis; Fifteen years of experience in feminist research, social movements and civil society advocacy provided me with the knowledge on where to focus my study.

This thesis upholds the potential for integrating more active feminist post-colonial perspectives in order to further analyse how these feminist bloggers understand their positionality vis-à-vis feminists in the West. There are several occasions where the issue comes up in this thesis, as for instance the sections on “the Western-centric lens of approaching Arab Middle Eastern women” (p. 73), “Challenging local and Western media” (p. 120) and “Glocal voices” (p. 156).

From a theoretical point of view, future analysis could also benefit from taking into account the contributions of social movement studies and theories. For example, to highlight the linkages between social media use by feminist movements and the broader mediascape. With regards to social media and specific challenges and opportunities in the

use of blogging, the results can be further located within current complex communicative arenas. Also, another theoretical bridge could focus on the construction of collective identities from social movement studies that may also provide further analytical insights for the development of feminist identities. Nevertheless, the scope of this study was to first carry out an in-depth analysis and to identify new concepts linking the feminist standpoint with discourse analysis and public sphere theories that would provide this integrated framework and the tools for a dialogic understanding of political participation. Of course, these aspects open up many theoretical directions that merit further scholarly investigation and analysis.

6.3 Emerging topics for future research

This study offers new knowledge on feminist blogging as an emerging citizenship practice of women during the 2011 Arab revolutions, reconstructing political action and expanding the notion of the public sphere. This study also raises new areas that are worthy of future academic enquiry and investigation.

Firstly, although there is a growing body of feminist research from the fields of media, communication and culture scholars, scholarship looking at the social and political aspects of blogging is limited. I am concerned about the scarcity of feminist research on blogging as a form of political participation. Considering the growth of the feminist blogosphere, looking at the alternative forms of engagement of women with feminist politics is imperative. This study highlights the need for feminist scholars to engage in this type of research.

Secondly, this study focuses on Arab feminist bloggers and their strategies to engage with global audiences to mobilise solidarity and political pressure. This approach facilitated diversity and brought out the glocal and transnational landscape of today's Internet-enabled politics and the role of social media. Future research could potentially focus on analysing blogs published in Arabic. This could facilitate the production of knowledge that could aid in understanding and comparing the discursive strategies of blogging for local or regional (Arab) outreach to influence political agendas. Furthermore, within these processes, the political role of women from the diaspora and exile remains an important area that deserves further research.

Third, while this thesis focused on ten blogs facilitated by Arab women activists and journalists in five countries in the MENA region, future research could focus on feminist

blogs from additional countries in the region and beyond, in order to enhance transnational perspectives. The use of a comparative perspective could also be beneficial in further research. Future feminist research carrying out interviews with bloggers would be imperative to reflect on: a) what this moment of feminist blogosphere means, b) their perceptions of the social and political impact of their blogging practice after the 2011 uprisings, as well as, in view of the ten-year socio-political developments and crises in their countries. Conducting interviews with these bloggers would also shed more light on their social biographies and how these relate to their discursive practices. In this regard, future research should explore the new and emerging relationships between transnational feminisms, new modes of online participation and digital media.

Fourthly, while I have explored the discursive practices and conversational narratives of (English-speaking) Arab and international audiences engaging with blogs as readers/commenters, future research could highlight additional aspects including the analysis of Arab-speaking audiences. In addition, the interactivity and conversational narrative happening among readers and bloggers deserves further analysis and study.

Fifthly, although the purpose was not a visual semiotic analysis, in Chapter Four I presented some key examples, whereby the visuals enhanced the textual discourses of the bloggers. In other words, I approached visuals as part of the discourse, and demonstrated how the pictures were used to support and strengthen the words of the women. In this regard, the powerful images and audio-visuals incorporated by women in their blog texts provided us with an uncensored understanding of the unlawful attacks and violence exercised by the regimes towards human rights defenders and especially bloggers. Additionally, it was a strategy that served as: a) collection of evidence for such crimes, b) radical acts of creating memory about what happened during the events, and consequently as c) acts of resistance. My research is a starting point in revealing these discursive strategies, but then the analysis of the visual discourses/stories, as well as the relationship between textual and visual discourses in the blogging practices of women is an area that is worthy of further research.

Sixthly, with this thesis I demonstrated the influence of feminist blogging in amplifying marginalised voices expressed through blogs and participation in ecosystems of online activist platforms. Still, questions around the long-term impact of feminist blogging as citizenship practice, are important yet impossible to answer. A research project such as this cannot, and is not meant to, determine a simple causal relationship between feminist

blogging and social change. This thesis revealed key elements comprising the alternative power of feminist blogging: resistance, community-building, transnational solidarity, and coalition-building. However, women's engagement with politics and online media is extremely complex. Thus, further research is needed on the ways in which global and glocal power is reinforced, negotiated, challenged, and circulated through online political participation using blogs and other new media.

Finally, feminist blogging can be conceptualised as archives of feminism, documenting events and creating memory. The production of feminist knowledge seems to be a longstanding practice of feminist activism, but in line with this study, documenting history is perceived as creation of memory, and memory can potentially destabilise power. This thesis captures a historical moment in the lives of women human rights defenders that raises the following questions: What might be the societal impact of their political activism as co-creators of history? How so we ensure the acknowledgement of these political acts as 'her-stories'? How do we ensure the survival of the knowledges produced by feminist bloggers in the digital age? These questions are starting points for interdisciplinary future research that should seek deeper analysis on how feminist blogging contributes in co-creating, re-writing, and archiving history in the 21st century. I join the calls in the literature for exploring blogs as archives of women's 'her-stories' and approach feminist activists as historiographers (Gabriel, 2016, Keller, 2013, 2017). And I also emphasise the responsibility feminist scholars from the social and political sciences have in order to ensure that these valuable narratives inform academic and socio-political interventions and policymaking.

6.4 Epilogue

With this study, my own location, which I reflect in Chapter Three, is also in dialogue with these findings. Taking stock of my fifteen years of feminist activism and analysis in Cyprus, and numerous discussions with women in the Euro-Mediterranean and the MENA regions-from different ideological and social backgrounds-gave me the opportunity for personal and professional development that informed this thesis. Living in Cyprus, a country of protracted inter-ethnic conflict, I have also experienced and recognised the individual and collective struggles for equality and peace in relation to fellow activists and bloggers from the MENA. Fighting highly patriarchal and militaristic systems entails risks and trauma for ourselves and our families. I do not claim to have the same experiences as these women, but I point out that our social positionings and feminist standpoints are part

of the situated knowledges that can shape a new politics for social change and justice as these emerge from today's cross-movement solidarity. This transnational sisterhood is what I argue can have instrumental power for collective mobilisation through global spaces. A new politics that is not merely a result of the digital era but the glocal voices behind this emerging citizenship practice of feminist blogging.

As we approach the ten-year anniversary of the so called 'Arab Spring', I reflect on the tremendous socio-political role of women activists blogging amidst additional waves of protests, as well as the social, economic, and political crises that followed in the years after the 2011 Arab uprisings and revolutions. For many of the feminist voices featured in this study, the 2011 Arab uprisings reflected individual and collective dreams that never materialised. Specifically, Syria and Yemen, countries that are torn apart by conflict, war and constitute the largest humanitarian crises in the world. In the case of Lebanon, a new revolutionary wave emerged in October 2019 against sectarianism, corruption and exploitation by the political class responsible for the economic bankruptcy of the country⁷⁶. As I write this, women activists and bloggers in Lebanon continue to radically claim public spaces, amidst a global pandemic (COVID-19), an economic and humanitarian crisis caused by an unrepresented explosion in August 2020 that left 300,000 Lebanese displaced in their own country. On the whole, this study contributes to the acknowledgement of the social, political and historical role of feminist activists and bloggers in the MENA region and beyond. Not only they interpret but they also change the world.

⁷⁶ Lebanese feminist activists and bloggers have been critical of the country's political class; their corruption has contributed to economic, political, racial, gender, and class inequalities.

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Annexes

Annex I – Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948)⁷⁷

Adopted and proclaimed by General Assembly resolution 217 A (III) of 10 December 1948.

Preamble

Whereas recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world,

Whereas disregard and contempt for human rights have resulted in barbarous acts which have outraged the conscience of mankind, and the advent of a world in which human beings shall enjoy freedom of speech and belief and freedom from fear and want has been proclaimed as the highest aspiration of the common people,

Whereas it is essential, if man is not to be compelled to have recourse, as a last resort, to rebellion against tyranny and oppression, that human rights should be protected by the rule of law,

Whereas it is essential to promote the development of friendly relations between nations,

Whereas the peoples of the United Nations have in the Charter reaffirmed their faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person and in the equal rights of men and women and have determined to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom,

Whereas Member States have pledged themselves to achieve, in co-operation with the United Nations, the promotion of universal respect for and observance of human rights and fundamental freedoms,

Whereas a common understanding of these rights and freedoms is of the greatest importance for the full realization of this pledge,

Now, Therefore THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY proclaims THIS UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS as a common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations, to the end that every individual and every organ of society, keeping this Declaration constantly in mind, shall strive by teaching and education to promote respect for these rights and freedoms and by progressive measures, national and international, to secure their universal and effective recognition and observance, both among the peoples of Member States themselves and among the peoples of territories under their jurisdiction.

⁷⁷ UN General Assembly. 1948. *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, 217 A (III). [Online] available at [un.org: https://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/](https://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/) [accessed 23 July 2020]

Article 1.

All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.

Article 2.

Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status. Furthermore, no distinction shall be made on the basis of the political, jurisdictional or international status of the country or territory to which a person belongs, whether it be independent, trust, non-self-governing or under any other limitation of sovereignty.

Article 3.

Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person.

Article 4.

No one shall be held in slavery or servitude; slavery and the slave trade shall be prohibited in all their forms.

Article 5.

No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

Article 6.

Everyone has the right to recognition everywhere as a person before the law.

Article 7.

All are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to equal protection of the law. All are entitled to equal protection against any discrimination in violation of this Declaration and against any incitement to such discrimination.

Article 8.

Everyone has the right to an effective remedy by the competent national tribunals for acts violating the fundamental rights granted him by the constitution or by law.

Article 9.

No one shall be subjected to arbitrary arrest, detention or exile.

Article 10.

Everyone is entitled in full equality to a fair and public hearing by an independent and impartial tribunal, in the determination of his rights and obligations and of any criminal charge against him.

Article 11.

(1) Everyone charged with a penal offence has the right to be presumed innocent until proved guilty according to law in a public trial at which he has had all the guarantees necessary for his defence.

(2) No one shall be held guilty of any penal offence on account of any act or omission which did not constitute a penal offence, under national or international law, at the time when it was committed. Nor shall a heavier penalty be imposed than the one that was applicable at the time the penal offence was committed.

Article 12.

No one shall be subjected to arbitrary interference with his privacy, family, home or correspondence, nor to attacks upon his honour and reputation. Everyone has the right to the protection of the law against such interference or attacks.

Article 13.

(1) Everyone has the right to freedom of movement and residence within the borders of each state.

(2) Everyone has the right to leave any country, including his own, and to return to his country.

Article 14.

(1) Everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution.

(2) This right may not be invoked in the case of prosecutions genuinely arising from non-political crimes or from acts contrary to the purposes and principles of the United Nations.

Article 15.

(1) Everyone has the right to a nationality.

(2) No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his nationality nor denied the right to change his nationality.

Article 16.

(1) Men and women of full age, without any limitation due to race, nationality or religion, have the right to marry and to found a family. They are entitled to equal rights as to marriage, during marriage and at its dissolution.

(2) Marriage shall be entered into only with the free and full consent of the intending spouses.

(3) The family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the State.

Article 17.

(1) Everyone has the right to own property alone as well as in association with others.

(2) No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his property.

Article 18.

Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.

Article 19.

Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.

Article 20.

(1) Everyone has the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association.

(2) No one may be compelled to belong to an association.

Article 21.

(1) Everyone has the right to take part in the government of his country, directly or through freely chosen representatives.

(2) Everyone has the right of equal access to public service in his country.

(3) The will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government; this will shall be expressed in periodic and genuine elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret vote or by equivalent free voting procedures.

Article 22.

Everyone, as a member of society, has the right to social security and is entitled to realization, through national effort and international co-operation and in accordance with the organization and resources of each State, of the economic, social and cultural rights indispensable for his dignity and the free development of his personality.

Article 23.

(1) Everyone has the right to work, to free choice of employment, to just and favourable conditions of work and to protection against unemployment.

(2) Everyone, without any discrimination, has the right to equal pay for equal work.

(3) Everyone who works has the right to just and favourable remuneration ensuring for himself and his family an existence worthy of human dignity, and supplemented, if necessary, by other means of social protection.

(4) Everyone has the right to form and to join trade unions for the protection of his interests.

Article 24.

Everyone has the right to rest and leisure, including reasonable limitation of working hours and periodic holidays with pay.

Article 25.

(1) Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control.

(2) Motherhood and childhood are entitled to special care and assistance. All children, whether born in or out of wedlock, shall enjoy the same social protection.

Article 26.

(1) Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit.

(2) Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.

(3) Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children.

Article 27.

(1) Everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits.

(2) Everyone has the right to the protection of the moral and material interests resulting from any scientific, literary or artistic production of which he is the author.

Article 28.

Everyone is entitled to a social and international order in which the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration can be fully realized.

Article 29.

