

Amplifying Voices of Resilience: A Review of *Women Rising*

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Abstract: This research article reviews the book *Women Rising: In and Beyond the Arab Spring*, edited by Rita Stephan and Mounira M. Charrad. The primary objective of this article is to critically examine the book, assessing its merits and demerits. Comprising forty chapters authored by diverse contributors, the book employs interviews, translated essays, visual representations, and excerpts from participatory journals to amplify the courageous voices of women across borders and throughout history. The central focus is on the agency of women in the context of the Arab Spring, emphasizing themes of resistance, revolution, and reform, while also highlighting the challenges they face, including sexual threats, body shaming, and attempts to discredit their work. Notable figures discussed include Afrah Nasser, Tawakkol Karman, and others. The book also examines significant movements and gender-based laws and policies in these regions. It employs captivating language and supports its arguments with data and citations, maintaining a page-turning pace through its diverse authorship. *Women Rising* explores patriarchal constructs, classism, and the role of women as active agents of change, making it a relevant and contemporary resource.

Key Words: women rising, Arab Spring, women's activism, gender equality, islamic feminism

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“You can crush the flowers but you cannot delay spring” (Stephan and Charret 2020 P. 190)

Women Rising is an ambitious and comprehensive collection that serves as a powerful platform to amplify the unwavering and resilient voices of women from various corners of the Arab world and across the annals of history. This extensive compilation spans a substantial volume comprising a remarkable forty chapters, each thoughtfully authored by a diverse group of individuals. The inclusion of interviews, translated essays, visually arresting representations, and compelling excerpts from participatory journals creates a multi-dimensional narrative that speaks loudly and authoritatively.

The book resonates with an assertive and persuasive tone, making it impossible for readers to remain untouched by the profound messages conveyed within its pages. It is not just a book but a manifesto for women's empowerment, an anthem for equality, and a testament to the indomitable spirit of women throughout the ages.

Moreover, *Women Rising* is more than just a collection of stories and voices; it's a meticulously crafted work that provides additional value through its insightful features. An inspiring foreword sets the stage for the reader, immersing them in the profound journey that lies ahead. Comprehensive notes and an extensive index ensure that readers can delve deeper into the material, uncovering nuances and connecting the dots between the various narratives.

In addition to this exceptional collection, it's important to recognize that there are also articles and studies on similar subjects, such as Saskia Glas and Neils Spierings' study (2019) in the *European Journal of Politics and Gender*, shedding light on how "supporters of Muslim feminism" are often disregarded by quantitative researchers (283-310). These studies add depth and nuance to the conversation, enriching the understanding of feminism within various cultural contexts.

Furthermore, Haneen Ghabra and Bernadette Marie Calafell's article, "From Failure and Allyship to Feminist Solidarities: Negotiating Our Privileges and Oppressions Across Borders" (2018) in *Text and Performance Quarterly* explores the (im)possibilities of feminist alliances

across difference and the importance of intersectional feminist ethics in creating alliances grounded in shared experiences of Otherness rather than specific identities.

Sara Salem's article, "On Transnational Feminist Solidarity: The Case of Angela Davis in Egypt" (2018), delves into Angela Davis's visit to Egypt in the early 1970s and how it catalyzed transnational connections of solidarity between Davis and Egyptian feminists, shedding light on the complexities of feminist organizing, hierarchies within "universal sisterhood," and the necessity for women's organizations focused on the third world. Further in his article "Arab Spring Era: Winds of Change in the Direction of Gender Equality for Tunisian Women" (2018), Gadi Hitman explores the transformative impact of the Arab Spring on the status of Tunisian women, highlighting the shift towards greater gender equality.

One significant aspect of *Women Rising* is its contextual richness. By offering a historical backdrop of the Arab Spring, it equips the reader with a deeper understanding of the chapters within the book. This historical context serves as a framework for comprehending the struggles, triumphs, and transformations of the women whose stories are featured in the book.

Almost every chapter within this comprehensive compilation delves extensively into the agency of women in the context of the Arab Spring, meticulously examining themes of resistance, revolution, and reform. Concurrently, it offers a critical examination of the myriad challenges and hardships encountered by these women activists. These challenges encompass threats of a sexual nature, instances of body shaming, and concerted efforts to undermine the legitimacy of their work, all of which underscore the resilience and determination of these activists.

