FEMINISM IN “THE WEST” ON SOCIAL MOVEMENTS IN “THE REST”: A DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF FEMINIST PUBLICATIONS, MS., JEZEBEL, AND BITCH, REGARDING THE ARAB UPRISINGS OF 2011

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Feminism in “the West” on Social Movements in “the Rest”: A Discourse
Analysis of Feminist Publications, *Ms.*, *Jezebel*, and *Bitch*, Regarding the Arab
Uprisings of 2011

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my sisters in the struggle, my feminist foremothers and the mentors and colleagues I have had the pleasure of growing with and learning from in the past two years. This thesis is dedicated to the women who were persecuted for centuries for writing, reading, and speaking out of turn. This thesis is dedicated to my mom, my grandmother, Gwen, Michelle, and Gina. Sisterhood is powerful. xxxo.
ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Feminism in “the West” on Social Movements in “the Rest”: A Discourse Analysis of Feminist Publications, *Ms.*, *Jezebel*, and *Bitch*, Regarding the Arab Uprisings of 2011

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Alicia M. Nichols

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In 1986, Chandra Talpade Mohanty sent shockwaves through the academic feminist community with the publication of her “Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourse.” In this influential essay, she draws attention to the negative effects of the discursive practices of some feminist writers in the West on the material realities of women and men living in the so-called “Third World.” Almost 30 years later, I am interested to see how well mainstream Western feminist communities have heeded the calls of Mohanty and other post-colonial and transnational feminists. As a Western feminist myself, it is my aim to rise to Mohanty’s challenge and practice the principles of self-reflexivity and transnational solidarity.

This thesis explores the ways in which a mainstream U.S.-based feminism discusses the “Arab Spring,” a term which has come to refer to the wave of democratic uprisings sweeping the Middle East/North Africa region (MENA) since December of 2010. However, in addition to identifying a general mainstream U.S. feminist discourse regarding the “Arab Spring,” I also explore the ways in which the three publications differ in their framings of the uprisings. My research goals and methodology draw from transnational, Third World, women of color, and Arab/-American, Middle Eastern, and/or Islamic feminisms that make suspect Western knowledge production as it is applied to “Othered” women.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In 1986, Chandra Talpade Mohanty sent shockwaves through the academic feminist community with the publication of her “Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourse.” In this influential essay, she draws attention to the negative effects of the discursive practices of some feminist writers in the West on the material realities of women and men living in the so-called “Third World.” Mohanty is associated with post-colonial and/or transnational feminist authors such as Gayatri Spivak, Gloria Anzaldúa, Chela Sandoval, Uma Narayan, Ella Shohat, Inderpal Grewal, and Caren Kaplan. A post-colonial, or Third World, feminist ethic draws attention to the effects of colonialism on the gendered realities of non-Western/Northern women while a transnational feminism necessitates an examination of the intersections of various sets of hegemonies on women’s lives in the context of global capitalism. Both theoretical traditions call upon Western feminist scholars to examine Western feminism’s influence on, and responsibility to, those Third World populations they are connected to by way of global power relations. Almost 30 years later, I am interested to see how well mainstream Western feminist communities have heeded the calls of Mohanty and other post-colonial and transnational feminists. As a Western feminist myself, it is my aim to rise to Mohanty’s challenge and practice the principles of self-reflexivity and transnational solidarity.

Recently, the U.S. has seen increased dialogue amongst scholars and activists concerned with social justice, including feminists, in regards to democracy in the Arab world. The conversations I am referencing center around what has come to be known as the “Arab Spring,” that is, the wave of democratic uprisings sweeping the Middle East/North Africa region (MENA) since December of 2010. So far, the Arab Spring has resulted in regime changes in Egypt, Libya, Yemen, and Tunisia, all four countries having been considered U.S. allies in the region at some point or another in the last decade. First, there has been much writing and discussing amongst both feminists based in the U.S. as well as in the countries thought to comprise the “Arab Spring” in regards to the gendered relationships and concerns
of protestors in the uprisings. Moreover, the Arab Spring has frequently been credited with influencing the Occupy movement in the U.S., and activists involved in the “two” movements (which are themselves divided into intra-regional camps) have exchanged much dialogue (Alessandrini). This last point points to a reversal of the basic Orientalist notion that culture flows from “the West” to “the rest.”

This thesis explores the ways in which a mainstream U.S.-based feminism makes sense of democratic social movements originating in the Arab world, including how the group in question responds when the “Third World Woman” subject calls for her rights without the aid of Western knowledge production and/or feminism. However, in addition to identifying a general mainstream U.S. feminist discourse regarding the “Arab Spring,” I also explore the ways in which the three publications differ in their framings of the uprisings. My research goals and methodology draw from transnational, Third World, women of color, and Arab/-American, Middle Eastern, and/or Islamic feminisms that make suspect Western knowledge production as it is applied to “Othered” women. With this thesis, I ask:

- To what extent have popular feminist publications in the U.S. integrated post-colonial and/or transnational feminist critiques of imperial feminism(s)?
- To what extent do the publications’ depictions of gender lend weight to Orientalist arguments that support U.S. foreign policy in the MENA region?
- What tropes and media events were common amongst the three feminist publications in question?
- In what ways do the framing tactics of the three publications differ?

I have organized my thesis into five chapters. In Chapter 2, I review literature relevant to the topics covered in my analysis, including Said’s *Orientalism*, transnational and post-colonial feminist critiques of imperial feminisms, and literature on the mobilization of mainstream media to squelch revolutionary social movements in societies with diverse relationships to democracy, gender and Orientalism in global media, and the creation and role of alternative and/or feminist media.

In Chapter 3, I describe the methodology and methods used in this study. First, I discuss the merits of discourse analysis in examining, with an aim to alleviating, social inequalities. In this chapter, I also affirm the importance of standpoint theories in feminist research and locate myself as a researcher. Moreover, in Chapter 3 I detail my coding scheme
for finding and analyzing articles and give brief backgrounds on the feminist publications in question.

In Chapter 4, I present my initial findings regarding the ten variables I coded for as well as those specifically regarding the mobilizations of “dress” as well as “male-instigated violence in protests” in mainstream U.S. feminist discussions of the Arab uprisings of 2011.

In Chapter 5, I revisit and answer my research questions given my findings and make some suggestions for further study and feminist action.
CHAPTER 2

BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE

With this thesis, I am inserting myself into an academic tradition that interrogates Western knowledge production as it concerns the Arab world and its people. My analytical framework borrows from theories of Orientalism, transnational and/or post-colonial feminist theories, media analysis, and social movement theories. These seemingly disparate disciplines all make explicit the connections between representation and the construction and maintenance of structural inequalities.

Throughout this thesis, I reference some common frames with which to discuss the Arab world as well as the political agendas those frames support, as identified by theorists writing on Orientalism and transnational and/or post-colonial feminism. My study also relies on literature that highlights the connections between media and social movements, including theories that identify the strategic circulation of Orientalist depictions of Arab gender roles in Western media. Moreover, it is important that in this section I provide some background knowledge that confirms the importance of media to movements for gender equality, in general, as well as the ways alternative media may be used for liberatory purposes.

