

Afrikanistik-Aegyptologie-Online

Sadiqi, Fatima (ed.) 2016. *Women's Movements in Post-“Arab Spring” North Africa. Comparative Feminist Studies Series.* New York: Palgrave Macmillan/ Springer Nature. 325 p., 2 figures b/w, 1 table, Hardcover: ISBN 978-1-137-52047-0 96,29€. e-book: ISBN 978-1-137-50675-7 76,99€

Martha Christine Süß, Universität Heidelberg

urn:nbn:de:0009-10-45208

Review

<1> In 2010, seemingly sudden and unexpected uprisings in different Northern African countries broke out, later to be called the 'Arab Spring'. This movement started in Tunisia and spread to other Northern African countries quickly. Later, it reached the Middle East. It mobilized the masses, all classes, genders and ages. The movement presented itself as egalitarian and leaderless and was well documented by international modern media. Although women played a crucial role not only in these revolutions, their role during situations of societal crisis is still understudied. "Gender issues are central to both the political and cultural aspects of movements, yet gender is often ignored in studies of revolution and nationalism", Dina Wahba one of the volume's author states. This gap is most welcome bridged by the collection of articles at hand, which are up-to-date and in depth analyses of the so called 'Arab Spring'.

<2> The volume is divided into two main parts, preceded by an introduction. Part one contains six chapters, while part two entails fourteen chapters. As Sadiqi, the editor, states, the first part provides an overview of post-revolutionary conditions and developments in the North African nation states and mentions theoretical aspects. The second part focuses on specific countries.

<3> In the introductory chapter "The Centrality of Women's Movements in the Post-revolution Dynamics in North Africa", the editor presents each chapter shortly. She introduces the volume's central argument: Different heritages from colonial rule by different European countries as well as recent political developments have left Northern African countries with completely societal situations. These situations left the populations of the different countries in unsatisfying living conditions. They finally led to the so called 'Arab Spring'. Sadiqi highlights the crucial role women played in these revolutionary processes in the different countries.

2. The Articles

<4> The first chapter of part one is Sadiqi's article „The Center: A Post-revolution Space for Women's Movements in North Africa: Morocco as an Example“ (p.15-30). The author sees secularism and Islamism as the two main paradigms of today's societies of North African countries. In addition, she sees an emerging paradigm she calls 'the Center'. Sadiqi shows that both paradigms make women's rights their topic. In doing so, these paradigms might instrumentalize women's interests to achieve their political and/or religious goals, as the author argues. Sadiqi greatly disassembles the role women's rights and interests play in the two paradigms. She names the space in which the two paradigms touch, while caring about women's rights and interests, 'the Center'. However, as this paradigm in Egypt's political landscape is brand-new and has no clearly defined outlines or political and/or religious actors, it will become easier to grasp with time. Thus, the concept of 'the Center' described in the article was not fully palpable to the reviewer. Sadiqi however has been the first to describe it and draw attention to this new development. In doing so, she created consciousness for the new paradigm and a starting point for further thinking and research.

<5> In "Women and the Arab Spring: A Transnational, Feminist Revolution"(p.31-44), Miriam Cooke sheds light on women's roles in different uprisings and revolutions throughout history. Cooke uses women's fights for equality to illustrate a general pattern in situations of societal crisis or revolution: During difficult situations norms are devaluated. A shared goal (for example the toppling of the regime) is made priority. As the crisis subsides and the society becomes more stable, norms are mostly reinforced. The reviewer would like to name this pattern 'in-out-dynamics'. In the context of the 'Arab Spring', this means that in revolutionary situations the active participation of women was appreciated. After overcoming the acute crises, however, traditional gender norms were reinforced. Cooke convincingly theorizes what has been observed since the French Revolution: after revolutions, women's living conditions do seldom improve significantly.

