

BOOK REVIEW

Anna Maria Di Tolla and Ersilia Francesca, editors. *Emerging Actors in Post-Revolutionary North Africa: Gender Mobility and Social Activism*. Studi Magrebini. Napoli: Il Torcoliere, 2017. 489 pp. Open Access. ISBN: 9788867191550.

What happened in December 2010 in Tunisia, with the self-immolation of the young street vendor Mohamed Bouazizi and immediately afterwards at the start of 2011 throughout many other countries of North Africa and the Middle East, has been considered a turning point not only for the region, but also for the whole world. In particular, since then there has been a growing and expanding interest among academics and grassroots politicians in the contexts, actors, and movements that have emerged from underprivileged and marginalized segments of society. By connecting the analysis of diverse forms of inequality, discrimination, and oppression on the one hand and of heterogeneous practices of struggle and resistance on the other, this collective volume in both French and English gives voice to the protagonists as well as to the issues that were at the center of the 2011 uprisings. These same issues were discussed during a three-day international conference entitled *North Africa Transition and Emerging Actors. Berber Movements, Gender Mobility and Social Activism* at the Università di Napoli “L’Orientale” in September 2014. The papers presented at this conference have been assembled into a volume titled *Emerging Actors in Post-Revolutionary North Africa: Gender Mobility and Social Activism*, edited by Anna Maria Di Tolla and Ersilia Francesca.

Divided into two parts, one more centered on socio-economic subjects and the other on gender-related questions, the sixteen contributions highlight the complexity of the contradiction-filled and fragmented reality that characterizes the everyday life of North African citizens, women in particular. The period of transition continuing to the present day is thoroughly explored in almost every chapter, as the authors have attempted to define the major similarities and changes among and within such problematic frameworks, in many cases through extended fieldwork.

The initial chapters aim to examine pressing topics that have arisen in the region since the so-called “Arab Spring.” A common thread connects Giuseppe Cataldi’s analysis of the European Union’s ineffectual position

regarding contemporary migration in the Mediterranean with Ersilia Francesca's research on new economic and social scenarios divided between those—mainly young people and women—who want to change the status quo, and those who represent continuity with past regimes. It continues with Eugenia Ferragina and Giovanni Canitano's study on water and food security issues, up to more theoretical contributions offered by Domenico Copertino on alternative backgrounds of Middle Eastern anthropology and by Pietro Longo on the debate around the Tunisian Law of Awqāf.

The objective of the second section, addressing mostly gender mobility and social activism, is to analyze the specific roles of women as central political actors in the spread of new forms of post-2011 activism, resistance, and resilience, through several points of view from around the area. Starting with Aitemad Muhanna Matar's extensive perspective on young "ordinary" female leaders who have questioned the strict dichotomy between Islamic culture and feminist activism as well as the historic elitism of Arab feminism, three following sub-sections deal with the current situation in the three major North African countries, respectively, Tunisia, Egypt, and Morocco. Converging around Tunisia, Gina Annunziata's stories of militant women revealed by women filmmakers, together with Marta Bellingreri's women's narratives and struggles in contrast with the neo-orientalist homogenization of the "Arab woman" powerfully delineate the heterogeneity coming from within women's and feminist contexts. Moving to Egypt, Rania Abdelrahman writes on the politics of martyrs' mothers, Roswitha Badry presents a view of women's initiatives against sexual harassment and violence in the public sphere, and Margherita Picchi analyzes an Islamic feminist future beyond the religious and secular binary. Pervine Elrefaei offers examples of current literature as acts of resistance, Mounira Soliman comments on youth movements that are re-appropriating public spaces, and Loubna Youssef presents a perspective on linguistic changes in feminist writings. These chapters all stress the importance of connecting such different, but at the same time, interrelated experiences. Concluding with a focus on Morocco, Sara Borrillo's essay on new concepts of women's bodies, questioning the contemporary gender-related societal hierarchy, along with Renata Pepicelli's thoughts on post-ideological, post-secular, and post-feminist women's movements, underline recent practices and strategies of women's struggles.

Taking a comprehensive overview, although each study sheds light on extremely important components of the transformations occurring in the region, the chapters, especially in the first part, could have been more closely linked to each other to give greater consistency to the complexity that characterizes the post-Arab Spring scenario. Nonetheless, this book undeniably represents a remarkable addition to current scholarship and will attract even more interest at a time when grassroots mobilization is emerging throughout the world.

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For additional reading on this subject, the ASR recommends:

Honwana, Alcinda Manuel. 2019. "Youth Struggles: From the Arab Spring to Black Lives Matter & Beyond." *African Studies Review* 62 (1): 8–21. doi:10.1017/asr.2018.144.

Pitcher, M. Anne. 2018. "The ASA at 60: Advocacy in an Age of Tyranny." *African Studies Review* 61 (3): 8–26. doi:10.1017/asr.2018.79.