ORIENTALISM

Since the 1970’s, much literature has been produced on Western cultural production as it concerns society in the Middle East/North African (MENA) region. Alexander Lyon Macfie writes in the Introduction to his Orientalism: A Reader, that during the 18th and 19th centuries, the term “orientalist” referred to a scholar studying the languages and literatures of “Turkey, Syria, Palestine, Mesopotamia, and Arabia, later also India, China and Japan, and even the whole of Asia” (1). Immediately following the Second World War, however, critiques of Orientalism began to surface, mostly from scholars living and writing from the very countries the field was concerned with. The third definition for Orientalism found in the Oxford English Dictionary reflects this shift:

1. Oriental style or quality; the character, customs, etc., of oriental nations; an oriental trait, feature, or idiom…
2. Knowledge of the languages, cultures, etc., of the Orient. Obs. rare…

3. The representation of the Orient (esp. the Middle East) in Western academic writing, art, or literature; spec. this representation perceived as stereotyped or exoticizing and therefore embodying a colonialistic attitude. (“Orientalism,” def. 3)

The four principal scholars of Orientalism are often thought to be Egyptian sociologist Anouar Abdel-Malek, Palestinian historian A.L. Tibawi, British and Australian Marxist sociologist Bryan S. Turner, and Palestinian-American literary theorist and public intellectual Edward Said (Macfie 3). Said’s book, Orientalism, first published in 1978, however, arguably received the most attention.

Orientalism was unique in its amalgamation of Michel Foucault’s concept of the discourse, “the linguistic apparatus through which the articulation of knowledge becomes an expression of power,” and Antonio Gramsci’s notion of hegemony “through which elite control is maintained over the masses” (MacKenzie 3-4). Taking the late eighteenth century as a “roughly defined starting point,” Said defines orientalism as

the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient…by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: in short, Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient. (3)

In Orientalism, Said also distinguishes between a European Orientalist ethic and one that arose out of U.S. policy circles post-WWII. He writes that unlike Americans, the French and the British have had a particularly long tradition of Orientalism. The Orient, he writes is not only adjacent to Europe; it is also the place of Europe’s greatest and richest and oldest colonies, the source of its civilizations and languages, its cultural contestant, and one of its deepest and most recurring images of the Other. (Said 1)

The early meetings of the West and the Orient were marked by

the Bible and the rise of Christianity…travelers like Marco Polo who charted the trade routes…fabulists like Mandeville; there were the redoubtable conquering Eastern movements, principally Islam, of course; there were the militant pilgrims, chiefly the Crusaders. (Said 58)

The foundations for Orientalism as an academic discipline arise out of the literatures belonging to these encounters.

Prior to the eighteenth century, Orientalists were “Biblical scholars, students of the Semitic languages, Islamic specialists, or, because the Jesuits had opened up the new study of China, Sinologists” (Said 51). The academic discipline of Orientalism increased in scope and
prestige throughout the nineteenth century, its robustness indicated by the appearance of self-referential texts, such as Raymond Schwab’s *La Renaissance orientale*, “the encyclopedic description of Orientalism roughly from 1765 to 1850,” as well as Jules Mohl’s *Vingt-sept Ans d’histoire des études orientales*, “a two-volume logbook of everything of note that took place in Orientalism between 1840 and 1867” (Said 51).

The label of Orientalist in this vein could refer to a novelist as well as an historian, one who studies everything from the editing and translation of texts to numismatic, anthropological, archaeological, sociological, economic, historical, literary, and cultural studies in every known Asiatic and North African civilization, ancient and modern. (Said 52)

However, an important feature of nineteenth century Oriental studies is that they occur within a context of an unequal power dynamic between Europe and “the Orient.” Knowledge of the Orient, “because generated out of strength, in a sense creates the Orient” (Said 40). The advancement of Orientalism as an academic field coincides with the period of unparalleled European expansion; from 1815 to 1914 European direct colonial dominion expanded from about 35 percent of the earth’s surface to about 85 percent of it. (Said 41)

Consequently, the Oriental, Said writes, is depicted as something one judges (as in a court of law), something one studies and depicts (as in a curriculum), something one disciplines (as in a school or prison), something one illustrates (as in a zoological manual). (40)

By the early twentieth century, then-former Prime Minister of the UK, Arthur Balfour, was able to rely on a centuries-old regime of knowledge with which to contextualize his 1910 speech on how the British might best effectively “manage” Egypt. Said writes that Balfour’s logic is as follows:

England knows Egypt…England knows that Egypt cannot have self-government; England confirms that by occupying Egypt…foreign occupation therefore becomes ‘the very basis’ of contemporary Egyptian civilization; Egypt requires, indeed insists upon, British occupation. (34)

On the other hand, prior to World War II, American knowledge of “the Orient,” was limited. However, since World War II, “America has dominated the Orient, and approaches it as France and Britain once did” (Said 4). At the time of Said’s writing, in 1987, Orientalism had been converted “from a fundamentally philological discipline” into a “social science specialty” (290). Modern American Orientalism, Said writes,
Derives from such things as the army language schools established during and after the war, sudden government and corporate interest in the non-Western world during the postwar period, Cold War competition with the Soviet Union, and a residual missionary attitude towards Orientals who are considered ripe for reform and re-education. (291)

He writes that the new “American social-science attention to the Orient” can be marked by its omission of Arab or Islamic literature, the effect of which keeps the region and its people “conceptually emasculated, reduced to ‘attitudes,’ ‘trends,’ statistics: in short, dehumanized” (Said 291). Moreover, universities in the U.S. have incorporated Oriental premises into studies regarding national policy. Language study is this context, for instance, is more of a “policy objective,” a means of establishing expertise, rather than a tool with which to read ”Oriental” literary texts (Said 291).

Moreover, since the 1950s, Said contends that television, film, and “all the media’s resources have forced information into more and more standardized molds” (26). These methods of standardization and cultural stereotyping “have intensified the hold of the nineteenth-century academic and imaginative demonology of ‘the mysterious Orient’” (Said 26).

When considering the motives for, and effects of, American Orientalism, one must not neglect the “question of Palestine.” Said identifies Zionism and the colonization of Palestine as playing a role in “getting the United States into the war” (295). The Zionist movement, and its construction of “freedom-loving, democratic Israel,” could not have happened without the utilization of ideas about “evil, totalitarian, and terroristic Arabs” (Said 27). Strategic interests in the creation of Israel have fueled for the U.S. a “liberal American identification with Zionism” that is acceptable in a way that a political identification with Arabs is not (Said 27).

Theories of Orientalism also inform post-colonial cultural and/or feminist theories which interrogate a kind of imperial “First World” feminism (Abdulhadi, Alsultany, and Naber; Ahmed-Ghosh; Donadey and Ahmed-Ghosh; Kaplan, Alarcón, and Moallem; Grewal; Grewal and Kaplan; Hall, “Encoding/Decoding”; Jarmakani; Lazreg; Mohanty, “Under Western Eyes: Feminist”, “Under Western Eyes Revisited”; Moghadam; Rastegar; Smith, Conquest).
CRITIQUES OF IMPERIAL FEMINISMS

Marnia Lazreg, in “Feminism and Difference: The Perils of Writing as a Woman on Women in Algeria,” maintains that academic feminism has not divorced itself from the colonial social scientific traditions it arose from. Her argument is similar to Said’s in that she contends that the social sciences have historically essentialized Middle Eastern and North African societies as (a) always and completely Islamic, (b) in a state of continual decline, and (c) incapable of producing scientific knowledge on its own countries and/or people. Lazreg claims that women writing in the social sciences have largely followed in the footsteps of their disciplinary forefathers. These feminist, protofeminist, or female writers continue to present women in the MENA region as a monolith, their lives primarily influenced by religion. Furthermore, Western feminists, protofeminists, and women writers in the social sciences have appropriated Middle Eastern women’s critiques of their own societies to justify Orientalist practices. Many have carelessly spread misinformation about Algerian women, taking advantage of their relative absence and/or denigration in the Western academy.