- (1) Everyone has duties to the community in which alone the free and full development of his personality is possible.
- (2) In the exercise of his rights and freedoms, everyone shall be subject only to such limitations as are determined by law solely for the purpose of securing due recognition and respect for the rights and freedoms of others and of meeting the just requirements of morality, public order and the general welfare in a democratic society.
- (3) These rights and freedoms may in no case be exercised contrary to the purposes and principles of the United Nations.

Article 30.

Nothing in this Declaration may be interpreted as implying for any State, group or person any right to engage in any activity or to perform any act aimed at the destruction of any of the rights and freedoms set forth herein.

Annex II- Note-taking Template for the Analysis of Blogs

- 1. Blog name and URL:**
- 2. Author's name:**
Multiple authors:
- 3. Period/ date of data collection:**
- 4. Total page views (on last date of data collection) – if applicable:**
- 5. Language of blogging: EN, FR, AR, Other...**
- 6. Blog's structure structural elements:**
 - a. Search engine availability**
 - b. Posts are organised in**
 - chronological order (journal style)**
 - thematically / thematic categories (tags)**
 - both**
 - c. Audio-visual elements: Pictures/ videos etc.**
 - d. Other:**
- 7. Posts-sampling from**
 - a. Keyword – search engine (with word-stems)**
 - b. Thematic tags and random selection (e.g. include the first 10 posts when a large number of posts appears for a specific theme related to the research question)**
 - c. Number of posts saved:**
- 8. Interactivity:**
 - a. Trend for dialogue- comments feature enabled**
 - b. Interactivity features/ structural interactivity:**
 - 1. Links to other social media:**
 - FB**
 - Twitter**
 - G+**
 - B**
 - Youtube**
 - Medium**
 - Other:**
 - c. Email- mailing list (possibilities for registrations)**

d. **Electronic banners/ links to other sites:**

9. **Organisation/ Diversification:**

a. **methods of spreading opinions/messages/ stories:**

b. **methods of organising actions for human rights / resistance (e.g. through reference to other blogs, online petitions, strikes, protests)**

c. **any signs/ proofs/ possibilities of influence and impact?**

10. **Comments/ emerging themes:**

a. **Emerging themes related to the research questions:**

Reflections on Table 2. Thematic categories used for the selection of blog posts/journal entries (notes and adjustments according to data)

Thematic categories	Associated concepts	Concepts that emerged (in blue)
Political participation	Citizenship, citizen, democratic values, elections, political parties, human rights action, online activism, protest, justice, access, freedom of speech/ opinion expressed, network(ing), coalition, mobilisation, demonstration, petition, campaign, solidarity, civil society, NGOs.	
Feminism and public sphere	Gender equality, womanhood, LGBTQI, patriarchy, margin, discrimination, exclusion.	
Socio-political transitions/transformations (processes and relationship)	Regime, authoritarian, democracy, conflict, war, violence, detention, harassment, travel bans/ restricted movement, corruption,	

with power/ authority)	discriminatory laws, elections, constitution.	
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b. Other notes for the analysis (memos to be added to NVivo12):

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Annex III- Table for the identification of blogs⁷⁸

Ref	Blog link	Country	Author's details	Comments	Inc. in Sample? X/√
1.	abirghattas.com	Lebanon	<p>Abir Ghattas</p> <p>Activist, blogger, digital communications director, outreach strategist at <u>Raseef22</u> (PAN Arab independent media platform) and <u>Majal</u> (a network of digital platforms on securing freedom of expression and access to information).</p>	<p>Blog focus: Abir's work in media and <u>writings</u> focuses on women's rights, freedom of speech and digital security. Based in Berlin.</p> <p>Language: EN, AR</p> <p>Methodological note: the blog closed and redirects the reader to other platforms where you can read her posts (Raseef22, Majal, medium). Type of organising!</p> <p>Medium: an online publishing platform. The platform is an example of social journalism, having a hybrid collection of amateur and professional people and publications, or exclusive blogs or publishers. Medium is regularly regarded as a blog host. One is required to publish and write articles, but free access is provided to articles written by registered accounts.</p>	√

⁷⁸ Adapted from Snee (2010, p. 3).

2.	afrahnasser.blogspot.com	Yemen	Afrah Nasser Feminist writer Writes in exile from Sweden.	Blog focus: Democracy, politics, exposing corruption. Language: EN	✓
3.	No personal blog identified.	Egypt	Azza Soliman Lawyer, women's rights activist	Focus: Violence against women, justice, banned from travelling, facing assets freeze by the regime. Language: EN, AR Informal phone interview conducted we discussed the current challenges and the role of feminist blogging in amplifying demands.	x
4.	No blog link identified. Publications / blog posts in news website.	Egypt	Heba Afify Journalist blogger No personal blog/ she writes for <u>Mada Masr</u> Cairo-based news website.	Focus: 2012 revolution, freedom of expression, front-line reporting, struggles for democracy. Language: EN	x
5.	atunisiangirl.blogspot.com/	Tunisia	Lina Ben Mhenni Tunisian Internet activist, blogger and assistant lecturer in linguistics at Tunis University. Awarded. Civil and political rights. Women's rights and gender equality (over 10 years of experience).	Focus: Censorship, Ben Ali regime, posting photos and video of protests throughout Tunisia, government accountability. Language: AR, FR, EN	✓
6.	www.monaeltahawy.com	Egypt/ New York	Mona Eltahawy Journalist, writer, commentator	Focus: articles, essays and op-eds for publications worldwide. Egypt, Islamic world,	✓

			Human rights networks identified her also as blogger. Online resources, refer to her as a feminist writer and blogging	women's issues, Muslim political and social affairs. Provides an international aspect in her criticism to the West. Language: EN	
7.	http://ma3t.blogspot.com and https://twitter.com/monasosh	Egypt	Mona Seif Human rights activist (participation in dissident movements during and after the 2011 Egyptian revolution, creative use of social media in campaigns.)	Focus: Revolution, Egypt, campaigning, military trials, civilian protesters. Language: AR (mainly) and EN (blog)	✓
8.	nazra.org/en	Egypt	Mozn Hassan and Nazra for Feminist Studies Founder of “Nazra for feminist studies”- NGO focusing on research and training based in Cairo. Approached as a collaborative blog: written by a group of feminist women.	Focus: Building movements, Egyptian feminist movement, research training. Language: EN, AR Some posts are authored by Mozn Hassan and some as a collective.	✓
9.	http://nonie-darwish.blogspot.com	Egypt	Nawla Darwish Feminist activist (pioneer) Founder of new Women Foundation	Blog is closed. Was this a result of the government's acts against activists? Initiate contact. Language: EN, FR and AR.	X
10.	http://razanghazzawi.org/	Syria/ Palestine	Razan Ghazzawi blogger, campaigner and activist She was called "iconic blogger and leading activist" by The Telegraph.	Focus: Syrian Civil War, activists' arrests, violations of human rights, Bashar al-Assad government. Language: EN	✓
11.	marcellita.com	Syria	Marcell Shehwaro Syrian blogger and	In 2015, “Dispatches from Syria” won a 2015 Online Journalism Award in the category of	✓

			activist. Describes her life in Aleppo- Syria's armed conflict, and in eventual exile outside of Syria.	Online Commentary. Language: AR and EN	
12.	sherriecoals.blogspot.com	Syria	Sherry Al-Hayek Al-Hayek is an activist whose blog has raised international awareness about citizen journalists imprisoned in Syria.	Language: AR (mainly) and EN	✓
13.	Myrrhandmind.tumblr.com	Lebanon	Paola Salwan Daher Feminist activist, writer, blogger from Lebanon living in Geneva.	Language: English Focus: global advocacy, sexual and reproductive rights, feminist solidarity and coalitions, the role of diaspora, Marxism feminism.	✓

Annex IV- Data Collection Record – Blog Posts

	Blogger / Blog Name	Post links	Post Title	Post date	Comments
1.	Abir Ghattas [www.abirghattas.com and https://medium.com/@abirghattas]	https://medium.com/@abirghattas/gaza-font-every-letter-hides-a-story-289afd031b40	Gaza Font: Every Letter Hides a Story	21-02-2015	Sharing grassroots initiatives and hidden stories.
2.	Abir Ghattas	https://medium.com/@abirghattas/the-lebanese-parliament-passed-a-law-that-put-women-at-further-risk-c945a1c46ac0	The Lebanese Parliament Passed a Law that Put Women at Further Risk	01-04-2014	Marital rape; Discriminatory laws.
3.	Abir Ghattas	https://medium.com/@abirghattas/the-day-i-left-lebanon-3f557ad9de7e	The Day I left Lebanon	27-12-2013	Inner voice; positionality; exile and diaspora perspective.
4.	Abir Ghattas	https://medium.com/@abirghattas/the-internet-in-lebanon-absolute-power-corrupts-absolutely-6546bea67d90	The Internet in Lebanon; Absolute Power Corrupts Absolutely	11-06-2013	Internet and political corruption.
5.	Abir Ghattas	https://medium.com/@abirghattas/egypts-protests-and-over-250-million-protests-worldwide-visualized-by-john-beieler-Abir-Ghattas-7042d050471	Egypt's Protests and Over 250 million protests worldwide visualized by John Beielser	27-08-2013	
6.	Abir Ghattas	https://medium.com/@abirghattas/e-corruption-soon-blogs-might-be-blocked-in-lebanon-32252766fb3a	E-Corruption, Soon Blogs Might Be Blocked in Lebanon	23-07-2013	Blogs, censorship and corruption.

7.	Abir Ghattas	https://medium.com/@abirghattas/the-street-are-ours-the-ministry-of-justice-protest-31f73ad00983	The Street Are Ours—The Ministry of Justice Protest	01-07-2013	Blogging about protests and reclaiming public spaces.
8.	Abir Ghattas	https://raseef22.com/en/our-team/	Inspired by the Arab Spring	Website information	Aspect of blogging and cross-posting in global, independent media platforms. Excerpt from website: “At the intersection of community, identity, democracy, and social justice, Raseef22 is an independent media platform, presenting news and views relevant to the Arab world. Inspired by the "Arab Spring", Raseef22 fills a cultural gap in the Arabic-language media landscape, acknowledging both local values and global perspectives.” Glocal and interwoven public spheres/counterpublics.
9.	Abir Ghattas	https://majal.org/about-us	“Local action became global” “Remote team that’s pretty close” “Amplifying underrepresented voices”	Website information	Aspect of gocality of blogging practices and diverse discursive strategies employed; transnationalising the blogosphere; blogging and making use of ecosystem of online platforms.
10.	Afra Nasser [http://afrahnasser.blogspot.com/]	http://afrahnasser.blogspot.com/2019/01/a-journalist-or-activist.html	A journalist or an activist?	09-01-2019	Secondary data. Raising the issue of the dismissal of the role/value of female reporters and being questioned for being both activists & journalists, whilst this never happens towards male reporters. This shows that the political commentary and

					agency of feminist bloggers and journalists is side-lined in the political public sphere. Cross-posting in Arabic.
11.	Afra Nasser	http://afrahnasser.blogspot.com/2018/03/in-yemen-women-bear-brunt-of-merciless.html	In Yemen, women bear the brunt of a merciless war	09-03-2018	Institutionalised gender discrimination and war.
12.	Afra Nasser	http://afrahnasser.blogspot.com/2018/11/light-at-end-of-tunnel.html	Light at the end of the tunnel?	02-11-2018	Secondary data. Yemeni politics.
13.	Afra Nasser	http://afrahnasser.blogspot.com/2016/08/yemen-image-politics-weapon-qat-misogyny.html	Yemen & Image Politics: Weapon, Qat & Misogyny	25-08-2016	Sexism in the media. Powerful pictures.
14.	Afra Nasser	http://afrahnasser.blogspot.com/2016/05/for-lasting-peace-in-yemen-bring-women.html	For lasting peace in Yemen, bring women to the table by Rasha Jarhum (LSE)	15-05-2016	Example of highlighting and posting articles of other women: http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/mec/2016/05/13/for-lasting-peace-in-yemen-bring-women-to-the-table/
15.	Afra Nasser	http://afrahnasser.blogspot.com/2016/04/co-speaking-with-nawal-el-saadawi.html	Co-Speaking with Nawal El Saadawi	18-04-2016	Feminist role models. Empowering each other.
16.	Afra Nasser	http://afrahnasser.blogspot.com/2016/11/caught-on-video-like-asking-if-youll.html	Caught on video: 'Like asking if you'll stop beating your wife', Saudi ambassador dodges Yemen cluster bomb question	04-11-2016	Naming and shaming.
17.	Afra Nasser	http://afrahnasser.blogspot.com/2016/01/arab-spring-generation.html	Arab Spring Generation	26-01-2016	Featured post. Cross-blogging/ cross-posting. Reflecting on genealogies of the social movement.
18.	Afra Nasser	http://afrahnasser.blogspot.com/2015/06/notes-low-female-political.html	Notes: Low Female Political Participation in Geneva's Peace Talks	15-06-2015	Using diverse tools (Twitter) she spreads the word about low female political participation in peace talks.