Women Rising presents an array of inspirational women whose contributions span a wide spectrum, ranging from labor activism to intellectual pursuits that engage with a multiplicity of issues such as labor injustice, class discrimination, queerness, domestic violence, and other deeply rooted problems emanating from gender inequality. Notable figures featured in the book include Afrah Nasser, renowned for her articulate use of words as a catalyst for change, Tawakkol Karman, a Nobel Peace Prize laureate emblematic of unwavering commitment to justice, and Rasha Jarhum, a dedicated advocate for peace and human rights.

The book also highlights figures like Mafis, who have significantly contributed to the discourse on gender equality, Aliaa Elmahdy, whose art challenged societal conventions, Rose Ghurayyib, a prominent labor activist, and Summer Nasser, a tireless advocate for social justice.

Margot Badran's scholarly contributions have left an indelible mark on the discourse surrounding women's rights in the Arab world, further enriching the narrative.

Importantly, *Women Rising* transcends the mere celebration of successful women activists from the Arab Spring and provides a nuanced portrayal of those who have encountered setbacks, such as Shabaan. These narratives serve as a compelling reminder of the formidable obstacles that women frequently confront in their pursuit of equality and justice. The resilience and determination displayed by these women, even in the face of adversity, exemplify their unwavering commitment to catalyzing change in the Arab world and beyond, reinforcing their indomitable spirit.

The volume not only delves into the stories of these remarkable women but also provides insightful glimpses into significant movements that have left an indelible mark on the Arab world's landscape. These movements, such as 'Don't Touch My Child,' 'Stop the Killing,' 'Brides of Freedom,' 'Jasmin Movement,' 'Syrian Sisterhood,' and 'April 6 Egyptian Movement,' have each played a crucial role in challenging the status quo and advocating for gender equality and women's rights. Through these movements, the book uncovers the collective power of women who have come together to confront the prevailing social, cultural, and political norms, demanding justice and change.

Additionally, the text does not shy away from exploring the controversies and scandals that have shaped the discourse surrounding women's rights in the Arab world, such as the notorious 'Fadihat Aseel Alawadhi.' This inclusion highlights the complexities and challenges faced by women activists and the immense courage required to confront deeply ingrained patriarchal structures.

The volume also offers a nuanced understanding of the legal and policy aspects of gender equality in the region. It references pivotal laws and policies that have marked significant milestones in the journey towards women's rights, including the Tunisian Law of Personal Status from 1956, which laid the groundwork for women's legal rights, Saudi Arabia's historic 2017 law permitting women to drive, a momentous step toward women's mobility and independence. Jordan's repeal of Article 308, which previously allowed rape if the rapist married the victim, and Lebanon's abolition of Article 522, both critical in combating gender-based violence and discrimination, are highlighted as notable legal advancements. Furthermore,

the text acknowledges Tunisia's 2014 constitution, which promotes the language of equality, solidifying the nation's commitment to gender parity and women's empowerment.

In sum, *Women Rising* not only narrates the experiences of women activists but also provides a broader perspective on the social, cultural, and legal contexts in which these women have striven for equality and justice. This multifaceted approach underscores the profound impact of women's voices and actions in reshaping the Arab world's landscape and advancing the cause of gender equality.

The language employed within the text is a masterful blend of ornate and captivating prose, characterized by its deft use of rhetorical devices and vivid imagery. Phrases such as 'obituary of democracy' and 'domino effect' are strategically woven into the narrative, lending a poetic quality to the discourse while simultaneously conveying the gravity of the events and concepts they describe. This artful language elevates the text beyond mere documentation, imbuing it with a literary dimension that engages the reader on both intellectual and emotional levels.

Furthermore, the authors of this volume bolster their arguments with a rigorous foundation of statistics, data, and citations, reinforcing the validity and substantiation of their assertions. This scholarly approach ensures that the book is not merely a collection of anecdotes and narratives but a meticulously researched and intellectually sound examination of the issues at hand. It allows readers to navigate through the intricate web of women's struggles in the Arab world with confidence in the accuracy of the information presented.