Black feminists Valerie Amos and Pratibha Parmar, in “Challenging Imperial Feminism,” write that there is a kind of consensus amongst white, Western feminists as to which issues are considered most worthy of attention and advocacy. According to Amos and Parmar, white, Western feminist theories are rooted in imperial practices that ignore the ways white women in the West continue to benefit from the oppression of people of color (Amos and Parmar 46). Western feminist theories which examine non-Western cultural practices as “feudal residues,” they argue, also position non-Western women as “politically immature women who need to be versed in and schooled in the ethos of Western feminism,” thus contributing to the maintenance of power and control over post-colonial societies (Amos and Parmar 48).

Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan, in Scattered Hegemonies: Postmodernity and Transnational Feminist Practice, also theorize as to why the complicated relationships of women to various hegemonies are simplified in the Western imagination and provide an
alternative theory of a complex relationship of gender to scattered hegemonies such as "global economic structures, patriarchal nationalisms, 'authentic' forms of tradition, local structures of domination, and legal-juridicial oppression on multiple levels” (17).

Grewal and Kaplan maintain that the Orientalist assumptions about culture necessarily flowing “from the ‘West’ to the ‘rest’” obscure the agencies of non-Western individuals and ignore questions of what cultural elements “are deployed where, by whom, and for what reason” (Grewal and Kaplan 13). An example Grewal and Kaplan give of strategically circulated media artifacts is the appearance of Muslim fundamentalism in global media outlets, despite Christian fundamentalism’s effects on the lives of millions of women around the world through funding practices that influence reproductive and other politics. Theories on media and social movements offer further insight regarding the connections between media circulation and politics.

**MEDIA AND SOCIAL MOVEMENTS**

In order to examine the impact of media in the U.S., it is important to understand connections between the media, the economy, and government in a Western context. The interconnectedness of these institutions, in general, becomes illuminated upon examination of the news media’s historical roots. The distribution of printed information as we know it can be traced to 16th-century Italy. At this time, writers began selling information sheets regarding nautical business and politics (Altschull xx). Newsletters of this sort were mostly circulated amongst the elite, learned populations. By the early 17th-century, however, the first “newspapers” had begun to circulate amongst groups of Europe’s middle classes, who had by then “turned to the printed page to fuel the revolutionary fires that flamed after the Reformation” (Altschull xxi). The potential for political mobilization in information distribution, however, was soon recognized by the established authorities of the time.

For instance, French revolutionaries had established a free press system, which, although still mostly representative of the privileged classes, had increased newspaper circulation from 4 papers to 335 in the first year post-Revolution (Altschull xxiv). With Napoleon’s seizing of power in the early 19th century, though, the booming French presses were converted into political propaganda tools. Germans in the mid 19th-century experienced a similar drastic change in available media content after Prussian chancellor Bismarck
“induced the king to deny the press the right to criticize the government” (Altschull 35).
Throughout history, access to information distribution has been contested between political
leaders and the populations they preside over in much the same way.

William B. Rugh, in “Do National Political Systems Still Influence Arab Media?,”
categorized societies’ media management style as belonging to one of three types:
“mobilization, loyalist, and diverse” (1). The first category refers to the manipulation of
media for the purposes of political mobilization. Countries with a loyalist bend to their
media, then, often have neither competing political parties nor elections, but the regimes in
those countries do not “seek aggressively to exploit the media to mobilize the public for
specific political purposes” either (Rugh 1). In the third group of countries, those with
“diverse” media systems, there often exists a contested political terrain and less legal
restrictions on freedom of expression than the first two. However, Rugh is also quick to note
that in a transnational era characterized by Satellite TV and the Internet, access to
information produced outside of one’s own country complicates the easy categorization of a
society into one of his three models (2). However, although global media may make its way
into a society in which it did not originate, its reception is based on the sociopolitical climate
in which it is being consumed.

Societies with a strong centralized government, as exist in socialist countries for
instance, have tended to favor the mobilization model. In 70s-era Communist Poland the
media was directly controlled by the Press Department bureaucracy (Curry 36). Jane Leftwich
Curry, in The Black Book of Polish Censorship, quotes First Secretary of the Polish United
Workers' Party Edward Gierek regarding the purpose of the Polish media in the 1970’s:

Its basic task is to increase the effectiveness of its political and ideological
influence in the direction of developing a socialist world-view (35)
The Party sought to achieve its goal through extreme censorship and the promulgation of
political propaganda. The censorship in Poland was such that during politically turbulent
years, “politics came to be virtually nonexistent in the Polish media” (Curry 57). Moreover,
censorship regulations were placed on reporting on countries that Poland was politically
involved with at the time. For example, since Iran was an important trading partner to Poland
in the mid-70s, one provincial publication was prevented from publishing a photograph of a
cow named Szachy because its name too closely resembled the Polish word for Shah (Curry
115).
Mobilization of the media for political purposes does not necessarily produce citizens loyal to the established authority. For instance, in an official 1980 poll in Poland, “only 36 percent of the population said it trusted the Communist Party” (Curry 4). Part of this disconnect had to do with the importation of contradictory news reports from other countries procured by Polish citizens who had traveled abroad. Moreover, some censored material was leaked, mostly due to “the sloppiness of a bureaucracy of uncommitted bureaucrats” (Curry 8). Some censored documents that were leaked reveal the extent that some Polish citizens were aware of the Party’s media control tactics. Take this censored excerpt, for instance, from an editorial discussion on the role of photography in the press:

J. Rurański: In photographs in the press, why is Poland so well arranged, so painted up? Why are the pictures identical in every newspaper? The same podiums, the same cutting of the ceremonial ribbons, the same smiles? (Curry 68)

Whereas in societies like Poland’s in the 1970s, government control of media was, for the most part, overt, governments that promote a more “diverse” media by the standards outlined above have employed tactics that work to conceal their methods of control. In the United States, for instance, media is assumed to be largely unbiased based on the fact that the First Amendment of the American Constitution grants American citizens the right to freedom of expression. However, even the founding fathers who authored the constitution attempted to silence the voices of their political opponents in the press. In the late 18th-century, James Madison, then Thomas Jefferson’s secretary of state, “openly adopted a system of rewards for those papers that supported the Jeffersonian program” (Altschull 32). Nevertheless, the liberal rhetoric of the American Revolution emphasized a “free market of ideas,” presenting buyouts like Jefferson’s as his prerogative as a citizen and suggesting that equal attention may be given to his opposition (however unlikely that would be given his class and political status).

Little or negative media attention is paid to individuals or movements that challenge authority in the U.S. While claiming objectivity, news sources often present information about political protests and/or movements that confront mainstream U.S. society “within a frame that minimizes or muffles” their significance while leaving out information “which would lend weight to an oppositional sense of things” (Gitlin 52). Moreover, John Downing, in *Radical Media: Rebellious Communication and Social Movements*, relays Gramsci’s emphasis on the everyday scenarios in which capitalist hegemony over the media rests on
“self-censorship by mainstream media professionals” (16). In this case, editors may believe they are freely omitting content based on standards of taste and/or industry professionalism without questioning the underlying assumptions that support said standards.

Nancy Fraser, in “Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy,” reiterates Gramsci’s theory of hegemony as “rule based primarily on consent supplemented with some measure of repression” (62). The mainstream or “official” public sphere, she argues, exists as a mechanism for “rationalizing’ political domination” through “mass-mediated staged displays” (Fraser 59). In this public sphere, the media that “constitute the material support for the circulation of views are privately owned,” therefore subordinated groups lack equal access to “the material means of equal participation” (Fraser 65).