<6> Likewise focusing on the 'in-out-dynamic', Margot Badran investigates ways of "Creative Disobedience: Feminism, Islam and Revolution in Egypt" (p.45-60). She focuses on the interaction between Islam, feminism and revolutionary processes. Patriarchal structures of societies and Islam need to be separated, she argues. Only after this is done, norms can be permanently changed. Thus, equality can be achieved not only in situations of crisis (when norms are put aside easily, as has been shown by Cooke) but also in stable societal situations. While Cooke theorizes the 'in-out-dynamics', Badran adds a concretization and a practical starting point to overcoming this phenomenon. Cooke makes the reader understand what is happening while Badran shows the first obstacle which has to be overturned: Patriarchy instrumentalizing Islam. The reviewer finds Cookes as well as Badrans contributions great starting points for further research for academics as well as food for thought for activists.

<7> Chapter five, Dina Wahba's "Gendering the Egyptian Revolution" (p.61-76) uses a wide range of scientific approaches to understand the interrelations of revolution and gender. The main goal of protesters, she argues, is to remove the oppressive regime. Maintenance of this patriarchal regime was the goal of the state-led counterrevolution. In describing this fightback of Egyptian patriarchal regime, Wahba describes the already well-known 'in-out-dynamic'. In the volume at hand, she is not the first to describe this dynamic. But she points out the instrumentalization of women implied in the 'in-out-dynamic' during not only the 2011 revolution particularly clearly.

<8> Céline Lesourd's contribution "The Lipstick on the Edge of the Well: Mauritanian Women and Political Power (1960-2014)" (p.77-93) focuses on women's low representation as well as instrumentalization in institutionalized politics. One problem is the constriction of women to secondary positions. She shows brilliantly that installing quotas and putting women into high positions in institutionalized politics alone might not be sufficient in achieving gender equality. Also, she considers women instrumentalized to help men maintain their powerful positions. She accurately describes Mauritania's

political landscape and its fallacies. Dismantling patriarchal structures that confine women to 'do politics' in subtle ways of speaking. In the field of institutionalized politics, they remain instrumentalized. Thus, the author clearly points out what needs to be changed in Mauritania's patriarchal makeup as well as political landscape to achieve full gender equality.

<9> Moha Ennaji introduces the volume's second part with his article "About North African Women's Rights After the Arab Spring" (p.97-107). In his contribution, he uses interviews to reveal female agency in the North African region in connection with the Arab Spring. The reader once again finds an example of the 'in-out-dynamics'. Ennaji dubs the partaking of women in those dynamics 'agency'. Although the term 'agency' is widely known in sociology, the reviewer would have appreciated a more explicit definition of the concept. Like the preceding authors, Ennaji sees the need to topple not only the regime, but patriarchy.

<10> In "Women's Rights and Equality: Egyptian Constitutional Law" (p.109-126), Ellen McLarney examines the Egyptian constitutions of 2012 and 2014. Particularly interesting to observe is §10: It mandates Egyptian women to find a balance between their private and public duties. In western countries, chasing after the so called 'work-life-balance' is part of most women's lives and is seen as a sign of emancipation and gender equality. However, in the Egyptian case it is interpreted as a sign of the Islamist make-up of the country. In Northern American media coverage, §10 of the 2012 Egyptian Constitution was interpreted as repressive towards women and as a sign of Islamic values. McLarney shows that Northern American journalistic interpretation of Egyptian politics has not overcome its 'Western-centrism'.

<11> Moushira Khattab's article "The Struggle of Egyptian Women for Equal Rights Continues: Two Steps Forward, One Step Back" (p.127-142) focuses on the repetition of the 'in-out-dynamics' over the course of the 20th century in Egypt. Khattab shares Ennajis view: Women must take up high positions in institutionalized politics. She points out that patriarchal and Islamic views and structures of society are still persistent in Egypt. Filling political positions of power with female ministers might not be enough to achieve full-fledged gender equality. In addition, a restructuring of the patriarchal society is needed.