					Diversification of sharing information and facts. Women, peace and security. Glocality of blogging.
19.	Afrah Nasser	http://afrahnasser.blogspot.com/2015/03/fail-better-yemeni-women.html	Fail Better, Yemeni Women!	13-03-2015	Gender gap –women absent from political debates and peace talks. Destabilizing power. Unknown aspects of the Yemeni feminist movement.
20.	Afrah Nasser	http://afrahnasser.blogspot.com/2014/10/domestic-violence-yemeni-womens-silent.html	Domestic Violence: Yemeni Women's Silent Killer	12-10-2014	
21.	Afrah Nasser	http://afrahnasser.blogspot.com/2014/12/after-being-threatened-to-be-stripped.html	After being threatened to be stripped off by Al Houthi men, Yemeni Female College Student Speaks Out	11-12-2014	Holding space for other women to speak out. Sexual violence in universities. Militarism.
22.	Afrah Nasser	http://afrahnasser.blogspot.com/2014/12/four-years-after-uprising-where-is.html	Four years after the uprising, where is Yemen going?	10-12-2014	Collaborative video with Global Voices assessing the post-revolution period. Enhanced analysis with regards to the social, political and historical context in Yemen coming from community voices on the ground.
23.	Afrah Nasser	http://afrahnasser.blogspot.com/2014/07/aliah-former-child-bride-shares-her.html	Aliah, a former child bride shares her tragic story	22-07-2014	Sharing stories, raising awareness.
24.	Afrah Nasser	http://afrahnasser.blogspot.com/2014/07/attaa-forgotten-revolutionary-dies.html	Atta'a, a forgotten revolutionary dies	21-07-2014	Taking stock of the revolution. Forgotten revolutionaries. Lack of transitional justice.
25.	Afrah Nasser	http://afrahnasser.blogspot.com/2014/06/world-bank-new-report-on-yemeni-womens.html	World Bank: New Report on Yemeni Women's Status	13-06-2014	Information and resource sharing.

26.	Afra Nasser	http://afrahnasser.blogspot.com/2014/04/yemeni-womens-rights-to-political.html	Yemeni Women's Rights to Political Participation at Risk	05-04-2014	
27.	Afra Nasser	http://afrahnasser.blogspot.com/2014/11/historical-day-for-womens-political.html	Historical day for women's political participation, but?	04-11-2014	Women ministers in Yemen.
28.	Afra Nasser	http://afrahnasser.blogspot.com/2014/09/yemeni-women-fight-for-greater.html	Yemeni women fight for greater representation	04-09-2014	
29.	Afra Nasser	http://afrahnasser.blogspot.com/2013/11/yemeni-law-considers-wives-as-private.html	Yemeni Law Considers Wives as Private Property of Their Husbands	27-11-2013	Awareness raising campaign; discriminatory laws.
30.	Afra Nasser	http://afrahnasser.blogspot.com/2013/11/adults-only-short-movie-on-child.html	Adults Only, Short Movie on Child Marriage in Yemen	18-11-2013	Awareness raising; Movie on child marriage.
31.	Afra Nasser	http://afrahnasser.blogspot.com/2013/11/violence-against-women-at-ndc-continues.html	Violence Against Women at NDC Continues	16-11-2013	Violence against women
32.	Afra Nasser	http://afrahnasser.blogspot.com/2013/09/yemen-end-child-marriage.html	Yemen: End Child Marriage	11-09-2013	Child marriage- initiatives
33.	Afra Nasser	http://afrahnasser.blogspot.com/2013/10/a-woman-is-half-wintess-in-yemen.html	A Woman is Half a Witness in Yemen	27-10-2013	Gender discrimination in Yemen. No recognition of women's rights.
34.	Afra Nasser	http://afrahnasser.blogspot.com/2013/10/quote-from-yemeni-feminist-writer-raufa.html	Quote from Yemeni Feminist Writer Raufa Hassan	21-10-2013	Knowledge sharing; quotes from feminist writers.
35.	Afra Nasser	http://afrahnasser.blogspot.com/2013/11/postcard-from-mexicos-bloggers-forum.html	Postcard from Mexico's Bloggers Forum	10-11-2013	Bloggers forum in Mexico. Encouraging transnational solidarity among bloggers (virtual bonds).
36.	Afra Nasser	http://afrahnasser.blogspot.com	Yemeni Women Rock	19-05-2013	Attribution to pioneer women-

		/2013/05/yemeni-women-rock.html			spreading the word (glocality, solidarity, virtual sisterhood).
37.	Afrah Nasser	http://afrahnasser.blogspot.com/2013/05/yemens-women-make-their-voices-heard.html	Yemen's women make their voices heard from revolution to constitution	18-05-2013	Reflections on political processes and women's efforts for legal and policy changes.
38.	Afrah Nasser	http://afrahnasser.blogspot.com/2013/04/yemen-youth-take-action.html	Yemen youth take action	30-04-2013	Youth perspectives on political activism.
39.	Afrah Nasser	http://afrahnasser.blogspot.com/2013/03/what-international-mainstream-media.html	What International Mainstream Media Doesn't Show about Women in Yemen	16-03-2013	Analysis and critique.
40.	Afrah Nasser	http://afrahnasser.blogspot.com/2013/04/three-women-voices-in-yemens-national.html	Three Women Voices in Yemen's National Dialogue Conference	01-04-2013	Feminist voices, quota, claiming public space, citizenship, negotiating power, coalition building.
41.	Afrah Nasser	http://afrahnasser.blogspot.com/2012/12/a-bleak-future-for-yemens-female-leaders.html	A Bleak Future for Yemen's Female Leaders	16-12-2012	Political participation of women; discussing quotas.
42.	Afrah Nasser	http://afrahnasser.blogspot.com/2012/09/yemens-freedom-fighter-amal-basha.html	Yemen's Freedom Fighter Amal Basha Continues to Struggle	12-09-2012	Sharing stories; raising awareness.
43.	Afrah Nasser	http://afrahnasser.blogspot.com/2012/10/the-first-ever-international-day-of.html	The First Ever International Day of THE GIRL Tomorrow	10-10-2012	International days as communication hooks.
44.	Afrah Nasser	http://afrahnasser.blogspot.com/2012/10/why-hana-and-i-support-uprising-of.html	Why Hana and I Support the Uprising of Women in the Arab World?	10-10-2012	Diaspora perspective; connecting with local voices.
45.	Afrah Nasser	http://afrahnasser.blogspot.com/2012/10/extraordinary-contribution-from-yemen.html	Extraordinary Contribution from Yemen to the #ArabWomenUprising	09-10-2012	Transnational solidarity movements; feminisms.
46.	Afrah Nasser	http://afrahnasser.blogspot.com/2012/08/is-there-law-to-prohibit-sexual.html	Is There a Law to Prohibit Sexual Harassment in Yemen?	30-08-2012	Discussing legal gaps on women's rights.

47.	Afra Nasser	http://afrahnasser.blogspot.com/2012/08/dr-elham-manea-fearless-yemeni-writer.html	Dr. Elham Manea: A Fearless Yemeni Writer	29-08-2012	Knowledge sharing; producing feminist knowledge; Empowering.
48.	Afra Nasser	http://afrahnasser.blogspot.com/2012/08/yemeni-photographer-boushra-almutawakel.html	Yemeni Photographer Boushra Almutawakel Challenging the Norm	19-08-2012	Diversity of voices and standpoints; Intersectional; Powerful images/visuals alongside the text.
49.	Afra Nasser	http://afrahnasser.blogspot.com/2012/08/one-year-after-women-took-to-streets-of.html	One year after the women took to the streets of Yemen	15-08-2012	Information sharing and resources; analysis and assessment of post-uprisings period.
50.	Afra Nasser	http://afrahnasser.blogspot.com/2012/07/yemeni-women-at-front-lines-for-change.html	Yemeni Women at the Front Lines for Change	28-07-2012	Cross-posting; women's role at the fore front; critical times for change; making use of online media platforms. [https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/culture/2012/03/yemeni-women-hope-from-pain.html]
51.	Afra Nasser	http://afrahnasser.blogspot.com/2011/07/rediscovering-my-inner-feminism-in.html	Rediscovering my Inner Feminism in Sweden	28-07-2011	On her personal journey of feminist identity; sexual harassment and exile.
52.	Afra Nasser	http://afrahnasser.blogspot.com/2012/08/in-face-of-political-storm-yemens-women.html	In the face of a political storm, Yemen's women stand firm	06-08-2012	Resistance. Persistence. Political action and the status of women.
53.	Afra Nasser	http://afrahnasser.blogspot.com/2012/07/what-did-i-do-in-political-week.html	What did I do in the political week - Almedalen	05-07-2012	Blogger influence! She was inspired by the Tunisian blog. Networking. Lobbying. Empowering each other.
54.	Afra Nasser	http://afrahnasser.blogspot.com/2011/08/yemeni-child-behind-revolutionary.html	Yemeni Child Behind a Revolutionary Portrait	11-08-2011	Media monitoring. Reflections and a critique about a photo of a Yemeni girl collecting plastic to help her family during the uprisings.
55.	Afra Nasser	http://afrahnasser.blogspot.com/2011/08/libyas-expected-soon-to-be-victory.html	Libya's (expected soon to be) Victory Energies Yemen's Uprising	25-08-2011	

56.	Afra Nasser	http://afrahnasser.blogspot.com/2011/08/yemen-celebrates-libyas-victory.html	#Yemen Celebrates #Libya's Victory	24-08-2011	Revolutionary momentum; creative use of hashtags and social media; glocality in practice; alternative knowledge/power.
57.	Afra Nasser	http://afrahnasser.blogspot.com/2011/08/yesterday-tunis-egypt-today-libya.html	Yesterday Tunis & Egypt, Today Libya, Tomorrow Yemen & Syria	23-08-2011	A shared revolutionary momentum. Solidarity across movements.
58.	Afra Nasser	http://afrahnasser.blogspot.com/2011/08/yemenis-schizophrenia.html	Yemenis' Schizophrenia	08-08-2011	Diversification: sharing articles from other feminist writers – spreading the word and producing feminist knowledge. A piece she read on YemenTimes.com by Nadia al-Saqqaf. The blog as a safe space to share other feminist voices.
59.	Afra Nasser	http://afrahnasser.blogspot.com/2011/07/fast-for-yemen-this-ramadan-please-join.html	Fast for Yemen: This Ramadan, Please Join us in Fasting for Yemen	29-07-2011	Glocality/ creative global peace project – raising awareness about Yemen and call for action.
60.	Afra Nasser	http://afrahnasser.blogspot.com/2011/07/road-map-early-elections-ramadan.html	Road Map, Early Elections & Ramadan	27-07-2011	On socio-political processes.
61.	Afra Nasser	http://afrahnasser.blogspot.com/2011/07/yemen-is-so-utterly-ruined-economistcom.html	Yemen is so utterly ruined, the Economist.com	22-07-2011	Published in international media platform. On geopolitical situation and the humanitarian crisis.
62.	Afra Nasser	http://afrahnasser.blogspot.com/2011/07/journalism-dangerous-job-in-yemen.html	Journalism; Dangerous Job in Yemen	20-07-2011	Cross-blogging and cross-posting her piece published on the dissidentblog.org on July 11, 2011. Glocality; the role of global online platforms.
63.	Afra Nasser	http://afrahnasser.blogspot.com/2011/07/saleh-defiance-concerns-yemeni.html	Saleh Defiance Concerns Yemeni Activists	20-07-2011	Cross-posting her piece published in Institute for War & Peace Reporting [https://iwpr.net/global-voices/saleh-

					<u>defiance-concerns-yemeni-activists]</u> Glocal and networked platforms and counter-public spheres.
64.	Afrah Nasser	http://afrahnasser.blogspot.com/2011/06/al-hasaba-people-in-agony.html	Al-Hasaba People in Agony	28-06-2011	Blogging the testimonies of anonymous activists from isolated areas suffering from humanitarian crisis and state neglect.
65.	Afrah Nasser	http://afrahnasser.blogspot.com/2011/06/horror-and-fear-sweep-taiz.html	Horror and Fear Sweep Taiz	27-06-2011	Publishing article by an anonymous writer. Showing pictures of fear and horror. Holding space for other who are marginalised and invisible.
66.	Afrah Nasser	http://afrahnasser.blogspot.com/2011/06/it-feels-like-living-back-in-medieval.html	It feels like living back in the medieval ages deprived of any services, says a citizen from Al-Houdeidah	27-06-2011	By anonymous writer – pictures and words documenting conflict. Holding space for others. Blogging and grassroots activism.
67.	Afrah Nasser	http://afrahnasser.blogspot.com/2011/06/best-illustration-on-yemenis-struggle.html	Best Illustration on Yemenis' Struggle	23-06-2011	Illustrations – variety of audio-visual methods and discourse.
68.	Afrah Nasser	http://afrahnasser.blogspot.com/2011/06/tawakkol-karmans-message-to-us-and.html	Tawakkol Karman's Message to the US and Saudi Arabia	20-06-2011	Example of giving space to other activists to publish their stories.
69.	Afrah Nasser	http://afrahnasser.blogspot.com/2011/06/international-community-must-not-be.html	"The international community must not be silent on what it happening in Yemen," Amal Basha says	17-06-2011	Diversification of discourse practice/ interdiscursive/ dialogical- Interviewing activists- Sisters' Arab Forum for Human Rights (SAF), Yemen.
70.	Afrah Nasser	http://afrahnasser.blogspot.com/2011/09/support-yemens-revolution.html	Support #Yemen's Revolution	05-09-2011	Call for action.
71.	Afrah Nasser	http://afrahnasser.blogspot.com/2011/08/im-heartbroken-to-watch-this-clip.html	#Yemeni #Journalist and #Blogger, #Shaye Still Behind Bars	03-08-2011	Solidarity – glocality; creative use of social media.