Another factor contributing to the illusory aspect of the “free market of ideas” media culture in the U.S. is the sense of anti-intellectualism that has always been promoted within American mass media. On account of its affordability and therefore capacity to circulate widely, the “penny press” has often been credited with ushering in a new era of mass media in 19th-century America (Altschull 22). The publishers of these affordable newspapers decided that “what a mass audience desired was excitement and gossip,” leading them to place priority on fiction and crime news stories over political goings-on in the new republic (Altschull 22). With the concomitant expansion of the advertising industry, the penny press began to rely heavily on advertising for its financial success, meaning more space was taken up in each “news” paper for purely commercial purposes. Laurie Oullette, in “Will the Revolution Be Televised? Camcorders, Activism, and Alternative Television in the 1990s,” argues that more modern forms of news media in the U.S. also exist to “distract the oppressed classes with trivial amusements and reify radical impulses through the promise of consumption” (166). When radical impulses do flourish into movements that confront the established authority in the U.S., steps are taken by those in the media to squelch said movements, based on either guidance on behalf of politicians and/or self-censorship in the Gramscian sense.

Mainstream U.S. media has historically employed tactics to minimize the effectiveness of politically radical movements that challenge established U.S. authority. In *The Whole World Is Watching: Mass Media in the Making & Unmaking of the New Left,*
Todd Gitlin elaborates on some of the tactics utilized by the media to curtail the anti-war efforts of the Students for a Democratic Society in the 1960’s. The earliest framing devices in mainstream coverage of the SDS were the following:

- trivialization, polarization, emphasis on internal dissension, marginalization, disparagement by numbers (under-counting), disparagement of the movement’s effectiveness. (Gitlin 27)

As the anti-war movement became more militant, however, so did mainstream media coverage against it. By the fall, most U.S. news media had resorted to using the following framing devices:

- reliance on statements by government officials and other authorities, emphasis on the presence of Communists, emphases on the carrying of ‘Viet Cong’ flags, emphasis on violence in demonstrations, delegitimizing use of quotation marks around terms like ‘peace march,’ considerable attention to right-wing opposition in the movement, especially from the administration and other politicians. (Gitlin 27-28)

Mainstream media sources also refrained from publishing SDS’ statement of purpose or protest sign slogans, or, in other words, from allowing them to represent themselves, which might imply that they have legitimate grievances (Gitlin 147).

Furthermore, mainstream media in the U.S. capitalized on the phenomenon of individual celebrity to discount SDS’ anti-war movement. Individuals were consistently highlighted as representative of SDS and anti-war politics. Frequently, said leaders, and anti-war politics by association, were made to seem deviant or “unrepresentative of the values, opinions, and practices of the larger society” (Gitlin 152).

Mainstream U.S. media has a long history of utilizing the tactics outlined above in order to perpetuate Orientalist depictions of Arab societies and/or people.

**Gender and Orientalism in Media**

Post-colonial cultural theorists have written a great deal on the mobilization of representations of “Otherness” by those in power (Hall, *Representation*). Today, different theories exist as to how and why representations of Arab-/American, Middle Eastern, and/or Islamic women, in particular, are “Otherized” (Abdulhadi, Alsultany, and Naber; Ahmed-Ghosh; Donadey and Ahmed-Ghosh; Kaplan, Alarcón, and Moallem; Grewal; Grewal and Kaplan; Jarmakani; Mohanty, “Under Western Eyes: Feminist”, “Under Western Eyes Revisited”; Moghadam; Rastegar; Smith, *Conquest*).
Post-colonial, transnational, Arab/-American, Middle Eastern, and/or Islamic feminisms tend to examine the intersections between representations of gender and nationality, often suggesting that nations and/or colonial relationships are gendered (Smith, *Conquest*; Kaplan, Alarcón, and Moallem). Some theorists have posited women as cultural symbols and political pawns in patriarchal power struggles (Ahmed-Ghosh; Moghadam). Circulation of information about gender relations, then, often serves to establish and maintain global power relations.

Inderpal Grewal, in “Transnational America: Race, Gender, Citizenship After 9/11,” exposes the ways race and gender, specifically, are employed in circulated rhetoric, photographs, video images, comic representations, etc. to communicate messages about citizenship and nationality.

In Grewal’s findings, in the days following the September 11 attacks, firemen were sanctified and the histories of racism within firehouses across the nation were ignored. Photo mugshots of the attackers in the newspapers showed them to be all males, presumably Muslims, represented as fanatical, well-trained, dangerous and thus barbaric. (“Transitional America” 545)

Associations of “Middle Eastern” men with danger and disruption and “American” men with heroism, specifically the hyper-masculinized, heteronormative fireman construct, frame hyper-masculinized institutions, like the U.S. military, as justified in the somewhat noble task of eliminating a kind of “barbarism.”

In a transnational world, the circulation of hegemonic Orientalist media has allowed for Muslims in other countries (and their political movements) to be justifiably oppressed and suppressed (Grewal; Abdulhadi, Alsultany, and Naber). In the days following the September 11 attacks, for example, media around the world was saturated with images of the plane crashes in New York and D.C. This gave other nation-states the opportunity to “repress insurgent movements and thus to support nationalist projects of state power” in the name of “civilization” or “anti-barbarism” (Grewal 545).

Clive Barnett, in “Theory and Events,” suggests that mainstream global media, as a rationalizing and normalizing agent, profits from minimal coverage on the events comprising the Arab Spring, which might problematize essentialist notions of the Middle East as anti-democratic, and therefore, notions about the West as truly democratic.
Although the aforementioned theories pertain mostly to hegemonic media, media may also carry liberatory significance for marginalized groups when used to disrupt, rather than support, the status quo.

**ALTERNATIVE/FEMINIST MEDIA**

Participants in the 1995 Beijing Conference on Women asserted that “media is one of the critical areas of concern for the advancement of women’s equality and development” (Made 31). It is important that feminists, then, create and encourage truth accounts that counter dominant media discourse.

Although mainstream media has always had institutional backing, activists in many societies have fought to combat its mobilization for political control. One tactic employed by activists in this regard is the encouragement of oppositional consciousness and/or oppositional readings of circulated information. For instance, members of “Not Channel Zero” in the 1980s taught viewers to “develop the deconstructive skills necessary to locate and challenge the biases of television and other media” (Oullette 177). Bell Hooks’ influential essay, “The Oppositional Gaze,” also encouraged oppositional viewing on behalf of black women who could not locate positive black female role models in mainstream representations.

Moreover, media has often been reappropriated to speak for the interests of the oppressed classes. In the U.S. in the 1980s, activists began using camcorders to create and distribute their own news, including political events from the perspective of activists, as well as document human rights breeches by authorities (Oullette 170). In more recent times, YouTube has been home to similar programs; in the last year, for instance, Occupy protestors have posted countless videos documenting large protests (to counteract the mainstream media’s tactic of undercounting) and accounts of police brutality. Although YouTube had not been invented at the time of his publication, Radical Media: Rebellious Communication and Social Movements, John Downing theorized about the potential of “webs of interpersonal communication that do not operate through media, even though they are fed by media and feed into media” (33). Along with YouTube, Twitter is another such social network that makes possible the utilization of media culture and, in particular the audience that mass media has created and fostered, on behalf of radical political platforms.
Muhammad I. Ayish, in “Understanding Arab Women’s Role in Media Industries – An Empowerment-Based Perspective,” discusses the lack of women in senior media positions in the Middle East, not because there are formal restrictions against them, but rather because patriarchal society works to make sure women are not thought to be “leaders and intellectual thinkers” (195). Despite this, Ayish asserts that women in the Arab world are using new media to participate in the production and propagation of alternative knowledge and the “creation of transgressive spaces” (195). Ayish relates the internet and transnational satellite broadcasting to an increase in the number of women working and represented in media, as well as an increase in public discourses regarding taboo subjects concerning women, “such as domestic violence, Islamic law and honor killing” (197). The global feminist blogosphere can be said to be a kind of counterpublic, that is, a subculture that constructs access routes to political life despite its “exclusion from the official public sphere” (Fraser 61). On the other hand, it is a semi-exclusive public, given that internet access is limited and therefore does not lend itself to entirely equal participation.