<12> Névine El Nossery in her article "Women, Art, and Revolution in the Streets of Egypt" (p.143-157) describes an artistic revolution running parallel to the Egyptian 'Arab Spring'. Egyptian women express themselves and voice their demands publicly. The author portrays a sort of parallel public sphere. In this sphere, equality is to be achieved via freedom of artistic expression. The article provides a model of lived equality in one aspect of society. It might be a role model for outstretching equality to other parts of society. Therefore, the author's choice to call the artistic movement a parallel revolution seems appropriate.

<13> In Chapter 11, "Notes on Sudanese Women's Activism, Movements, and Leadership" (p.160-176) by Sondra Hale, the author describes different Sudanese women's movements. She finds that there is no unified women's movement in Sudan: movements and activists are very diverse. Hale compiles knowledge of different Sudanese women's movements. The article presents more of a historical and geographical overview than an analysis, as the title rightfully suggests. The reviewer finds this overview encompassing. It would be a great starting point for further analysis of the topic.

<14> The first article to focus on Libya is by Amanda Rogers, "Revolutionary Nuns or Totalitarian Pawns: Evaluating Libyan State Feminism After Mu'ammar al-Gaddafi" (p.177-193). It depicts the situation of women before, during and after Gaddafi's rule. During the country's recent instability, the patriarchal make-up of society and gender oppression became a secondary thread. Rogers shows how in this post-revolutionary crisis many movements and initiatives were founded to promote gender equality. Thus, encompassing measures to change the patriarchal structures of Libya's society are taken. Rogers shows that gender equality is hindered by traditional culture, the instrumentalization of Islam for political and social purposes as well as Gaddafi's specific way of ruling. These impeding conditions must be addressed intersectionally.

<15> Lilia Labidi's contribution “Tunisian Women's Literature and the Critique of Authority: Sources, Contexts, and the Tunisian 'Arab Spring' ” (p.195-210) delves into the way two Tunisian women throughout history have shaped their relationship to and participated in (colonial) political structures of the time. She has gone far back into the past and evaluated old resources. In the same article she also investigates the newly emerged genre of cartoon art as women's means of expressing (political) opinions. It is, however, not clear why she chooses these two topics. And why does she combine them the way she does? A paragraph answering these questions would be helpful to the reader.

<16> “Engendering Tunisia's Democratic Transition: What Challenges Face Women?” (p.211-221), written by Nabila Hamza gives an historical overview of Tunisian 'state feminism' under the Bourguiba and Benali regimes. The author also describes women's activism during the 2011 revolution. Again, the 'in-out-dynamics' are mentioned. The general applicability of the phenomenon called the 'in-out-dynamics' is demonstrated. Hamza cites the example of Tunisia and its history to illustrate more practical aspects of the concept.

<17> Khadija Arfaouis article “Women and Leadership in the Post-Arab Spring: The Case of Tunisia” (p.223-234) explores how Tunisian women fought against a deterioration of their living conditions in the aftermath of the 2011 revolution. She argues that in order to maintain and improve women's situations in Tunisia constantly, the patriarchal organization of society must be overcome.

<18> In “The Algerian Woman Issue: Struggles, Islamic Violence, and Co-optation” (p.235-249) Rachid Tlemçani depicts the relationship between women, Islam and politics. Islam is used to justify authoritarian regimes and to marginalize women. The author considers it an obstacle impeding gender equality. To remove this obstacle, he argues, religion and politics need to be separated. In a nutshell, he proposes to change the (patriarchal) structure of society, as do other authors in the same volume. Tlemçani's article is really pleasant to read. He states clearly what he is examining and in which order. This makes it very comprehensible.