72.	Afra Nasser	http://afrahnasser.blogspot.com/2011/08/tell-truth-because-its-always.html	Tell the Truth Because It's Always Revolutionary	03-08-2011	Defining revolutionary political action; truth telling; personal reflections.
73.	Afra Nasser	http://afrahnasser.blogspot.com/2011/08/1st-day-of-ramadan-in-yemen.html	1st Day of #Ramadan in #Yemen	02-08-2011	Revolutionary momentum – example of spreading the word, using social media in blogging practice.
74.	Afra Nasser	http://afrahnasser.blogspot.com/2011/09/zero-silence.html	Zero Silence	01-09-2011	Documentary about social media and the revolution in the Middle East.
75.	Afra Nasser	http://afrahnasser.blogspot.com/2011/09/continuous-hardships-against-journalists.html	Continuous Hardships Against Journalists in Yemen	01-09-2011	Journalist attacks; censorship.
76.	Afra Nasser	http://afrahnasser.blogspot.com/p/about.html	About	Blog homepage	From the “about” section of the blog. Her personal statement. Positionality.
77.	Lina ben Mhenni -A Tunisian Girl [http://atunisiangirl.blogspot.com/]	http://atunisiangirl.blogspot.com.cy/2017/07/no-i-didnt-disappear-no-i-didnt-give-up.html	No I didn't Disappear. No I didn't Give Up	03-07-2017	Dialogue with readers/community. Agency and alternative participation. Battle with institutional power continues.
78.	Lina ben Mhenni	http://atunisiangirl.blogspot.com.cy/search	Critics want justice for Myriam after rape trial in Tunis	05-04-2014	Cross-blogging in global media platform http://www.yourmiddleeast.com/news/critics-want-justice-for-myriam-after-rape-trial-in-tunis_22628 . Holding state accountable.
79.	Lina ben Mhenni	http://atunisiangirl.blogspot.com.cy/2012/10/your-middle-east-blogger-lina-ben.html	Your Middle East: Blogger Lina Ben Mhenni: Tunisia – A Fledgling Democracy? "Tunisians who united to overthrow the dictator are now divided"	29-10-2012	Diverse blogging action; glocality aspects; cross-posting in the blog a link to her article published in regional media outlet for greater outreach: https://yourmiddleeast.com/2012/10/28/tunisians-who-united-to-overthrow-the-dictator-are-now-divided/ .

80.	Lina ben Mhenni	http://atunisiangirl.blogspot.com.cy/2012/10/will-wounds-heal-in-al-omrane-tunisians.html	WILL THE WOUNDS HEAL IN AL OMRANE? "Tunisians feel that the government has betrayed them. Their dreams and hopes have been stolen"	21-10-2012	Glocality; holding state accountable; cross-posting/blogging a link to her article in regional media outlet for greater outreach: https://yourmiddleeast.com/2012/10/21/tunisians-feel-that-the-government-has-betrayed-them-their-dreams-and-hopes-have-been-stolen/
81.	Lina ben Mhenni	http://atunisiangirl.blogspot.com.cy/2012/09/your-middle-east-blogger-lina-ben.html	BLOGGER LINA BEN MHENNI ON THE POLICE RAPE CASE IN TUNISIA "Tunisia is so far from being on the right path to build a democracy"	28-09-2012	Diversified action; glocality aspects; cross-blogging/posting in regional media platforms "Your Middle East"; assessing transitional processes; call for state accountability for police rape case. http://www.yourmiddleeast.com/opinion/blogger-lina-ben-mhenni-on-the-police-rape-case-in-tunisia_9821
82.	Lina ben Mhenni	http://atunisiangirl.blogspot.com.cy/2012/07/tunisie-manger-pendant-la-journee.html	Tunisia: Eating during the day would be forbidden!	20-07-2012	In French. High level of readers engagement-14 comments.
83.	Lina ben Mhenni	http://atunisiangirl.blogspot.com.cy/2012/08/assaulted-by-cops.html	Assaulted by cops!	07-08-2012	Important/encouraging comments! Conversational narratives. Disturbing pictures.
84.	Lina ben Mhenni	http://atunisiangirl.blogspot.com.cy/2012/01/tunisia-is-moaning.html	Tunisia is Moaning!	05-01-2012	Reporting on protests/immolation; revolution against the oppressive powers continuous; uncovers corruption and violence, censorship of academia and individuals; challenges the hegemonic power discourse/ lies.
85.	Lina ben Mhenni	http://atunisiangirl.blogspot.com.cy/2012/08/freedom-of-	Freedom of Peaceful Assembly	04-08-2012	Reflections on public space and human rights.

		peaceful-assembly.html			
86.	Lina ben Mhenni	http://atunisiangirl.blogspot.com.cy/2012/03/plight-of-wounded-of-tunisian.html	The plight of the wounded of the Tunisian Revolution: Assaulted inside the Ministry of Human Rights!	27-03-2012	Detailed reporting.
87.	Lina ben Mhenni	http://atunisiangirl.blogspot.com.cy/2012/03/threatened-by-lawyer.html	Threatened by a lawyer	15-03-2012	Corruption, personal attacks by pro-regime lawyer, resistance, destabilizing power.
88.	Lina ben Mhenni	http://atunisiangirl.blogspot.com/2012/12/your-middle-east-graffiti-in-tunisia.html	Your Middle East: Graffiti in Tunisia: art or crime?	02-12-2012	Monthly archive; youth movements perspective; questioning transitional government; glocality aspects; cross-blogging/posting in regional media platform. https://yourmiddleeast.com/2012/12/01/graffiti-in-tunisia-art-or-crime/
89.	Lina ben Mhenni	http://atunisiangirl.blogspot.com.cy/2012/07/tunisie-vivre-derange-la-police.html	Tunisia: Live disturbs the police!	02-07-2012	Secondary data from French. Socio-political context. Analysis on police regression.
90.	Lina ben Mhenni	http://atunisiangirl.blogspot.com.cy/2012/01/death-list.html	Being on a Death List	26-01-2012	Attacks on bloggers; exposing threats and censorship; authoritarianism; resistance; destabilizing power.
91.	Lina ben Mhenni	http://atunisiangirl.blogspot.com.cy/2012/01/new-arab-woman-forum-concludes-with.html	New Arab Woman Forum concludes with “Sawa Sawa” March (February 2nd, 2012)	24-01-2012	Knowledge sharing; demands to be handed to Lebanese Prime Minister. Interdiscursivity; calls by women for regional action; Slogan: “Together”. Blogging for solidarity, mobilisation and coalition building. Transnational feminisms.
92.	Lina ben Mhenni	http://atunisiangirl.blogspot.com.cy/2012/06/tunisia-freedom-of-press-back-to-black.html	Tunisia: Freedom of Press: Back to Black!	01-06-2012	
93.	Lina ben Mhenni	http://atunisiangirl.blogspot.com	The World is Watching Us	28-11-2011	A powerful visual; no-text in the blog

		m.cy/2011/10/world-is-watching-us.html			post.
94.	Lina ben Mhenni	http://atunisiangirl.blogspot.com.cy/2011/11/what-does-activism-mean-today-my.html	What Does Activism Mean Today? My Article Published by the Kraut Magazine	15-11-2011	Diversification of discursive action; information and outreach; transcending space(s) though online platforms; defining political activism and the role of social media.
95.	Lina ben Mhenni	http://atunisiangirl.blogspot.com.cy/2011/02/sorry.html	Sorry	11-02-2011	Conversational narrative (blogger-readers); High readers' engagement; 18 comments; encouraging/empowering.
96.	Lina ben Mhenni	http://atunisiangirl.blogspot.com.cy/2011/10/update-as-to-wounded-of-revolution.html	Update as to the wounded of the revolution	22-10-2011	Uncovering the transitional neglect and no access of the wounded revolutionaries to their rights.
97.	Lina ben Mhenni	http://atunisiangirl.blogspot.com.cy/2011/10/urgent-what-about-wounded-of-revolution.html	Urgent what about the wounded of the revolution	22-10-2011	Calls for action for transitional justice. Reporting on hunger strikes of the wounded; most extreme forms of protest (indignation).
98.	Lina ben Mhenni	http://atunisiangirl.blogspot.com.cy/2011/10/free-malek-sghiri.html	Free Malek Sghiri	21-10-2011	Call for action/support; posted in both EN and FR for wider outreach; glocality aspects.
99.	Lina ben Mhenni	http://atunisiangirl.blogspot.com.cy/2011/05/my-word-for-oslo-freedom-forum.html	My participation in the Oslo Freedom Forum	10-05-2011	Blogging as online and offline participation; activist forums as interwoven public spheres of expression and networking (diversified action).
100.	Lina ben Mhenni	http://atunisiangirl.blogspot.com.cy/2011/08/revolution-is-going-on.html	The revolution is going on	09-08-2011	Effort to maintain revolutionary momentums.
101.	Lina ben Mhenni	http://atunisiangirl.blogspot.com.cy/2011/08/bahrainby-our-silence-we-also-incur.html	Bahrain: By Our silence we also incur a share in the guilt	24-08-2011	Information sharing; regional context; local voices highlighted; critique of global silence; guilt and

					responsibility.
102.	Lina ben Mhenni	http://atunisiangirl.blogspot.com.cy/2011/07/free-samir-feriani.html	Free Samir Feriani	14-07-2011	Call for action; mobilising support.
103.	Lina ben Mhenni	http://atunisiangirl.blogspot.com.cy/2011/02/demonstration-outside-parliament.html	Demonstration Outside the Parliament	07-02-2011	Detailed reporting; visuals; encouraging commentary by readers; conversational narratives.
104.	Lina ben Mhenni	http://atunisiangirl.blogspot.com.cy/2011/01/free-slim.html	Free Slim and Aziz	07-01-2011	A visual with the faces of two detained activists; bloggers' solidarity; using social media to raise awareness and mobilise pressure #SidiBouزيد. Conversational: encouraging comments.
105.	Lina ben Mhenni	http://atunisiangirl.blogspot.com.cy/2011/01/lawyers-strike.html	Lawyers' Strike	06-01-2011	Documenting lawyers' strike. The pictures are interconnected with the text.
106.	Lina ben Mhenni	http://atunisiangirl.blogspot.com.cy/2011/05/internet-is-part-of-media-field.html	Internet is part of the Media Field: An Introduction for Some Ignorant Journalists	30-05-2011	Knowledge sharing; critique to local journalists.
107.	Lina ben Mhenni	http://atunisiangirl.blogspot.com.cy/2011/05/solitude.html	Solitude	24-05-2011	Secondary data from FR. Inner voice, feelings and readers' engagement.
108.	Lina ben Mhenni	http://atunisiangirl.blogspot.com.cy/2011/01/ma-facebook-page-tunisian-girl-is-back.html	My Facebook page Tunisian Girl is Back!	05-01-2011	
109.	Lina ben Mhenni	http://atunisiangirl.blogspot.com.cy/2011/04/urgent-call.html	Urgent Call	21-04-2011	Call for action; mobilising support-medicine / food- to support refugees.
110.	Lina ben Mhenni	http://atunisiangirl.blogspot.com.cy/2011/01/did-you-say-isolated-case.html	Did you say 'An Isolated Case'?	04-01-2011	Indignation; questioning hegemonic discourse/authority for repeatedly violating rights; resistance.
111.	Lina ben Mhenni	http://atunisiangirl.blogspot.com.cy/2011/03/bobs-awards.html	Bob's awards	27-03-2011	Global greeting and political acknowledgement for her work on freedom of speech; High readers

					interactivity (12 comments) support/encouragement; conversational and community aspects.
112.	Lina ben Mhenni	http://atunisiangirl.blogspot.com.cy/2011/03/syrians-are-angry.html	Syrians are angry!	16-03-2011	Different positionalities with shared visions; Information sharing. Regional political commentary.
113.	Lina ben Mhenni	http://atunisiangirl.blogspot.com.cy/2011/03/my-meeting-with-stepahne-hessel.html	My Meeting with Stéphane Hessel	16-03-2011	Reflecting worries as blogger fighting for women's rights and freedom of speech; empowering; conversational/ rich commentary.
114.	Lina ben Mhenni	http://atunisiangirl.blogspot.com.cy/2011/03/skype-conference-with-libyan-blogger.html	A Skype Conference with a Libyan Blogger	15-03-2011	Blogging community in the MENA; holding space for other women's voices; rich commentary; glocality aspects.
115.	Lina ben Mhenni	http://atunisiangirl.blogspot.com.cy/2011/03/my-country-tunisia-for-years-regime.html	My country, Tunisia: 'For years, the regime kept up appearances'	14-03-2011	Glocality; transcending spaces; cross blogging/posting using transnational online platforms; rich commentary https://www.thestar.com/news/insight/2011/03/13/my_country_tunisia_for_years_the_regime_kept_up_appearances.html
116.	Lina ben Mhenni	http://atunisiangirl.blogspot.com.cy/2011/05/world-press-freedom-day.html	World press Freedom Day	03-05-2011	Visual of global and local communities/ No-text. Using international days as hooks.
117.	Lina ben Mhenni	http://atunisiangirl.blogspot.com.cy/2011/01/you-cant-stop-us-from-writing.html	You can't Stop us from Writing!	03-01-2011	Resistance; power renegotiation; rich commentary; solidarity; virtual bonds; community building.
118.	Lina ben Mhenni	http://atunisiangirl.blogspot.com.cy/2011/01/hacked-bustill-writing.html	Hacked but Still Writing!	03-01-2011	Resistance to censorship; alternative power.
119.	Lina ben Mhenni	http://atunisiangirl.blogspot.com.cy/2011/02/well-fight-for-	We'll Fight for our Freedom!	02-02-2011	Conversational; rich and powerful comments! How glocality looks like!