Relatedly, radical media can be precarious insofar as it demarcates the realm of the “alternative” (and many times “progressive”) at the expense of minority voices within oppositional movements. For instance, during the Mexican Revolution, both a large mainstream publication, El Correo, and an influential radical publication, La Voz de la Revolución, portrayed women as “especially vulnerable to evil influences and in need of protection from either their fathers or the paternal guidance of the revolution” (Smith, Gender 23). In 1916, La Voz de la Revolución also printed a pamphlet that attacked “the ‘fanaticism’ of the Yucatean population, and more specifically its women” as it concerns religion (Smith, Gender 98). In these instances, the effect of the role of radical media as “spokesperson for the movement” has been distrust on behalf of minority activists, and subsequent disunity, within the movement(s). My study on U.S. feminist publications’ reporting on the Arab uprisings of 2011 examines U.S. feminist media as alternative in some aspects with the power to further marginalize some groups it purports to speak for.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY AND METHOD

DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

Discourse is both informed by and shapes social realities, and can therefore be an agent for either producing or correcting social inequalities. By identifying problematic discursive practices, one might change the conversation surrounding gender and democracy in the Arab world from one that victimizes Arab women and demonizes Arab men to one that highlights the complexity of representations of either.

Discourse acts as a kind of blueprint from which the person who encounters it might form a conceptual representation. The producer of the discursive map always has some goal in mind, which directs “the selection of information to convey” (Tomlin, Forrest, Pu, and Hee Kim 39). The reader or viewer interprets the discourse in concert with what they already know, including any familiarity with the subject or cultural assumptions. In both cases, information held in common between the producers and receivers of the discourse “makes up part of the conceptual scaffolding on which each depends for effective communication” (Tomlin, Forrest, Pu, and Hee Kim 43).

Members of a given interpretive community or culture, then, necessarily share the same systems of concepts and images, or the same tools for interpretation (Hall, *Representation* 17-18). We in the U.S. can be said to share similar tools for interpretation, including the same cultural codes and stereotypes.

Much has been written about the specific method of representation called stereotyping. Cultural historian Sander Gilman calls stereotypes “a crude set of mental representations of the world…They perpetuate a needed sense of difference between the ‘self’ and the ‘object’, which becomes the ‘Other’” (17-18). Stereotypes reflect a binary opposition, about which Jacques Derrida, as cultural theorist Stuart Hall tells us, refers to as a “‘violent hierarchy. One of the two terms governs … the other or has the upper hand’” (Hall, *Representation* 258). They stoke ideas about Us/Them, liberated/oppressed, the Occident/Orient, etc.
Journalism is an activity that is particularly “entrenched in nationalist discourses,” often meant to encourage hegemonic consent to a given social order on behalf of average citizens (Jiwani and Richardson 251). Journalists employ particular textual strategies with which to frame a discourse and, oftentimes, perpetuate stereotypes. In my analysis of the feminist publications’ reporting on the Arab uprisings of 2011, I look specifically at topics as they are expressed in headlines as well as implications shrouded in rhetorical devices such as presupposition and over-completeness.

News stories are assigned topics in order to guide the reader or viewer’s interpretation of the events covered. These topics are often communicated through headlines and reflect “what news-makers construe to be the most important information about a news event” (van Dijk 71). A headline, in particular, both “describes the essence of a complicated news story in a few words” and “arouses the reader’s curiosity” (Schneider 48). It follows, then, that an examination of the headlines assigned to stories in the three feminist publications in my study will illuminate the priorities of those publications as well as the assumed priorities of their audiences when it comes to reporting on the uprisings.

In addition to exploring the main themes as communicated through topic assignment, I examine rhetorical devices utilized in the feminist publications’ coverage on the uprisings in order to reveal “underlying meanings and ideologies” (Meyers 101). Van Dijk states that presupposition is one such rhetorical device used to convey “information that is supposed to be known and shared by the writer and reader, and which therefore need not be stated” (183). In other words, presuppositions read like assumptions shared by both producers and readers/viewers of a given discourse. Van Dijk also identifies over-completeness, which “often takes the form of functional irrelevance,” as a rhetorical device that communicates implication (185). Over-completeness is the inclusion in a story of a seemingly irrelevant detail, which is actually “relevant within a more general negative portrayal of a person or group” (van Dijk 185). An example of this would be mentioning the (non-white) race of someone who has committed a crime. The only reason for such an inclusion would be to lead the reader or viewer toward associating crime with a particular race or group of people.

Aside from a discourse analysis of the three feminist publications in question, my methodology also incorporates standpoint theory as an epistemological tool.
STANDPOINT THEORY

Standpoint theory directly interrogates the positivist notion that knowledge is universal and instead points to ways that power structures and knowledge production have “coconstituted each other” (Harding 382). Knowledge presented as universal or as “the truth,” then, is often that which reflects the perspectives of those at the top of a given hierarchical power structure and which also works to justify their position there.

Feminist standpoint theories are particularly interested in the “truth” accounts of those who occupy positions of oppression. In the words of Sandra Harding,

standpoint theory uses the ‘naturally occurring’ relations of class, gender, race, or imperialism in the world around us to observe how different ‘locations’ in such relations tend to generate distinctive accounts of nature and social relations. (384)

As a working-class, mixed-ethnicity Lebanese/European-American woman, it follows that my accounts of nature and social relations will vary considerably from those arising from the dominant U.S. political and/or media mainstream.

When I critique mainstream Western feminist cultural production, I am situating myself as a Western feminist with a Lebanese-American family, and, therefore, some access to knowledge regarding the lived experiences of Arabs here and abroad, and how those experiences are shaped by American discourses about “Arabness.” This means that in many ways, I am attuned to discrimination directed at those perceived to be Arab, Arab-American, and/or Muslim. My experiential knowledge regarding Arab women and men whom I have known and their/our various cultural practices contradicts racist stereotypes propagated by the U.S. media.

On the other hand, I was born in the U.S., have fair skin, wear “Western” clothes, and bear a “white” last name. This gives me the privilege of escaping much of the discrimination directed at those perceived to be Arab, Arab-American, and/or Muslim. Moreover, as a citizen of the United States, I actually benefit in many ways from war-waging against, and oppression of, those living in the region. These privileges act as limitations on my experiential knowledge in regards to Arab/-icized oppression here and abroad. Furthermore, they have no doubt obscured my understanding of the lived realities of groups of Arab/-icized people, especially those living in the Middle East/North Africa (MENA.) region.

Being conscious of my standpoint as both insider and outsider when relating to women and men living in the Arab world has made me particularly cautious when deciding
what, and how, to study. Rather than attempting to represent the perspectives of the revolutionary participants in the Arab Spring, I am choosing to deconstruct the Western feminist discursive practices that simultaneously utilize and structure their lives and stories. In other words, I am attempting to examine Western cultural production from within a Western feminist standpoint, albeit one that is outside of the mainstream U.S. feminist tradition.