One of the distinguishing features of *Women Rising* is the collaborative effort of over forty different authors, contributing to the book's vibrant and dynamic energy. This diverse authorship brings a multiplicity of perspectives and voices to the forefront, enriching the narrative with a kaleidoscope of experiences and insights. Such diversity not only provides readers with a varied and multifaceted exploration of women's activism but also maintains an engaging and page-turning pace throughout the book, ensuring that readers remain captivated from start to finish.

The text is also punctuated by the resonant echoes of slogans and revolutionary chants that have reverberated through the streets and hearts of women activists. Phrases like 'Women are complete not complements' and "Have Mercy! Have Mercy! The Egyptian woman has been screaming for years, and everyone turns a blind eye" (Mafis 2020, p. 99) not only serve as rallying cries but also illustrate the enduring power of language and rhetoric in the struggle for

women's rights. These slogans are a testament to the persistence and resilience of women activists, and they are seamlessly integrated into the narrative, providing a vibrant and authentic connection to the movements and voices featured in the book.

One of the particularly captivating and intellectually stimulating aspects of this book is its thoughtful exploration of complex ideas, profound observations, and compelling thoughts. It delves into the patriarchal logic that systematically constructs the normative worker as male, effectively excluding women from essential decision-making roles within labor activism (Naber 2020, p. 36). This critical analysis unravels the intricate web of gender biases that underlie labor movements and serves as a testament to the depth of scholarly inquiry undertaken in this work.

Additionally, the book's chapters shed light on the inherently gendered aspects of classism and authoritarianism, underscoring the intricate intersections between gender, social class, and political power. The insightful examination of these dynamics reveals the multifaceted nature of women's struggles in the Arab world, highlighting the importance of addressing these issues within a gendered framework. This nuanced perspective advances the scholarly discourse on gender in the context of broader socio-political structures.

Moreover, the book firmly establishes the viewpoint that women are not passive victims but active agents of change. It celebrates the agency and resilience of women who have taken it upon themselves to challenge the status quo, advocate for their rights, and initiate transformation. This perspective reframes the narrative, emphasizing the proactive and instrumental role women have played in shaping the course of history in the Arab world.

Another noteworthy aspect is the book's meticulous attention to detail and acknowledgment of the collaborative nature of this work. Each chapter is accompanied by acknowledgments, recognizing the contributions of the many individuals who have collectively contributed to the book's creation. This collaborative ethos not only underscores the significance of solidarity in the struggle for gender equality but also reflects the spirit of unity that has driven women's movements in the Arab world.

Additionally, the book includes a chapter that delves into the development of a university course titled "Genesis of Gender and Women's Studies at the University of Fez, Morocco" by Fatima Sadiqi. This chapter provides a valuable case study of the academic growth and institutionalization of gender and women's studies in the Arab world, showcasing the scholarly and educational aspects of the book.

Women Rising maintains its scholarly relevance by engaging with contemporary discourse and offering a nuanced exploration of key concepts within the realm of gender studies and activism. Notably, it dissects the distinctions between secular feminism and Islamic feminism, delving into the complexities of these ideological frameworks in the Arab world. This examination sheds light on the multifaceted nature of women's movements and the diversity of perspectives that contribute to the broader discourse on gender and equality. The book thus serves as a valuable resource for scholars and activists seeking to understand the intricate intersections of feminism in the Arab context.

Within its pages, the text delves into the concept of a Feminist Ethos, as exemplified by figures like Asmaa Mahfouz, providing a comprehensive examination of the principles and ideologies that underpin feminist activism in the region. Additionally, the inclusion of references to Western feminists such as Judith Butler and Simone de Beauvoir further enriches the narrative, demonstrating the global dialogues and cross-cultural influences that have shaped women's movements in the Arab world.

Moreover, *Women Rising* explores the innovative ways in which women have harnessed digital spaces and audiovisual media to amplify their voices and dissent. This exploration reflects the contemporary relevance of the book as it delves into the challenges posed by the age of post-truth, where the internet serves as both a platform for truth-seeking and a menacing space for disinformation and online harassment. This analysis underscores the ongoing struggle for truth and justice in the digital age, positioning the book at the forefront of discussions surrounding technology, activism, and gender in the Arab world.