		our-freedom.html			
120.	Lina ben Mhenni	http://atunisiangirl.blogspot.com.cy/2011/01/what-happened-is-not-isolated-case.html	What Happened is not an Isolated Case!	02-01-2011	Resistance, exposing, reporting, mobilising community aid.
121.	Lina ben Mhenni	http://atunisiangirl.blogspot.com.cy/2011/01/talking-about-revolutiontunisia.html	Talking about a Revolution: Tunisia	02-01-2011	Information sharing using links to articles. Internet citizens' concerns about repressive measures against protesters.
122.	Lina ben Mhenni	http://atunisiangirl.blogspot.com.cy/2011/01/gvo-tunisia-lawyers-assaulted-for-their.html	GVO Tunisia Lawyers assaulted for their Sidi Bouzid Stand	02-01-2011	Cross-blogging in Global Voices; local –global in dialogue (glocality); blogging as a form of participation in networked public sphere(s).
123.	Lina ben Mhenni	http://atunisiangirl.blogspot.com.cy/2011/01/we-are-not-free-yet.html	We are not Free yet!	29-01-2011	Rich commentary; pictures showing police attacks. Maintaining revolutionary momentum.
124.	Lina ben Mhenni	http://atunisiangirl.blogspot.com.cy/2011/01/tunisian-bloggers-light-candles-in.html	Tunisian Bloggers Light Candles in the Memory of the Martyrs	23-01-2011	Detail reporting/documenting including pictures.
125.	Lina ben Mhenni	http://atunisiangirl.blogspot.com.cy/2011/01/books-freedom.html	Books Freedom	22-01-2011	Informative; a bookshop selling books previously seized by authorities; pictures; comments of encouragement.
126.	Lina ben Mhenni	http://atunisiangirl.blogspot.com.cy/2011/01/welcome-to-essabah.html	Welcome to 'Essabah'	21-01-2011	Visiting a newspaper; reporting on changes regime collapse; pictures documenting the space; new titles on the magazines; hope expressed.
127.	Lina ben Mhenni	http://atunisiangirl.blogspot.com.cy/2011/01/well-done-tunisian.html	The Future is Ours	16-01-2011	Pictures complementing her reporting of a crime in remote areas. A young man killed on the ambulance by gangsters linked to the presidential guard. Calls for solidarity, action and

					freedom.
128.	Lina ben Mhenni	http://atunisiangirl.blogspot.com.cy/2011/12/university-teachers-organize-rally.html?search=female+	University Teachers Organize a Rally against Violence and Extremism in Universities	01-12-2011	Violence and harassment of academia. Extremism in universities.
129.	Lina ben Mhenni	http://atunisiangirl.blogspot.com.cy/2010/12/bloody-day-for-lawyers-sidibouid.html	Bloody Day for Lawyers #sidibouid	31-12-2010	Reporting on lawyers' protests and demands for accountability and freedom of speech.
130.	Lina ben Mhenni	http://atunisiangirl.blogspot.com.cy/2010/12/lawyers-demonstration-tuesday-28th-2010.html	Lawyers' Demonstration Tuesday 28th, 2010;	29-12-2010	Detailed documentation, including pictures.
131.	Lina ben Mhenni	http://atunisiangirl.blogspot.com.cy/2010/12/demonstration-to-support-sidi-bouid-2.html	Demonstration to Support Sidi Bouid (2)	27-12-2010	Reflections of the demonstration, including a powerful photo placed in the centre of the text showing the demonstrating crowd.
132.	Lina ben Mhenni	http://atunisiangirl.blogspot.com.cy/2010/12/tunisia-unemployed-mans-suicide-attempt.html	Tunisia: Unemployed Man's Suicide Attempt Sparks Riots (GVO)	23-12-2010	Cross-posting in online activist platforms. Sharing links in blog: https://af.reuters.com/article/topNews/idAFJOE6BI06U20101219 https://globalvoices.org/2010/12/23/tunisia-unemployed-mans-suicide-attempt-sparks-riots/
133.	Lina ben Mhenni	http://atunisiangirl.blogspot.com.cy/2010/12/sorry-hamas-im-wearing-blue-jeans-by-by.html	Sorry, Hamas, I'm Wearing Blue Jeans by — By Ashley Bates	19-12-2010	Knowledge sharing; holding space for other women authors; providing related links: https://www.motherjones.com/politics/2010/12/gaza-hamas-asma-al-ghoul/
134.	Lina ben Mhenni	http://atunisiangirl.blogspot.com.cy/2010/12/sidi-bouid-is-burning.html	Sidi Bouid is Burning	19-12-2010	Personal and collective anger in society. Shedding light to uncovered incidents by traditional media and the

					role of blogging. Burning: literally and symbolically – immolations = the most extreme form of protest. Picture of the streets in the centre of the text.
135.	Lina ben Mhenni	http://atunisiangirl.blogspot.com.cy/2010/12/viol-conjugal-et-si-on-en-parlait.html	Viol Conjugal et Si On en Parlait ? What if we Talk about Marital Rape	12-01-2010	Written in FR and EN (more outreach). Discussing marital rape addressed social, legal gaps, sexism in society/intimate relationships. All comments were in FR- I used Google translate with caution for better understanding of the context (used only as secondary data). The majority of comments were from locals disagreeing that a woman can say no to her husband. She was truly challenging the public discourse on women's dignity/ control over her body/ sexuality. Victim-blaming attitudes are visible in the comments. Keyword search: rape.
136.	Lina ben Mhenni	http://atunisiangirl.blogspot.com.cy/2010/03/do-you-know-how-does-it-feel-to-be.html	Censorship!	11-03-2010	
137.	Lina ben Mhenni	http://atunisiangirl.blogspot.com.cy/2010/10/one-year-after-his-arrest-tunisian.html	One Year After His Arrest, Tunisian Activist Still in Legal Limbo	25-10-2010	Cross-blogging/posting: Link to her article hosted in other online platform www.movements.org (hosts blog posts). The article covers the legal constraints of student activists.
138.	Lina ben Mhenni	http://atunisiangirl.blogspot.com.cy/2010/06/lunatic-asylum.html	Lunatic Asylum	10-06-2010	Poem/ creative text. In dialogue with power. Powerful image and encouraging comments.
139.	Lina ben Mhenni	http://atunisiangirl.blogspot.com	Are bloggers a Threat to	29-09-2010	Keyword search: blog*

		m.cy/2010/09/are-bloggers-threat-to-governments.html	Governments?		Blogging's alternative power; attacks/arrests towards bloggers.
140.	Lina ben Mhenni	http://atunisiangirl.blogspot.com.cy/2010/02/no-no-no-no-to-censorship.html	No no no no to censorship	09-02-2010	No text/ A picture of herself with a fearless expression, anger and she is wearing a pin saying I want my YouTube. Resistance.
141.	Lina ben Mhenni	http://atunisiangirl.blogspot.com.cy/2010/08/hunger-strike-for-right-to-employment.html	Hunger Strike for the Right to Employment	25-08-2010	
142.	Lina ben Mhenni	http://atunisiangirl.blogspot.com.cy/2010/08/still-far-from-equality-for-women-at.html	Still far from equality for women at work	13-08-2010	Knowledge/ Information sharing: URL and screenshots of EU magazine.
143.	Lina ben Mhenni	http://atunisiangirl.blogspot.com.cy/2010/04/world-at-glance.html	the world at a glance	08-04-2010	Commenting on USA-Russia relations; sarcasm and challenging the dominant international discourse; alternative discourse.
144.	Lina ben Mhenni	http://atunisiangirl.blogspot.com.cy/2010/02/tunisia-censorship-again-and-again.html	Tunisia censorship again and again	08-02-2010	Diversification of blogging exposing censorship and calling for freedom of speech; glocality. Inclusion of quotes from other Tunisian bloggers. Interdiscursive and holding space for others.
145.	Lina ben Mhenni	http://atunisiangirl.blogspot.com.cy/2010/12/tunisia-censorship-continues-as.html	Tunisia: Censorship Continues as Wikileaks Cables Make the Rounds (Global Voices)	07-12-2010	Cross-blogging/posting in Global Voices (online activist platform); glocality aspects. Using related links: https://globalvoices.org/2010/12/07/tunisia-censorship-continues-as-wikileaks-cables-make-the-rounds/ Interdiscursive; conversational; information sharing.
146.	Lina ben Mhenni	http://atunisiangirl.blogspot.com.cy/2010/11/blogs-sind-	Blogs sind politische Signale/Blogs are political	07-11-2010	Secondary data. Featured in article produced within the framework of

		politische-signaleblogs-are.html	signals		the German-Arab blogger meeting. Article's original language: German.
147.	Lina ben Mhenni	http://atunisiangirl.blogspot.com.cy/2010/05/do-women-talk-too-much.html	Do women Talk too much	14-05-2010	Feminist knowledge; analysis on sexism in language; female voices in the public domain; gender aspects and modes of utterances.
148.	Lina ben Mhenni	http://atunisiangirl.blogspot.com.cy/2010/09/blogger-criminal.html	Blogger = criminal	05-09-2010	<p>Informs of blogger arrests treated as criminals. Reports on cases in the region providing URL links from Global voices</p> <p>https://advox.globalvoices.org/2010/09/05/bahrain-bahraini-blogger-arrested/</p> <p>Advox: A project of Global Voices, a global anti-censorship network of bloggers and activists dedicated to protecting freedom of expression online. Interwoven and networked public spheres. Transcending space(s). Glocality aspects of blogging.</p>
149.	Lina ben Mhenni	http://atunisiangirl.blogspot.com.cy/2010/04/but-now-im-abjuring-you-forever.html	But now I'm abjuring you forever!	27-04-2010	A poem in conversation with authority; oppressive regime. Resistance and inner voice expressed. Alternative power/ discourse.
150.	Lina ben Mhenni	http://atunisiangirl.blogspot.com.cy/2010/01/tunisia-and-bahrain-block-individual.html	Tunisia and Bahrain block individual FB and Tweeter pages	04-01-2010	Cross-blogging; online platforms; Glocality; Screenshot of the article in Global Voices website.
151.	Lina ben Mhenni	http://atunisiangirl.blogspot.com.cy/2010/03/writing.html	Writing	31-03-2010	Resistance; writing is life; censorship; sense of community; keep fighting; struggle over the public sphere.

152.	Lina ben Mhenni	http://atunisiangirl.blogspot.com.cy/2010/03/bloggers-terrorists-blogueurs.html	Bloggers= Terrorists??	23-03-2010	Diversification of blogging; Cross-blogging/ posing: https://globalvoices.org/2010/03/22/iran-new-wave-of-blogger-arrests/ Glocality; the question in her title is challenging power.
153.	Lina ben Mhenni	http://atunisiangirl.blogspot.com.cy/2010/03/back.html	Back	16-03-2010	Blog has been censored in Feb 2010.
154.	Lina ben Mhenni	http://atunisiangirl.blogspot.com.cy/2010/03/social-media-and-womens-empowerment.html	Social Media and Women's Empowerment	13-03-2010	Featured in daily news; diversification of action; using online media for outreach. Cross-posting in blog.
155.	Lina ben Mhenni	http://atunisiangirl.blogspot.com.cy/2010/03/etf-conference-women-and-work.html	ETF Conference Women and Work	13-03-2010	Networking; feminist spaces/forums; empowering each other.
156.	Lina ben Mhenni	http://atunisiangirl.blogspot.com.cy/2010/02/solidarity.html	Solidarity	13-02-2010	Secondary data. Title only and a picture with a quote in AR and a man. In solidarity about the censorship of another blogger.
157.	Lina ben Mhenni	http://atunisiangirl.blogspot.com.cy/2010/04/maghreb-blog-blogging-in-morocco.html	Maghreb Blog: Blogging in Morocco	02-04-2010	Screenshot and URL for fellow blogger. Interdiscursivity and support among bloggers in the MENA. Signs of influence and outreach. Dialogical participation.
158.	Lina ben Mhenni	http://atunisiangirl.blogspot.com.cy/2010/02/iraqi-blogger-hiba-meshandani-arrested.html	Iraqi blogger Hiba Meshandani arrested	02-02-2010	Reporting on the arrests of other bloggers and denouncing blog censorship.
159.	Lina ben Mhenni	http://atunisiangirl.blogspot.com.cy/2010/01/arrestation-d-un-blogueur-marocain.html	Moroccan Blogger arrested	29-01-2010	(in AR, FR and English- trilingual post) she reports on the arrests of other bloggers and denounces blog censorship.
160.	Lina ben Mhenni	http://atunisiangirl.blogspot.com	Fragmented person	29-01-2010	Feeling pain and worry behind the