**DATE COLLECTION AND CODING SCHEME**

The highly publicized wave of uprisings presented me with an opportunity to explore feminist writing on foreign affairs. Much has been written on Orientalism in high art and literature. However, as Linda Steet writes in *Veils and Daggers: A Century of National Geographic's Representation of the Arab World*, it is often the case that “rigorous critique practices in other areas of study…are not applied to the area of popular educational texts and visual images” (9). My aim with this thesis has been to apply that kind of critique to popular feminist publications that are available to a wide range of folks who may or may not be connected to any academic feminist community.

I chose to conduct a discourse analysis of Internet articles published by three feminist publications, *Ms. Magazine, Bitch,* and *Jezebel,* that make mention of the recent wave of uprisings in the Middle East known popularly as the “Arab Spring.” I limited the audience in question to those who access the free material provided by the three publications rather than those who also pay for subscriptions to the print versions of *Ms.* and *Bitch;* I was interested in what kind of information the three publications were making available to the public, including those who accidentally stumble upon articles from either of the three sites, rather than a particularly interested population.

The Arab Spring is commonly thought to have begun with Tunisian street vendor Mohamed Bouazizi lighting himself on fire on December 17, 2010 and arguably continues to this day (especially in places that have not experienced complete revolutions, e.g. Syria). I chose to focus on articles published from Bouazizi’s self-immolation in December 2010 to January 2012, two months after the last regime, Yemen’s Saleh regime, had been overthrown. This way, I dealt only with the discourse surrounding the actual uprisings and regime changes rather than how the discourse evolved post-revolution(s). That being said, I
have also been interested in how the aforementioned feminist magazines create and employ the concept, “the Arab Spring,” including if and when they ended or stopped being relevant to U.S. readers and why.

I conducted key word searches on *Ms. Magazine, Bitch,* and *Jezebel* in order to find stories tagged with the key words “Arab Spring” as well as each of the four countries which experienced government overthrows in the time period in question (Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, Yemen). Rather than using each site’s search feature, which, in some cases, only dates back so far, I used the Google search features “date range” and “site:” (as in site:Jezebel.com Arab Spring, etc.) to find articles published from 2010-January 2012. From my results, I read each article and discarded those that did not provide adequate information with which to begin answering my research questions (i.e. a result from *Jezebel* entitled “Miley Cyrus Is Not Dead” was included in my preliminary search results). I then checked each article for a series of media tactics, tropes, or themes identified by theorists writing on West-East feminist encounters and social movement media.

In general, I wanted to understand how U.S. feminists were representing “activists in the Arab uprisings” to a U.S. audience. Moreover, since women are often discursively positioned as the symbolic repository of group identity,” I also had the construction of the Arab world vis a vis the construction of “Arab Women,” and its patriarchs, in mind (Kandiyoti 435). I read each article a few times over in attempts to identify frequently appearing themes regarding revolutionary actors in the Arab Spring and their relationships to each other and to the West. Post-colonial and transnational feminist theories about common Orientalist tropes utilized in Western knowledge production, such as a preoccupation with the veil, Islamism, and competing notions of democracy and gendered systems, influenced my scanning of the articles. Moreover, a couple specific readings contributed to the formation of my coding scheme.

Sociologist, political writer, and New Left activist Todd Gitlin’s book, *The Whole World is Watching: Mass Media in the Making & Unmaking of the New Left,* was instrumental to my understanding of U.S.-based mainstream media strategies to diminish the effectiveness of revolutionary social movements. Gitlin elaborates on some of the tactics utilized by the media to curtail the anti-war efforts of the Students for a Democratic Society, of which he was a part, in the 1960’s. One of the themes I decided to code for, “male-
instigated violence in protests,” was based on an amalgamation of several of the themes he highlighted in the U.S. S.D.S. coverage: “polarization,” “emphasis on internal dissension,” “marginalization,” and “emphasis on violence in demonstrations” (Gitlin 27-28).

Moreover, in “Beyond the ‘Woman Question’ in the Egyptian Revolution,” Abu-Lughod and El-Mahdi agree that Western media seems “obsessed with the role of women in this revolution” (683). Abu-Lughod also notes that key liberal terms and reformist slogans have been over-used in coverage of the Egyptian revolution. El-Mahdi interprets the coverage of social media’s role in the Arab Spring as a way for the U.S. to claim credit. She also points to Arab movements that have been ignored in Western media, such as the Palestinian intifada and the Egyptian labor movement in which more than 1.8 million people have been involved. In my initial coding of the articles, I was more attentive, then, to themes like “social media,” “Palestine,” political participation in the “liberal democratic” sense, etc.

I eventually identified ten themes with which to code each article for: (1) male-instigated violence in protests, (2) importance of social media to revolutions, (3) a prominence placed on revolutionary activities of youth in movement, (4) mention of the degree of Westernization and/or Arab-ization in how revolutionary actors are dressed, (5) Islamism as a detriment to the goals of the revolutionaries, (6) lack of political representation as detrimental to women’s status in the Arab world, (7) Palestine/Palestinians (the contexts in which they are being written about from the West), (8) Hillary Clinton as ally to revolutionaries, (9) Western writers taking steps to dispel stereotypes regarding the Arab world, and (10) the West/U.S. as bearing some responsibility for unrest in the Middle East. I examined those themes in detail with an eye to their origins and continuation and/or break with hegemonic U.S. attitudes and policies regarding the Arab world.

**BACKGROUNDS OF MS., BITCH, AND JEZEBEL**

Before moving to a discussion of representations of the Arab uprisings of 2011 by the mainstream U.S. feminist publications, *Ms.*, *Bitch*, and *Jezebel*, it is necessary to first provide some background information on the publications. These three publications are widely referenced in the Western world and represent a white, mainstream U.S. (hegemonic) feminist camp, as the viewpoints of the writers tend to be accessibly liberal as opposed to leftist and the type of feminisms advocated by these publications do not center women of
color and/or women in “the Third World.” I chose these three publications because their online hubs are arguably the most popular mainstream feminist sites on the internet. Ms.’s Facebook page, for instance, today possesses over 44,000 Facebook “likes,” the smallest number of the three publications but still more than comparable online publication Feministing.com, whose Facebook page shows over 35,000 likes (Facebook, “Feministing.com”). Moreover, they are fairly established as either long-standing feminist publications or, as in Jezebel’s case, extensions of popular media companies. Below I have included each publication’s name and tagline before briefly charting the histories and/or missions of each.

Ms. Magazine, co-founded by Gloria Steinem and Letty Cottin Pogrebin in 1971, is a pioneer in the field of feminist media (Ms. Magazine). Ms. affirms their continued commitment to “in-depth investigative reporting and feminist political analysis” and claims to be renowned “nationally and internationally as the media expert on issues relating to women’s status, women's rights, and women's points of view” (Ms. Magazine). The subscription demographics for Ms. show “a high percentage of college students,” although readership is “almost equally spread among young women, women in the middle and older women” (Journalism Jobs). They describe their own readers as “well-educated professionals who are influential opinion leaders in progressive and feminist communities…engaged activists and philanthropists, strongly motivated to support causes they believe in” (Ms. Blog). Although they do not provide information in regards to their subscriber statistics, a good way to compare the online readerships of these three publications is through a comparison of their Facebook “likes.” Again, today the Facebook page for “Ms. Magazine” has over 44,000 “likes.”