<19> Chapter Seventeen, Soumia Boutkhil's “Moroccan Women in Limbo: On Liminal Citizenship and the Quest for Equality” (p.251-265) shows how the two diametrically opposite discourses of Islamism and secularism deny Moroccan women their (constitutional) rights. This denial culminates in what the author calls 'Liminal Citizenship' for Moroccan women. The article joins in the discussion other articles have opened before: Is it helpful to establish a quota? Is this measure sufficient to reach full gender equality? The author shows that the implementation of women's constitutional rights is not sufficient for achieving equality. Additionally, (unconscious) cultural attitudes and practices have to be changed as well. Installing a quota and putting women in high positions in institutionalized politics on its own is not sufficient, she argues.

<20> Rachida Kerkech in “Moroccan Women's Cultural Rights: A Psycho-social Perspective on Cultural Paradoxes” (p.267-282) examines the (unconscious) socio-cultural attitudes held in the patriarchal Moroccan society. These attitudes, the author argues, deny women the full enjoyment of their cultural rights. The reviewer could not fully grasp the author's concept of 'Cultural Rights'. Maybe the concept is widely known. Still, the reviewer would have found a more encompassing definition helpful. Her analysis of (unconscious) socio-cultural attitudes in Moroccan society is a brilliant illustration of the notion that gender equality needs to be worked on intersectionally in all aspects of society.

<21> “Women's Economic Empowerment in Morocco: The Case of Social Entrepreneurship” (p.283-298) by Manal Elattir, Yamina El Kirat El Allame and Youness Tihm focuses on different programs to empower Moroccan women economically. They conclude that traditional development aid programmes do not help women's situations sustainably. The authors contrastingly portray a self-help organization empowering women sustainably. At the end of their contribution they present concrete measures to enable organizations to achieve the goal of empowering women. Omitting theoretical aspects, they provide practical and precise tactics of empowering women. The article reads like the output of a sort of think tank.

<22> Through the last article in the volume, “Reflections on the 20-February Movement: Hope Renewed,

Hope Frustrated for Women” (p.299-312), Abdellatif Zaki aims at discerning and describing main discourse lines of the 20-February Movement in Morocco. He develops border stones of a theoretical framework that should help to analyze these discourses. He establishes several criteria a movement must display in order to be called a revolution. With the aid of these criteria he explains the fact that living conditions of women in Morocco did not improve despite women's partaking in the Moroccan struggles. The criteria he outlines are well thought out and could be taken as a manual for overcoming the patriarchal makeup of Moroccan society in a peaceful way. However, the author might have elaborated further on why he choose exactly these criteria and believes them to be valid.

3. General Assessment

<23> The articles in the volume provide a thorough overview as well as analyses of women's movements in Northern African countries during the 'Arab Spring' as well as before. The authors use wide spread theoretical approaches to shed light on the struggle for gender equality, its successes and repercussions.

<24> While reading the articles one after the other, some similar outcomes of analyses surface in different authors' contributions. Consequently, they are catching the reader's attention. For example, many articles describe what the reviewer has dubbed the 'in-out-dynamics': women's participation during a time of acute political crisis or revolution is highly welcomed, nevertheless once the acute crisis has subsided they were mostly relegated to their traditional roles. This aspect of women's movements and revolutions is discussed very often and from various angles by the different authors. Its wide applicability is confirmed and the authors agree with each other. The outcomes of their discussions are strikingly similar. The most important aspect of the whole volume is the discussion about the so-called 'in-out-dynamics', the reviewer thinks. Another aspect discussed in several articles which struck the reader's attention is the discussion of penal and family codes. However, these discussions and outcomes of analyses could have been connected more explicitly. A résumé at the end of the volume would have been a great opportunity to provide the reader with an overview of the article's similarities and differences.