		m.cy/2010/01/fragment-of-person.html			veil of courage. The impact of violence on her.
161.	Lina ben Mhenni	http://atunisiangirl.blogspot.com.cy/2010/01/tunisia-they-censored-arabicac-again.html	They censored Arabicca again	24-01-2010	Cross-posting link to article she wrote on Global Voices https://globalvoices.org/2010/01/24/tunisia-and-they-censored-arabicca/ showing the struggle in accessing public discourse and the organisation of bloggers to fight censorship
162.	Lina ben Mhenni	http://atunisiangirl.blogspot.com.cy/2010/01/tunisian-bloggers-against-student.html	Tunisian Bloggers against student imprisonment	19-01-2010	Cross-blogging/posting in Global Voices; diversification in the struggle over public sphere(s); outreach.
163.	Lina ben Mhenni	http://atunisiangirl.blogspot.com.cy/2010/03/who-is-free-to-speak-in-tunisia-when.html	Who is free to speak in Tunisia when the government tries to silence an international human rights organization?	29-03-2010	The story as reported by Reuters in EN and AR for wider dissemination. Exposes corruption and censorship exercised against local activists, journalists and international organisation mapping the situation of human rights in Tunisia. The lines between the local and the global are blurred and the post on itself challenges the power structures of who is allowed to have a voice.
164.	Marcell Shehwaro - On the Edge of Syria [edgeofsyria.com/]	https://edgeofsyria.com/2017/01/18/in-order-to-be-taken-seriously/	In Order to Be Taken Seriously	18-01-2017	Cross-posting. Translated from the Arabic by Robin Moger. This article was published by Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung: https://lb.boell.org/en/2017/01/18/order-be-taken-seriously .
165.	Marcell Shehwaro	https://edgeofsyria.com/2015/12/16/winner-of-2015-online-commentary-small-	Winner of 2015 Online Commentary, Small Newsroom	16-12-2015	Collaboration with Global Voices; Online platforms as support communities and counter-public

		newsroom/#more-140			spheres for bloggers; Cross- blogging in maximising outreach.
166.	Marcell Shehwaro	https://edgeofsyria.com/2015/10/14/whats-personal-when-youre-syrian/#more-29	What's Personal When You're Syrian?	14-10-2015	
167.	Marcell Shehwaro	https://www.huffpost.com/entry/marcell-shehwaro-syrian-blogger_n_560c1fa6e4b0dd85030a3996	HuffPost article- Syrian Blogger Offers an Intimate, Haunting View of Life In A War Zone	10-01-2015	Secondary data.
168.	Marcell Shehwaro	https://globalvoices.org/2015/09/27/global-voices-series-dispatches-from-syria-wins-online-journalism-award/	Series Dispatches from Syria Wins Online Journalism Award	27-09-2015	Secondary data. Greeting; awards; political listening and acknowledgement; local voices with global audiences; glocality of blogging; Global Voices: https://awards.journalists.org/entries/dispatches-syria-marcell-shehwaro-life-aleppo/
169.	Marcell Shehwaro	https://edgeofsyria.com/2015/09/08/a-year-away-from-syria/#more-31	A Year Away from Syria	08-09-2015	Reflections on trauma, revolution and Syrian politics.
170.	Marcell Shehwaro	https://edgeofsyria.com/2014/03/12/syria-i-am-aleppo-aleppo-is-me/	I am Aleppo, Aleppo is me	12-03-2014	Identity; individual voice; social positioning. Situated knowledge.
171.	Marcell Shehwaro	https://edgeofsyria.com/2014/07/14/if-i-were-a-dictator-i-would-consider-you-my-enemy/#more-45	If I Were A Dictator, I Would Consider You My Enemy	14-07-2014	Aspects of Syrian politics in 2013.
172.	Marcell Shehwaro	https://globalvoices.org/2014/06/27/we-have-all-become-killers-in-syria/	In Syria We Have All Become Killers	27-06-2014	Powerful words and visual discourse.
173.	Marcell Shehwaro	https://globalvoices.org/special-coverage/dispatches-from-	Marcell Shehwaro's Dispatches on Syria	(N/A)	Special cover on Global Voices website.

		syriamarcell-shehwaro-on-life-in-aleppo/			
174.	Marcell Shehwaro	https://edgeofsyria.com/2014/03/15/three-years-of-the-syrian-revolution-our-dream-remains-alive/	Three Years of the Syrian Revolution: “Our Dream Remains Alive	19-3-2014	This Post is published as a part of Dispatches from Aleppo, Global voices.
175.	Marcell Shehwaro	https://edgeofsyria.com/about/	Things about me	Homepage	Unique standpoint/ social positioning.
176.	Mona Eltahawy [http://www.monaeltahawy.com/]	https://qz.com/419234/were-in-a-global-feminist-moment-mona-eltahawy-on-why-men-hate-us-and-how-they-love-us/	We are in a Global Feminist Movement - Why Men Hate Us and How they Love Us	06-06-2015	
177.	Mona Eltahawy	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U61w2Ou3yFk	Egypt the Arab World and the War on Women	10-06-2014	
178.	Mona Eltahawy	https://www.telegraph.co.uk/women/womens-life/10904048/Women-of-Arab-Spring-We-now-need-a-sexual-revolution-not-just-a-political-one.html	Women of the Arab Spring: 'We now need a sexual revolution, not just a political one'	17-06-2014	
179.	Mona Eltahawy	https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/jul/10/egypt-revolution-sexual-violence	Egypt needs a revolution against sexual violence	10-07-2013	
180.	Mona Eltahawy	https://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2013/08/14/is-this-the-end-of-the-arab-spring/airing-out-the-house-of-egypt	Airing Out the House of Egypt	14-08-2013	
181.	Mona Eltahawy	http://foreignpolicy.com/2012/04/23/why-do-they-hate-us/	Why Do They Hate Us?	23-04-2012	
182.	Mona Eltahawy	https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2012/apr/19/insu	An insult to revolutionary Egypt	19-04-2012	Far from democratic politics.

		It-revolutionary-egypt-elections?CMP=tw_t_gu			
183.	Mona Eltahawy	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/dec/23/mona-elatahawy-assault-egyptian-forces?newsfeed=true	Bruised but defiant: Mona Eltahawy on her assault by Egyptian security forces	23-12-2011	Exposing sexual assault and violence. Twitter and social media. Broken arms. Body as revolution. Defiance.
184.	Mona Eltahawy	https://www.thestar.com/news/insight/2010/12/18/herspace_mideast_women_log_on_speak_out.html	HerSpace: Mideast women log on, speak out	18-12-2010	Under thematic tag “women”. Influence and outreach. Intersectional. Transnational mobilization and coalition building. Role of blogging and social media. Distabilising power.
185.	Mona Eltahawy	https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2011/aug/12/riots-egyptian-mubarak-civil-liberties	Please Britain, don't let Mubarak inspire your response to unrest	12-08-2011	on civil liberties
186.	Mona Eltahawy	https://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2011/02/07/is-caution-the-right-us-strategy-on-egypt/blink-and-backing-down-in-egypt	Blinking and Backing Down in Egypt	08-02-2011	55 comments. Dialogue among readers. Challenging Obama-Mubarak relations characterized as a “parallel universe” and taking away “people’s power”. Paternalistic way of doing politics.
187.	Mona Eltahawy	https://www.thestar.com/news/insight/2011/01/08/tunisia_the_uprising_has_a_hashtag.html	Tunisia: The uprising has a hashtag	08-01-2011	
188.	Mona Eltahawy	http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2D_kXrJwU9o	Cyberactivism-Women, social media and revolutions	16-05-2011	Video- on Affrah Nasser’s Youtube Chanel (virtual solidarity/bonds).
189.	Mona Eltahawy	https://www.chron.com/news/houston-texas/article/Egyptians-want-Mubarak-punished-Arab-columnist-1685173.php	Egyptians want Mubarak Punished	16-05-2011	by another columnist referring to Mona (quotes)
190.	Mona Eltahawy	https://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2011/03/25/egypt-young-people-are	Egypt’s Young People Are	25-03-2011	Youth renegotiating power. Hopes

		mfordebate/2011/03/24/will-egypts-youth-movement-be-pushed-aside/egypts-young-people-are-stepping-up-to-the-challenge	Stepping Up to the Challenge		for social change.
191.	Mona Eltahawy	https://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2011/01/27/whats-behind-the-demonstrations-in-egypt/leaderless-but-powerful-in-cairo	Leaderless but Powerful in Cairo	22-03-2011	Destabilizing power & questioning international political powers. Comments by global audience. Glocality.
192.	Mona Eltahawy	https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2011/jun/02/egypt-next-revolution-virginity-tests	These 'virginity tests' will spark Egypt's next revolution	02-06-2011	
193.	Mona Eltahawy	https://jezebel.com/5747762/the-woman-whos-explaining-egypt-to-the-west	The woman who's explaining Egypt to the West	31-01-2011	92 comments/ blogging and twitting
194.	Mona Eltahawy	https://www.thestar.com/news/insight/2011/01/29/smashing_through_fear_in_egypt.html	Smashing through fear in Egypt	29-01-2011	
195.	Mona Eltahawy	https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2011/jan/29/egypt-mubarak-tunisia-palestine	We've waited for this revolution for years. Other despots should quail	29-01-2011	
196.	Mona Eltahawy	http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2011/01/25/AR2011012507200.html	Will Egypt's protests go the way of Tunisia's revolution?	26-01-2011	
197.	Mona Eltahawy	https://www.thestar.com/news/insight/2011/01/21/raining_on_the_tunisian_revolution.html	Raining on the Tunisian revolution	21-01-2011	Strong photo! Global aspect- talking about the hypocrisy of global politics and western mainstream media. Brings in an alternative aspect

					based on socio-political context on the ground. Glocality.
198.	Mona Eltahawy	https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2011/jan/16/tunisia-first-arab-revolution-ben-ali	Tunisia: the first Arab revolution	16-01-2011	Sarcasm for Western mainstream media and analysts. She asks questions that distabilise power from politics to the power of the ordinary people. Glocality aspect.
199.	Mona Eltahawy	http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2011/01/14/AR2011011405084.html	Tunisia's Jasmine Revolution	15-01-2011	
200.	Mona Eltahawy www.monaeltahawy.com	http://www.monaeltahawy.com/	HomePage statement	05-05-2018	Unique standpoint.
201.	Mona Seif [Ma3t.blogspot.com]	http://ma3t.blogspot.com/2011/12/my-revolution-bloody-wednesday.html	My revolution: Bloody Wednesday	31-12-2011	
202.	Mona Seif	http://ma3t.blogspot.com/2011/12/my-revolution-beginning.html	My revolution: The beginning	30-12-2011	Powerful personal story and unique standpoint/ social positioning.
203.	Mona Seif	http://ma3t.blogspot.com/2011/06/in-progress.html	...In progress	20-06-2011	Dreams crashed.
204.	Mona Seif	http://ma3t.blogspot.com/2011/06/away-from-spotlight.html	Away from the spotlight: The true revolutionaries	17-06-2011	
205.	Mona Seif	http://ma3t.blogspot.com/2011/02/i-was-not-brave-i-was-protected.html	!I was not brave, I was protected	06-02-2011	Many encouraging comments (solidarity, being part of a community)
206.	Mona Seif	http://ma3t.blogspot.com/2011/02/another-testimony-of-military-brutality.html	Another testimony of military brutality on protesters	28-02-2011	Translation of a testimony of another activist. Tough to read. Violence against protesters.
207.	Mona Seif	http://ma3t.blogspot.com/2011/02/eyewitness-account-on-	Testimony on the arrest of Amr Abdallah Al-Bihary Early	27-02-2011	

		arrest-of-amr.html	Saturday morning of the 26th of February 2011		
208.	Mona Seif	http://ma3t.blogspot.com/2011/02/support-revolutions-of-people.html	Support revolutions of the people!	19-02-2011	
209.	Mona Seif	http://ma3t.blogspot.com/2011/01/long-live-revolution-of-egyptian-people.html	Long Live the Revolution of The Egyptian People	30-01-2011	Many wonderful comments of sisterhood and solidarity. Her testimony from Tahrir with pictures and the hope reflected from Mubarak's overthrow.
210.	Mona Seif	http://ma3t.blogspot.com/2011/01/blog-post_29.html	Urgent appeal	29-01-2011	Urgent call for medicine.
211.	Mona Seif	http://ma3t.blogspot.com/2011/01/national-powers-coalition-statement.html	National Powers coalition statement	29-01-2011	
212.	Mona Seif	http://ma3t.blogspot.com/2010/09/mute.html	Mute	27-09-2010	Lack of hope and agency. Muted voices.
213.	Mona Seif	http://ma3t.blogspot.com/2010/06/my-city.html	My city	23-06-2010	
214.	Mozn Hassan -Nazra for Feminist Studies [Nazra.org]	http://nazra.org/en/2016/04/when-defending-women-and-their-bodies-becomes-crime	When Defending Women and their Bodies Becomes A Crime	18-04-2016	Mozn Hassan / blog post. Egyptian feminist movement, defending women's bodies & representation. Seen as a threat to national security. Facing persecution.
215.	Mozn Hassan	http://nazra.org/en/2016/03/postponement-interrogation-mozn-hassan-civil-society-organizations-case	Postponement of Interrogation with Feminist and Women Human Rights Defender Mozn Hassan in the Civil Society Organizations Case	29-03-2016	No author name/ collaborative blog.
216.	Mozn Hassan	http://nazra.org/en/2016/03/48-organizations-around-world-condemn-escalating-measures-taken-by-the	48 Organizations Around the World Condemn the Escalating Measures Taken by the	28-03-2016	Steps taken to stifle her activism in the public space, systemic smear campaigns against her and other civil