Bitch: Feminist Response to Pop Culture was created in 1996 by Lisa Jervis, Benjamin Shaykin, and Andi Zeisler to provide the “sharp, fun, nonacademic analyses of the sexism rampant in movies, television, advertising, and more” they were missing as feminist pop culture buffs (Bitch Media, “Our History”). Bitch Media currently defines pop culture as “broad, encompassing cultural attitudes and myths, phenomena of the popular imagination, and social trends as well as movies, TV, magazines, books, advertising, and the like” (Bitch media, “Contributor’s Guidelines”). In some of their examples of important pop cultural artifacts, however, like the few given in the introduction to BITCHfest: Ten Years of Cultural
Criticism from the Pages of Bitch Magazine, editors Lisa Miya-Jervis and Andi Zeisler seem to limit their focus to an examination of fictional sources, rather than news sources. They describe their audience as “diverse,” with magazine subscribers in 46 countries and all 50 states (Bitch Media, “About Us”). However, they also claim to be “uniquely situated to draw in young readers who are at a critical moment in their lives—a moment when they are discovering feminism and activism, finding answers to who they are, and questioning the definitions of gender, sexuality, power and agency prescribed by the mainstream media” (Bitch Media, “About Us”). They currently boast more than 80,000 readers and 9,000 unique visitors a day to bitchmedia.org (Bitch Media, “About Us”). Moreover, today the “Bitch Media” Facebook page has over 70,000 likes (Facebook, “Bitch Media”).

Jezebel: Celebrity, Sex, Fashion for Women was launched in May of 2007 as a Gawker Media blog under the direction of managing editor Anna Holmes, who had previously worked for the likes of “Entertainment Weekly, Glamour, Star, Celebrity Living, and InStyle.” In Jezebel’s Manifesto published November 1, 2007, entitled “The Five Great Lies of Women’s Magazines,” the authors define Jezebel as a blog for women that attempts to “take all the essentially meaningless but sweet stuff directed our way and give it a little more meaning, while taking more the serious stuff and making it more fun, or more personal, or at the very least the subject of our highly sophisticated brand of sex joke”. Regarding Jezebel’s audience, Holmes writes that its age range “could be anywhere from 18 to 40” and states that she “would like it to be broader, in terms of a woman anywhere in the country, or even the world, would be able to look at it” (PRWeek US). However, according to Holmes in a June 2007 interview with PRWeek, Gawker.com first proposed Jezebel as “a straight women's blog with the appropriate Gawker tone.” (PRWeek US).

Nowhere on the “About” page, the Manifesto, or the aforementioned interview with Anna Holmes is Jezebel called a “feminist” site. Jezebel currently boasts a whopping 5,000,000 monthly readers (Gawker Media). Moreover, today their Facebook page shows over 221,000 likes (Facebook, “Jezebel”).
CHAPTER 4
FINDINGS

My sample consisted of 117 articles in total. 55 of those articles were published at Ms., 55 at Jezebel, and only 7 at Bitch. Ms. actually wrote the majority of the articles that centered the uprisings, as 28, or about half, were features on the Arab Spring, as opposed to the 27 which made mention of the Arab Spring but did not highlight it specifically. Ms. article, “Post-Split, Will North Sudan’s Women Be Left Behind?” is a good example of an article that used the uprisings to discuss some other related issue, as it dealt specifically with the reception of women’s issues in North Sudan but made reference to the integration of women’s gendered concerns in Egypt’s revolution (Yasin). Of the Jezebel articles, 39, or about 71%, were features on the Arab Spring while 16, or about 29%, made mention of the Arab Spring. Bitch hardly covered the Arab uprisings, as only one of their articles dealt directly with the Arab Spring while the remaining six briefly referenced the uprisings.

The three most popular themes in my entire sample were “male-instigated violence in protests,” “importance of social media to revolutions,” and “lack of political representation as detrimental to women’s status in the Arab world.” The three least popular themes were “Hillary Clinton as ally to revolutionaries,” “Palestine/Palestinians,” and “the West/U.S. as bearing some responsibility for unrest in the Middle East” (see Table 1). Although the framing of Hillary Clinton as an ally to the revolutionaries was found in only about 5% of the articles in the sample, that number is significant when compared with the number of individuals who were featured in the discourse in general.

The Ms. articles reflected the findings for the entire sample, with the three most popular themes in the publication’s “Arab Spring” coverage being “male-instigated violence in protests,” “importance of social media to revolutions,” and “lack of political representation as detrimental to women’s status in the Arab world.” The three least popular were, again, “Palestine/Palestinians,” “Hillary Clinton as ally to revolutionaries,” and “the West/U.S. as bearing some responsibility for unrest in the Middle East (see Table 1).
Table 1. Frequency of Major Themes in Articles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Number of Articles</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>All Publications</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ms. (n=55)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jezebel (n=55)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bitch (n=7)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Male-instigated violence in protests</td>
<td>68 (58%)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>31 (56%)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>35 (62%)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>2 (29%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Importance of social media to revolutions</td>
<td>34 (29%)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>22 (40%)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>11 (20%)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>1 (14%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lack of political representation as detrimental to women’s status in the Arab world</td>
<td>25 (21%)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>18 (33%)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>7 (11%)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>A prominence placed on revolutionary activities of youth in movement</td>
<td>16 (14%)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>11 (20%)</td>
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<td>5 (9%)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Western writers taking steps to dispel stereotypes regarding the Arab world</td>
<td>15 (13%)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>10 (18%)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>1 (2%)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4 (57%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mention of the degree of Westernization and/or Arab-ization in how revolutionary actors are dressed</td>
<td>13 (11%)</td>
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<td>8 (15%)</td>
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<td>5 (9%)</td>
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<td>0 (0%)</td>
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<td>Islamism as a detriment to the goals of the revolutionaries</td>
<td>11 (9%)</td>
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<td>9 (16%)</td>
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<td>2 (4%)</td>
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<td>0 (0%)</td>
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<td>Hillary Clinton as ally to revolutionaries</td>
<td>6 (5%)</td>
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<td>2 (4%)</td>
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<td>4 (7%)</td>
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<td>0 (0%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Palestine/Palestinians</td>
<td>5 (4%)</td>
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<td>The West/U.S. as bearing some responsibility for unrest in the Middle East</td>
<td>4 (3%)</td>
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Note: Percentages refer to number of articles that feature theme divided by total articles in sample or publication (n).

The three most popular themes in the *Jezebel* articles, “male-instigated violence in protests,” “importance of social media to revolutions,” and “lack of political representation as detrimental to women’s status in the Arab world,” also reflected the findings at large. However, the least popular themes were “Islamism as detriment to the goals of the revolutionaries,” “Palestine/Palestinians,” each appearing in 4% of the *Jezebel* articles, and “the West/U.S. as bearing some responsibility for unrest in the Middle East” and “Western writers taking steps to dispel stereotypes regarding the Arab world,” tied for comprising 2% of *Jezebel*’s articles (see Table 1).
Bitch’s coverage prioritized significantly different themes than that of the other two publications. Although “male-instigated violence in protests” also ranked as one of Bitch’s most popular themes, Bitch’s single most popular theme was “Western writers taking steps to dispel stereotypes regarding the Arab world,” appearing in 57% of their articles as compared with 13% of the articles in the sample at large. The themes, “mention of the degree of Westernization or Arab-ization in how revolutionary actors are dressed,” “a prominence placed on revolutionary activities of youth in movement,” “lack of political representation as detrimental to women’s status in the Arab world,” “Islamism as detriment to the goals of the revolutionaries,” and “Hillary Clinton as ally to revolutionaries” were not found in the Bitch articles at all (see Table 1).