<25> As mentioned above, the volume is divided into two parts. While the first one aims at theorizing the political aftermath of the 'Arab Spring', the second is meant to provide the reader with "specific country experiences" (see table of content). However, the reviewer could not clearly discern these two parts. Chapter 7 "About North African Women's Rights After the Arab Spring" (p.97-108) by Moha Ennaji for example is grouped in part two. While part two is meant to entail articles covering specific countries, Ennaji's article covers multiple countries in the Northern African region. Chapter 4 "Creative Disobedience: Feminism, Islam, and Revolution in Egypt" (p.45-60) by Margot Badran is grouped in part one. However, it explicitly discusses Egypt.

<26> The articles provide theoretical approaches ranging from Postcolonial Theory and a political critique of Neo-liberalism and Patriarchy as ruling system s to challenging Habermas' notion of the 'public sphere' (p.144). This plurality of frameworks makes for a wide and varied room to accommodate and shed light on the varying phenomena being described in the volume. One field, though, the reviewer would have appreciated: the theorization and definition of often-used concepts such as 'woman/ women'. Questions arise such as: What makes up a woman? Are all authors referring to a unified definition of the concept or do their ideas differ? Is it a biological one? Or is 'woman' defined in terms of 'doing gender'? Are transwomen and/or a concept of a spectrum of femininity included? And if the authors' concepts differ, would the application of one author's understanding to another author's results challenge or alter these results? Can Northern African women's concept(s) of womanhood be grasped by western feminist thinking at all? Do the authors situate their contributions in a specific strand of feminist theory? If so, which one, how and why? What does this positioning mean for their analyses? Traditional understandings as well as characteristics of gender are luckily mostly challenged in the volume's articles as in the field of gender studies as a whole. A part of achieving

gender equality is to overcome traditional gender roles. These traditional understandings are deeply ingrained in the thinking of most people in most societies. Thus, it is very important to (re-)define and challenge them by thinking critically.

<27> Minor mistakes in editing (for example on p. 149 where one street artist's birth year should be given the text just states "b. 19xx") cannot compromise the volume's appealing layout. It contains notes on the contributors as well as an index and a bibliography with useful suggestions for further reading at the end of most articles.

<28> It provides the reader with a comprehensive overview and many detailed analyses of politics and women's movements in Northern Africa. Not only are individual women's experiences described, but the impact of so-called superstructures as colonialism and patriarchy, state feminism programs and constitutional texts on women's everyday lives is highlighted. The volume is a worthy read for scholars of feminism, gender studies, political as well as social sciences. It also makes for an informative read for interested non-scholars by introducing them to views rarely found in (western) media coverage. Some aspects of the volume could be structured more explicitly. These are the segmentation into two parts and (a) definition(s) of the concept 'woman/women'. Also, many articles refer to each other explicitly or implicitly, complement or challenge each other with contradictory argumentations. These connections could have been highlighted more clearly. Many articles share similar outcomes of their analyses: They describe political revolutions as not being able to achieve equal living conditions permanently. It appears that this can only be done in situations of societal crisis. To achieve equality permanently there need to be changes of patriarchal norms and structures of societies besides political changes. By discussing what the reviewer dubbed the 'in-out-dynamics' from various angles, the articles create a point of departure for further academic research as well as learning for women's movements. The volume opens up a field of discussion and further research opportunities. As it is only partly focused on theory, the volume might also stipulate the invention of new tactics in struggling for full gender equality. Thus, the volume does not only contribute to the scientific community, but also to more practically oriented women's movements in Northern African countries and beyond.

Lizenz

Empfohlene Zitierweise

Süß MC (2017). Sadiqi, Fatima (ed.) 2016. Women's Movements in Post-“Arab Spring“ North Africa. Afrikanistik Agyptologie Online, Vol. 2017. (urn:nbn:de:0009-10-45208)

Bitte geben Sie beim Zitieren dieses Artikels die exakte URL und das Datum Ihres letzten Besuchs bei dieser Online-Adresse an.

Volltext

Kommentare

Es liegen noch keine Kommentare vor.

Möchten Sie Stellung zu diesem Artikel nehmen oder haben Sie Ergänzungen?

Kommentar einreichen.