		against-mozn-hassan	Egyptian Government against Feminist and Woman Human Rights Defender Mozn Hassan		society leaders. Lack of transparency and non-declaration of charges
217.	Mozn Hassan	http://nazra.org/en/2016/03/solidarity-statement-egyptian-feminist-organizations-coalition-nazra-feminist-studies	A Solidarity Statement from the Egyptian Feminist Organizations Coalition with Nazra for Feminist Studies	28-03-2016	No author name; collaborative blog. Coalition building; community; solidarity; power negotiation and resistance.
218.	Mozn Hassan	http://nazra.org/en/2016/03/130-academics-express-their-solidarity-mozn-hassan-and-nazra-feminist-studies	130 Academics express their solidarity with Mozn Hassan and Nazra for Feminist Studies	27-03-2016	No author name; collaborative blog; safety issues; coalition building and solidarity.
219.	Mozn Hassan	http://nazra.org/en/2016/03/official-interrogation-nazra-feminist-studies-foreign-funding-case	Official Interrogation of Nazra for Feminist Studies in the "Foreign Funding Case" and Summoning of Team Members	20-03-2016	Crackdown on independent civil society; closing public space; travel bans and interrogation of activists, Nazra's accountability questioned.
220.	Mozn Hassan	http://nazra.org/en/2015/11/launching-statement-support-regional-coalition-women-human-rights-defenders-whrds-middle	LAUNCHING STATEMENT SUPPORT THE REGIONAL COALITION FOR WOMEN HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS (WHRDs) IN MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA (MENA) ONLINE	29-11-2015	Press release; no author names. Coalition building; transnational feminist movement; exposing impunity, violence and calling for transitional justice.
221.	Mozn Hassan	http://nazra.org/en/2013/07/analytical-paper-right-women-public-political-space	Analytical Paper: the Right of Women to Public Political Space	28-07-2013	No author name; safety issues; feminist analysis redefining public and private spheres in relationship to Egyptian authoritarianism. Redefining political participation. Calls for "feminist spaces and voices".
222.	Mozn Hassan	http://nazra.org/en/2012/04/manual-women-human-rights	Manual on Women Human Rights Defenders	30-04-2012	Feminist knowledge production. Manual informing and supporting

		<u>defenders</u>			women activists. No author names.
223.	Mozn Hassan	http://nazra.org/en/2012/04/women-and-constitution-working-group-document	Women and Constitution Working Group Document	26-04-2012	Feminist knowledge production. Research paper.
224.	Mozn Hassan	http://nazra.org/en/2012/09/%E2%80%9Ci%E2%80%99m-coming-back-you-i-want-kill-you%E2%80%9D-one-year-impunity	One Year of Impunity: Violations against Women Human Rights Defenders in Egypt from August to December 2011	01-09-2012	Sharing a report documenting the violations of WHRDs. An insightful analysis and recommendations to the Egyptian authorities. Asking for public acknowledgement.
225.	Mozn Hassan	http://nazra.org/en/2011/11/we-stopped-our-participation-intl-campaign-against-gender-based-violence	Egyptian Human Rights Organizations Stops their Participation in an International Campaign Against Gender Based Violence	25-11-2011	No author name; Collaborative blog; joint statement; repression; violence against women as tool to keep them away from public sphere.
226.	Mozn Hassan	http://nazra.org/en/2011/12/women-activists-are-still-being-pushed-away-public-sphere-authorities	During the Celebration of the International Day on Women Human Rights Defenders: Women Activists Are Still Being Pushed Away from the Public Sphere by the Authorities	11-11-2011	Feminist knowledge; report; repression; pushed away from public sphere. no author name; collaborative blog.
227.	Mozn Hassan	http://nazra.org/en/2011/02/call-rapid-dissolution-national-council-women	Coalition of Women's NGOs in Egypt: National Council of Women Doesn't Represent Egyptian Women.Call for Rapid Dissolution	24-02-2011	Coalition building; Joint statement; Alternative voices; transparency; resistance; Naming and shaming state feminism.
228.	Mozn Hassan / Nazra for Feminist Studies	http://nazra.org/en/2017/01/violence-has-many-prisons-look-women%E2%80%99s-experiences-prisons-and-detention-centers-egypt	Violence Has Many Prisons: A Look at Women's Experiences in Prisons and Detention Centers in Egypt	11-01-2017	No author's name. Collaborative blog.
229.	Mozn Hassan / Nazra for	http://nazra.org/en/2017/02/nad-eem-center-forcibly-shut-down	Human Rights groups persevere in their advocacy despite	10-02-2017	Repression of activist groups in Egypt.

	Feminist Studies		escalating repression		
230.	Mozn Hassan / Nazra for Feminist Studies	http://nazra.org/en/2017/01/reasons-may-vary-travel-ban-always-patriarchal	Reasons May Vary, but Travel Ban is always Patriarchal: A Feminist Analysis of Experiences of Women Human Rights Defenders in Egyptian Airports	09-01-2017	Restrictions in movement; attacks on women human rights defenders and organisations; collaborative blog, no author's name.
231.	Mozn Hassan / Nazra for Feminist Studies	http://nazra.org/en/2016/12/feminist-activist-and-woman-human-rights-defender-mozn-hassan-and-nazra-feminist-studies	Feminist Activist and Woman Human Rights Defender Mozn Hassan and Nazra for Feminist Studies Included in Asset Freeze Case Associated with Case 173 for the Year 2011 Known as the "NGO Foreign Funding Case"	12-12-2016	No author name; safety issues; Assets freeze; exposing corruption and attacks against activists and civil society organisations.
232.	Mozn Hassan / Nazra for Feminist Studies	http://nazra.org/en/2016/12/closing-statement-%E2%80%9Cit-happens%E2%80%9D-campaign	Closing Statement for "It Happens" Campaign	12-12-2016	Campaigning; rapes, public sphere, civil society targeting. No author's name, collaborative blog.
233.	Mozn Hassan / Nazra for Feminist Studies	http://nazra.org/en/2016/11/political-parties-and-civil-society-organizations-reject-new-associations-law	Political parties and civil society organizations reject the new associations law	24-11-2016	Coalition building; joint statement; mobilisation for freedom of association.
234.	Mozn Hassan / Nazra for Feminist Studies	http://nazra.org/en/2016/05/one-year-after-its-launch-national-strategy-combating-violence-against-women-still-lacking	One year after its launch, the National Strategy for Combating Violence Against Women still lacking Monitoring Mechanism	11-05-2016	No author's name; collaborative blog; accountability; socio-political mapping from a feminist perspective and demands towards the government.
235.	Mozn Hassan / Nazra for Feminist Studies	http://nazra.org/en/2016/09/mozn-hassan-and-nazra-feminist-studies-receive-%E2%80%9Cright-	Mozn Hassan and Nazra for Feminist Studies receive the "Right Livelihood" Award known as the Alternative Nobel	25-09-2016	Influence and outreach.

		livelihood%E2%80%9D-award-known-alternative	for 2016		
236.	Mozn Hassan / Nazra for Feminist Studies	http://nazra.org/en/2016/12/those-awful-tahrir-rapes	Those Awful Tahrir Rapes	08-12-2016	Producing feminist knowledge; blog post Dr.Lama Abu-Odeh Professor of Law - Georgetown University Law Centre; holding space for other women.
237.	Mozn Hassan / Nazra for Feminist Studies	http://nazra.org/en/2016/09/report-2015-house-representative-elections	Report on 2015 House of Representative Elections	06-09-2016	Press release on transitional accountability, constitution building and women's representation.
238.	Mozn Hassan / Nazra for Feminist Studies	http://nazra.org/en/2014/04/egypt-epidemic-sexual-violence-continues	Egypt: Epidemic of Sexual Violence Continues	16-04-2014	A comprehensive report documenting the history of sexual violence during the Egyptian revolution. Exposing the use of violence towards women as a way to silence women and refrain them from participating in the public political sphere.
239.	Mozn Hassan / Nazra for Feminist Studies	http://nazra.org/en/2013/12/egypt-no-acknowledgment-or-justice-mass-protester-killings	Egypt: No Acknowledgment or Justice for Mass Protester Killings... Set Up a Fact-Finding Committee as a First Step	10-12-2013	No author's name. Collaborative blog. Asking for public acknowledgement of massive killings of protesters, access to rights and reparation for victims, fact-finding committees to issue reports based on impartiality, transitional justice, list of violations/history.
240.	Mozn Hassan / Nazra for Feminist Studies	http://nazra.org/en/2012/12/civil-society-organizations-warn-potential-rigging-constitutional-referendum	Civil society Organizations Warn of Potential Rigging of Constitutional Referendum, Demand that NCHR be Excluded from Referendum Monitoring and Oversight of Civil Society	12-12-2012	Joint statement; Call for action; exclusion of civil society from the negotiating table; Exposing transitional neglect/corruption; calls for reporting and handling violations.

241.	Mozn Hassan / Nazra for Feminist Studies	http://nazra.org/en/2012/06/testimonies-recent-sexual-assaults-tahrir-square-vicinity	Testimonies on the Recent Sexual Assaults on Tahrir Square Vicinity	13-06-2012	Detailed documentation and sharing women's testimonies of sexual assaults in the Tahrir protests. http://nazra.org/sites/nazra/files/attachments/nazra_sexual_harassment_testimonies_june2012_en.pdf
242.	Mozn Hassan / Nazra for Feminist Studies	http://nazra.org/en/2011/06/revolution-just-beginning	A Revolution Just Beginning	17-06-2011	Author: Mozn Hassan.
243.	Mozn Hassan / Nazra for Feminist Studies http://nazra.org	http://nazra.org/en/about-us	About us	Homepage	Methodological note: I approach Nazra for Feminist Studies as a collaborative blog. I took the decision to include a thematic selection of posts in the sample as Egypt is a special case and also to show the coalitions for solidarity and resistance. Specific discourses on public sphere, political participation and the role of women human rights defenders. I particularly analysed the blog posts written by Mozn Hassan, who is the founder and was particularly attacked by the state.
244.	Paola Salwam Daher -Murrh and Mind [Myrrhandmint.wordpress.com]	https://myrrhandmint.wordpress.com/2013/02/07/solidarity-with-our-egyptian-sisters/	Solidarity with Our Egyptian Sisters	07-02-2013	https://cafethawrarevolution.wordpress.com/2013/02/07/solidarity-with-our-egyptian-sisters/ Transitional sisterhood.
245.	Paola Salwam Daher	https://myrrhandmint.wordpress.com/tag/womens-rights/	Disgust and Despair, or Yet Another Rant on Lebanon	31-05-2013	Marxist feminist perspective; sectarianism, violence against women; revolution.
246.	Paola Salwam	https://myrrhandmint.wordpress.com/	You Are Not My Comrade	27-03-2013	Critique to the global social forum.

	Daher	s.com/2013/03/27/you-are-not-my-comrade/			Questioning some aspects of the anti-imperialist movement, neo-liberal policies and dictatorship in the region.
247.	Paola Salwam Daher	https://myrrhandmint.wordpress.com/2013/03/19/on-angry-feminists-womens-bodies-and-peoples-sense-of-entitlement/?fbclid=IwAR3spHJhSI91nWeykXok7pS-8uguixmTJHAKYg4Ey9HkK2smgX2jgd2vb0	On Angry Feminists, Women's Bodies, and People's Sense of Entitlement	19-03-2013	Sexual and reproductive rights.
248.	Paola Salwam Daher	https://myrrhandmint.wordpress.com/2012/05/25/23724991844/	Move Over! We Don't Need Your Feminism Now!	25-05-2012	As a revolutionary movement, feminism focuses on tackling gender stereotypes, ensuring social justice and high quality, free education and health for all; fighting against oppression (militarism, capitalism, sectarianism); making sure women and men live free from violence. Answering the question "we don't have time for feminism" during conflict in Lebanon.
249.	Paola Salwam Daher	https://myrrhandmint.wordpress.com/2012/04/20/21422296215/	On a Feminist International – Blogging at the AWID Forum	20-04-2012	Blogging and transnational feminist forums.
250.	Paola Salwam Daher	wordpress.com/2012/01/15/15879963382/https://myrrhandmint.	Moving Mountains	15-01-2012	Sense of community; feminist coalition building for social change.
251.	Paola Salwam Daher	https://myrrhandmint.wordpress.com/2011/12/28/14916396358/	Lebanon: Land of the Men (and of a Few Courageous Women)	28-12-2011	A critique to discriminatory laws and policies; substantial equality and citizenship to women;