The book also provides readers with invaluable insights into the emergence of Arab women's activism in cyberspace as early as 1999, a testament to the pioneering spirit of women who harnessed the power of the internet to advocate for their rights and challenge societal norms. Furthermore, it elucidates the establishment of The Arab Women Solidarity Association United (AWSA United) as a crucial platform for Arab women in the diaspora to express solidarity and support for women in the Arab world, highlighting the transnational nature of women's movements and the importance of cross-border alliances.

A critical examination of *Women Rising* reveals important considerations related to the book's inherent limitations. While this work undeniably represents a significant and commendable collection of women activists' voices from Islamic countries, it is imperative to acknowledge

that it may not encompass the full spectrum of women's diverse experiences within these regions. The selection of authors and chapters is inevitably a subjective process, influenced by a variety of factors, and as such, it is plausible that alternative perspectives and narratives may not have found a place within the book. This subjectivity can potentially limit the overall scope and representation within the text.

Furthermore, it is worth noting that the book primarily centers its focus on the Arab Spring and its aftermath. While these events undoubtedly had a profound impact on women's activism in the region, it is equally vital to recognize that there have been other pivotal moments and movements in the history of women's activism within Islamic countries that also warrant attention and exploration. The book's emphasis on the Arab Spring may inadvertently overshadow these other significant milestones and movements, thereby presenting a somewhat skewed historical narrative.

It is essential for readers to approach *Women Rising* with a nuanced perspective, appreciating it as an invaluable contribution to the field of gender studies and women's activism. The book undoubtedly offers profound insights into the experiences of women in Islamic countries and the transformative power of their activism. However, at the same time, it is crucial to remain cognizant of its inherent limitations, primarily stemming from the subjectivity of the selection process and the book's specific historical focus.

In scholarly discourse, recognizing and engaging with such limitations is a fundamental aspect of critical analysis. While *Women Rising* offers a rich and illuminating portrayal of women's activism, its readers should supplement their understanding with additional research and diverse perspectives to gain a more comprehensive view of the multifaceted landscape of women's experiences in Islamic countries. The book serves as an essential starting point for this exploration, prompting further inquiry and a deeper understanding of the complexities surrounding women's roles and struggles within these regions.

In conclusion, *Women Rising*, despite the recognized limitations discussed, remains an exceptional and indispensable resource that enriches the scholarly landscape across a wide array of academic disciplines. Scholars, researchers, students, educators, and anyone with an interest in feminism, women's studies, political science, social science, political history, gender studies, and the humanities will find this book to be a valuable addition to their academic pursuits.

The book serves as a comprehensive and illuminating exploration of women's activism across various Islamic countries, offering profound insights into their struggles, achievements, and agency. Its multifaceted content, which encompasses interviews, essays, visual representations, and meticulously researched data, provides a rich tapestry of women's experiences in these contexts. *Women Rising* not only informs but also inspires critical thinking, facilitating profound discussions on critical topics such as gender equality and social justice.

While the book may not claim to provide a definitive or exhaustive account of women's experiences and activism in Islamic countries, its thought-provoking nature and comprehensive index make it an indispensable reference and textbook for those seeking a deep and nuanced understanding of the complexities surrounding women's lives in these regions. Its ability to transcend the boundaries of the classroom is a testament to its impact, as it inspires readers with its powerful voices and radical ideas.

By delving into the intricacies of women's activism in Islamic countries, *Women Rising* empowers readers to explore further, question established norms, and engage in ongoing conversations surrounding gender equality and the dynamics of women's struggles. In this sense, it is not merely a book but a catalyst for continued exploration and reflection, making a significant contribution to the ongoing dialogue on women's rights, social justice, and political change in Islamic countries. Its relevance extends far beyond the pages of the book, leaving an enduring imprint on the minds and hearts of those who engage with its powerful narratives and intellectual insights.

Ma men reedo ma men reedo (We don't want it we don't want it)

Ma men reedo ma men reedo (We don't want it; we don't want it)

El nizam el abaweh badna nbeedo (The patriarchal system we will abolish)

El nizam el abaweh badna nbeedo (The patriarchal system we will abolish) (Stephan and Charret 2020 P. 179)

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