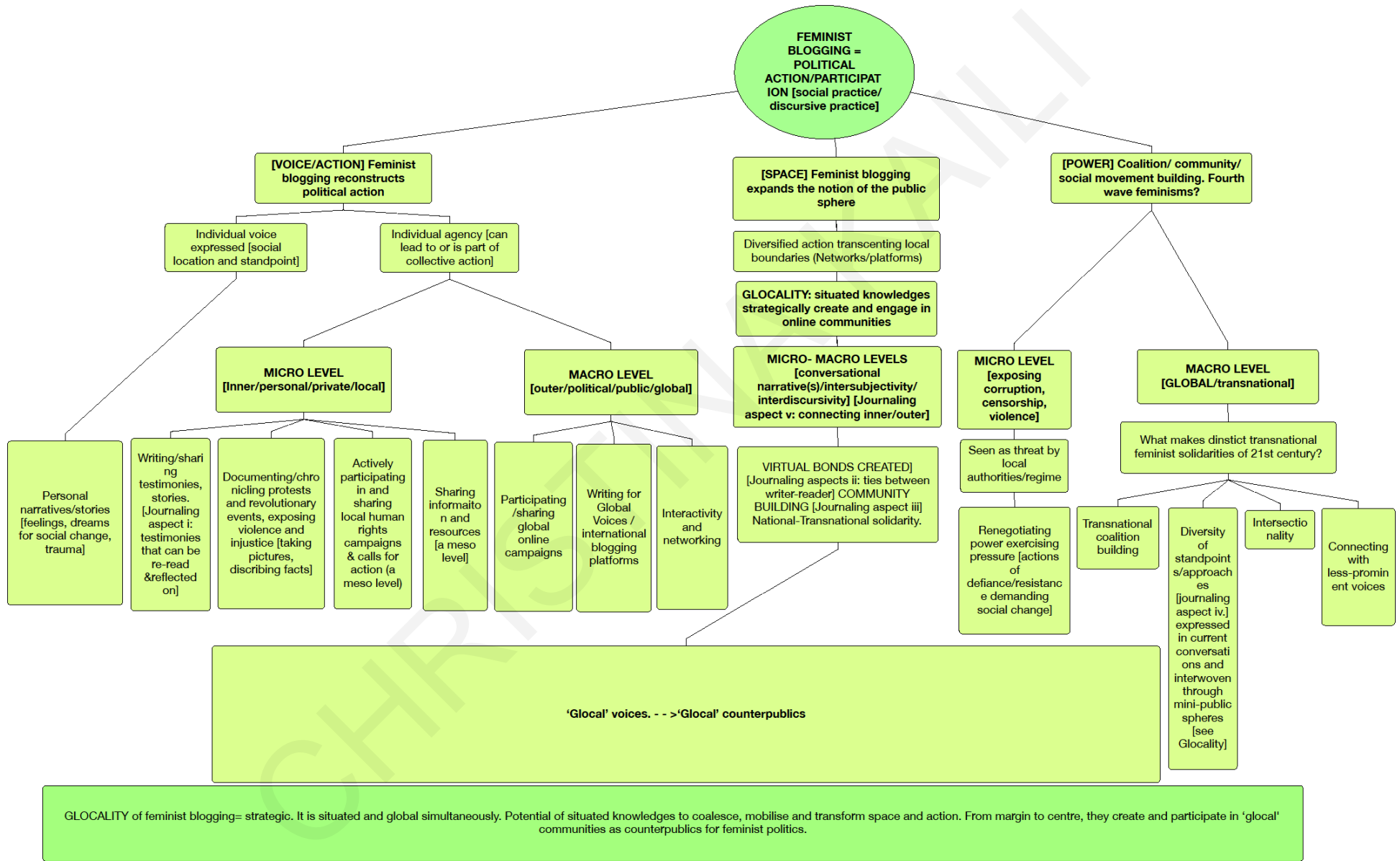
					intersectionality and inclusivity.
252.	Paola Salwam Daher	https://myrrhandmint.wordpress.com/2011/12/25/14765445462/	Social media and feminism	25-12-2011	Cross-blogging/posting on AWID. Glocality and transnational coalition building for feminism. The role of social media. http://yfa.awid.org/2011/12/social-media-and-feminists-opportunities-threats-and-awareness/ (Social Media and Feminists: Opportunities, Threats and Awareness)
253.	Paola Salwam Daher	https://myrrhandmint.wordpress.com/2011/10/15/11472036302/	Lebanese Chronicles: Two	15-10-2011	Sexual violence.
254.	Paola Salwam Daher	https://myrrhandmint.wordpress.com/2011/09/03/9755356355/	Lebanese Chronicles: One	03-09-2011	Holding space for other women; invisible women; domestic workers and migrant workers in Lebanon; harsh conditions.
255.	Razan Ghazzawi -Exiled Razanyyat [razanghazzawi.org]	https://razanghazzawi.org/2017/04/16/this-is-me-speaking/	This is me speaking	16-04-2017	Challenging hegemonic media discourse; alternative knowledge; unique standpoint; encouraging comments.
256.	Razan Ghazzawi	https://razanghazzawi.org/category/syrian-revolution/	Exiled RAZANIYYAT	07-02-2016	The realities of exile, trauma and the Syrian revolution. Exile and diaspora perspectives.
257.	Razan Ghazzawi	https://razanghazzawi.org/2016/03/05/my-coming-out-story/	My coming out story	05-03-2016	Situated knowledge; unique standpoint; queer, non-binary perspective.
258.	Razan Ghazzawi	https://razanghazzawi.org/2014/09/30/razan-and-i-opendemocracy/	Razan and Open Democracy	30-09-2014	Diversification of online political action; glocality; signs of influence and alternative knowledge/power.

					Article in Open Democracy Platform https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/north-africa-west-asia/razan-and-i/
259.	Razan Ghazzawi	https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/north-africa-west-asia/seeing-women-in-revolutionary-syria/	Seeing the women in revolutionary Syria	08-04-2014	Cross-blogging/posting; Article featured in Open Democracy; online platforms as interwoven public spheres; transcending local-global.
260.	Razan Ghazzawi	https://razanghazzawi.org/2014/03/17/action-alert-revolutionary-and-blogger-marcel-shehwaro-detained/	UPDATED: REVOLUTIONARY AND BLOGGER MARCEL SHEHWARO DETAINED AND RELEASED	17-03-2014	Solidarity and support among bloggers; detailed documentation; shared empowerment. Keyword search: blog, blogger.
261.	Razan Ghazzawi	https://razanghazzawi.org/2012/09/19/how-peaceful-revolutionaries-turned-into-relief-activists-in-damascus/	HOW PEACEFUL REVOLUTIONARIES TURNED INTO RELIEF ACTIVISTS IN DAMASCUS	19-09-2012	Narration and storytelling. Holding space for other voices. Keyword search: activism/ volunteerism.
262.	Razan Ghazzawi	https://razanghazzawi.org/2012/05/18/revolutionaries-smile/	REVOLUTIONARIES' SMILE	18-05-2012	Community; solidarity; writing/agency; alternative knowledge; holding space for others and amplifying voices of resistance; censorship. Keyword search: revolution.
263.	Razan Ghazzawi	https://razanghazzawi.org/2011/07/25/few-thoughts-on-syrian-twitter-facebook-and-the-televised-media/	Few Thoughts on Syrian Twitter Facebook and the Televised Media	25-07-2011	Reflections on social media, getting real information out and the underprivileged voices. Affirmative rhetoric.
264.	Razan Ghazzawi	https://razanghazzawi.org/2009/02/26/the-feminist-collective-project-launched/	THE FEMINIST COLLECTIVE PROJECT LAUNCHED!	26-02-2009	Bloggng and transnational feminisms; solidarity and sisterhood. Keyword search: feminism.
265.	Razan Ghazzawi	https://razanghazzawi.org/about/	About page		Social positioning; unique standpoint. Perspective of exile and non-binary politics. The role of diaspora.

266.	Sherry Al-Hayek [sherriecoals.blogspot.com]	http://sherriecoals.blogspot.com/2012/05/friends-court-day-and-nightmares.html	Friends court day and nightmares	05-2012	Solidarity and support among bloggers (including Razan Ghazawy).
267.	Sherry Al-Hayek	http://sherriecoals.blogspot.com/2012/03/blogging-about-syria.html	Blogging about Syria	03-2012	Reasons for writing in English; Glocality aspects.
268.	Sherry Al-Hayek	http://sherriecoals.blogspot.com/2012/03/syrian-women-day.html	Syrian Women's Day!	03-2012	Feminist perspectives/identity.
269.	Sherry Al-Hayek	http://sherriecoals.blogspot.com/2012/03/amnesty-international-call-for-syrian.html	<u>Amnesty International: A call for the Syrian "first Lady" (!)</u>	03-2012	Feelings of hopelessness and indignation to the oppressive system.

Annex V- Mind Map

CHRISTINA KAILI



Annex VI- Code Book

Nodes	Description	Files	References
1. VOICE (AGENCY)	In what ways blogging reconstructs political participation?	50	93
Blogger's social positioning	Narratives of their own social location and posts referring to their bio. For example, the homepage or the About section of their blogs.	29	46
Diversification	Diverse strategies employed by bloggers to communicate political commentary and demands.	34	51
Individual voice	personal is political	55	102
Blogging	What it means to them. Duty. Identity.	32	55
Feelings	Creative narratives; text and poems of bloggers reflecting their inner voice and feelings- Agony, pain and worries behind the courageous self.	26	46
Anger		10	15
Collective feelings		12	16
Empowerment and hope		32	49
Feminist identity	Constructing their own feminist identity and values.	14	17
Language	Perceptions towards the language of their writing (AR, EN, FR).	4	18
Privilege	Perspectives on individual privileges and class issues.	9	11
Political action	Perspectives on political participation, including political activism and human rights action.	17	26
Calls for Action	Petitions and other calls for human rights action	49	74
Amplify the voices		8	8
Campaigning	Campaigning on specific issues and awareness raising	8	8
Demanding political reform	Demanding institutional change. Lobbying and advocating.	12	14

Nodes	Description	Files	References
Lobbying			
Freedom of assembly		6	19
Freedom of expression	Including freedom of press.	16	31
Transparency & accountability	Truth finding and reparation.	6	15
Challenging gender norms	Challenging sexism, culture and religion. Breaking social barriers and gender norms towards social change. Advocating for gender equality. The core values behind coalition building.	31	58
Citizenship and Democracy	Re-defining citizenship and democracy. Insights on elections, quotas.	26	40
Documenting and citizen journalism	Reporting events and facts (such as attacks and violations). Sharing stories. Citizen journalism.	27	41
Exposing corruption		37	62
Exposing violence		42	65
Pictures	Images and visual elements of blogposts.	29	43
Revolutionaries Martyrs	Sharing stories and testimonies of the martyrs and revolutionaries. Those that are in the margin of the margin. Creating memory.	12	14
Online political participation		17	22
Participation in conferences		5	17
Participation in Protests	Demonstrations, rallies, protests, sit ins and other events denouncing the shortcomings of the governments, regimes and authorities.	27	42
2. SPACE (PUBLIC SPHERE)	Different aspects of the public sphere and the public spaces. How access to public sphere is being claimed, re-claimed and re-negotiated. Local boundaries to accessing public space/sphere. RQ: What is the role of blogging in transcending local boundaries and talking to global audiences? and How feminist blogging diversifies in the struggle over the public sphere?	34	55
Community building	a sense of community	58	99
Intersectionality and inclusivity		10	10

Nodes	Description	Files	References
Networking		10	16
Solidarity and support	Creation of virtual bonds through support and solidarity.	65	124
Encouraging comments	Commentary by blog readers and followers. It seems that it is mostly encouraging and solidarity commentary. Conversational narrative with readers.	48	95
‘Glocality’	Transcending space and merging local level with global. Online action and discourse through blogging that shows the politics of place-based needs communicated in the global public sphere.	99	154
Margin and exile	Perceptions on exclusion, marginalization, being invisible, leaving and exile.	37	55
Shrinking public spaces		39	61
Western politics and media (Global level)	Comments criticising France, US, Saudi Arabia and other states about their apathy and hidden agendas with the dictators. Perceptions about the Western media and global politics- referred to as “parallel universe”.	22	54
3. POWER	How does the margin becomes a place of alternative power? Different perceptions and manifestations of power.	0	0
Alternative power		56	102
Influence and outreach	Examples of influence, outreach, political listening and acknowledgment.	30	50
Information and resources	Alternative knowledge; information and resources sharing from the grassroots	57	91
Resistance	Breaking social and political boundaries. Defiance and disobedience towards political powers of oppressive systems.	79	133
Destabilising and (re)negotiating power		36	45
Questioning patriarchal structures	Challenging patriarchal structures, authorities, processes and politics. Naming and shaming.	59	97
Repression (oppressive regime)	Oppressive regime/ authority Manifestation of repression. Statements that show the backlash on personal freedoms and attacks. Discriminatory and repressive policies during transitional period. Hegemonic discourse.	69	104
Attacks against Bloggers and	Restrictions on political action/participation and activism. Physical attacks, arrests,	61	126

Nodes	Description	Files	References
Activists	disappearances. Online and offline threats. Death threats. Travel bans. Defamation. Showing that they are seen as threat.		
Censorship		48	87
Corruption and incompetence	Exposing corruption and incompetence of the political parties and governmental structures. Exposing: nepotism; gaps in free/ fair elections; political party interests.	24	45
Humanitarian crisis	Including conflict and poverty.	15	19
Justice and legal gaps	Perspectives on transitional justice including legal gaps and impunity.	29	62
Constitution drafting		3	4
Sexual violence	Exposing and analysing sexual harassment and violence.	22	43
Transitional regression for women rights	Incidents of regression to women's rights: prevented from participating in transitional bodies, in conferences, in protests, in claiming public space. Regression in accessing civil and political rights. Exposing transitional neglect by the governments.	33	49
Transnational coalition building/ feminism(s)	Cross-movement solidarity/ coalitions among Arab-feminist movements and contribution of blogging in transnational feminism(s). A "Fourth wave"?	59	100
"Arab Spring"	Perceptions on the 2011 revolutions/uprisings as movements for democratic processes.	36	67
Social media role	Perspectives on the role of social media in the blogging practice and for the Arab Spring movement. Aspects of interactivity and virality.	42	78