I decided to further examine the theme, “male-instigated violence in protests,” as it was the most frequently appearing theme in the sample in general and a popular theme in all three of the publications. Additionally, I chose to explore the political mobilization of the “mention of the degree of Westernization or Arab-ization in how revolutionary actors are dressed,” with an eye to how dress has been mobilized in mainstream U.S. feminist coverage of the Arab uprisings of 2011. Although the “mention of the degree of Westernization or Arab-ization in how revolutionary actors are dressed” was not one of the most frequently appearing themes, its significance lies in its historical mobilization by Western knowledge production.

**Dress of Revolutionary Actors in the Uprisings**

Although the degree of Westernization and/or Arab-ization was only mentioned in 11% of the articles, photos of veiled women versus either men or women in “Western” dress accompanied 43 articles, or about a whopping 78% of the 55 articles that featured photos of protestors in the uprisings. The most typical of these depictions featured women wearing the hijab (hair covering) versus the niqab (face covering). Of the 43 articles featuring photos of veiled women, 31 articles featured photos of a woman or women wearing the hijab, five articles featured photos of a woman or women wearing the niqab, and seven articles featured photos in which women could be spotted wearing Western clothing and either the hijab or niqab. Twelve of the 43 articles featured photos of a woman or women in Western dress.
Ms. was most likely to discuss the revolutionary actors’ styles of dress in the text of their articles, as eight, or about 16%, of Ms.’ articles regarding the Arab uprisings used the “style of dress” trope. By comparison, five, or about 9%, of Jezebel’s articles touched on the same themes. None of Bitch’s articles made mention of the way revolutionary actors were dressed.

Only one of the thirteen “dress” articles reflected on the tendency for Western knowledge production to mobilize the trope of the veil for political purposes. Moreover, the articles tended to code Arab women as Muslim or living under some form of Islamic law regardless of where they were from. Furthermore, throughout 2011, as the movements progressed, the articles went from coding Islamic/traditional dress as neutral to utilizing Islamic/traditional dress to talk about (often violent) government interference into the lives of women.

**Practicing Self-Reflexivity as Western Writers**

For more than twenty years, post-colonial and/or transnational feminists have published critiques of Western feminisms’ narrow focus on “the veil” when discussing Arab women’s issues. Presenting all Arab women as veiled has been an effective way of coding them as monolithic in their adherence to Islamic law or social custom and establishing their difference from women in the U.S. In order to gauge the extent to which the feminist publications in my sample had ingested these critiques, I looked for signs of self-reflexivity, or an awareness of the history of Orientalism within the Western tradition in which they write.

The only article which was explicitly critical of mainstream Western media’s conflation of Islamic dress and “Arabness” was the earliest published article referencing the question of dress, “The Invisible Women of Tahrir Square, and What’s Ahead for Women in Egypt,” published at Ms. In this article, the author, Shahnaz Taplin-Chinoy, relays the critique of an Egyptian woman protestor, Iman Bibars, regarding U.S. media reporting on the women of the Egyptian revolution. Taplin-Chinoy writes that “Bibars believes that the American TV media missed huge–and predictable–chunks of the story when it came to women,” before elaborating on those “predictable” (based on an awareness of U.S. Orientalism in media) aspects of U.S. media coverage:
Bibars’ sense was that U.S. broadcast media had a frame: Reporters look for women in hijabs and burqas… She reported that they had no interest in interviewing her, a middle-aged, Western-dressed, English-speaking NGO activist. (Taplin-Chinoy)

Here, Taplin-Chinoy is drawing attention to the tendency of U.S. media to highlight those Arab women that fit within a Western Orientalist purview while ignoring those that may demystify ideas about Arab women as monolithic and always Islamic, at least in appearance.

Two more articles, one from Jezebel and one from Ms., although not explicitly encouraging an oppositional reading of Western media, used the symbol of women’s dress to contradict Western media’s tendency to present Arab and/or Muslim women as a monolith. An example is Robin Morgan’s of Ms.’ contention in “Women of the Arab Spring” that the crowd in Egypt was diverse in terms of appearance, as

women flocked to rallies— wearing veils, jeans and miniskirts— young girls, grandmothers, female judges in their court robes. However, although Morgan does paint a diverse picture of Egyptian women’s dress styles, she does suggest that one is perhaps more “feminist” than the others by marking the beginnings of the Egyptian feminist movement “in 1923 when Huda Sha’rawi publicly stripped off her veil”.

**CONSERVATIVE ISLAMIC DRESS AS NORMATIVE, REGARDLESS OF COUNTRY/REGION**

In five articles, four from Ms. and one from Jezebel, conservative Islamic dress was textually coded as normative for Arab women. In Jezebel’s “Libyan Rape Victim Iman al-Obeidi Escapes to Tunisia,” for instance, author Margaret Hartmann writes that al-Obeidi fled Libya wearing “a traditional head covering that hid everything except one eye.” From the aforementioned statement, a Western reader unfamiliar with Islam is likely to infer that traditional Islamic head coverings hid/hide everything except one eye. In fact, more research on al-Obeidi’s story confirms that she was wearing it in a particular way so as to conceal her face from those who may seek to keep her in Libya.

Another example can be found in “Masses of Yemeni Women Defy Oppression – and Stereotypes,” an article regarding women’s roles as protestors in the Yemeni revolution. In this article, author Michelle Chen writes that Yemen’s protests featured “a mass of black-clad women,” a description which both deindividualizes the women protestors and attests to the
apparent normativity of Islamic dress in Yemen. Chen also includes the testimony of Raja al Thaibani, who we are told is a “photojournalist who has been documenting the revolution since April,” and therefore somewhat of an expert on the Yemeni revolution. Thaibani, Chen writes,

was surprised when she found out that many women on the square do not cover their face with the traditional niqab and that they give speeches about human rights and freedom of the press.

Chen’s inclusion of Thaibani’s “expert” testimony confirms to Western readers that they, too, should find any situation wherein Arab women are not wearing the niqab surprising. Moreover, Chen writes that Thaibani is as surprised that the women protestors are giving liberal speeches, associating the absence of the niqab with progressive activities.

**ANXIETY ABOUT ISLAMISM**

Islamism, also called political Islam, is a set of ideologies holding that Islam should guide both political and social life. Islamists often advocate for the implementation of Sharia law, or the coding of Islamic guidelines into official law. Sharia itself, however, is interpreted very differently depending on the society in which it is meant to govern. For instance, the application of Sharia in Saudi Arabia has traditionally justified prohibiting women from driving, although Sharia in, say, the Islamic Republic of Iran, has not. In any case, Sharia stands in contrast to the “separation of church and state” enshrined in the U.S. constitution.

The U.S. and other Western secular countries have attempted to preserve this distinction, oftentimes to the point of criminalizing Islamic dress. France, for instance, has historically been intolerant of the wearing of the hijab in public, having banned it in 2004 for public school children and the niqab (face covering) in 2011 for all citizens (Reuters Staff). In the Netherlands, Geert Wilder’s Freedom Party has expressed intent to ban the niqab in public and even tax women who wear hijab (Fekete 65). Italy and Germany have not banned the niqab at the national levels, but have passed such legislation at the town and state levels, respectively (Reuters Staff). These cases highlight the veil as a symbol of the encroaching of political Islam on Western society.

Maya Mikdashi, in "The Uprisings Will Be Gendered," writes that Western media has tended to frame the uprisings of 2011 as dangerous insofar as they may empower Islamists.
Three “dress” articles in my sample, two published at *Ms.* and one at *Jezebel,* also dealt with themes of anxiety over traditionalists/Islamists gaining power in the uprisings.

The article most exemplary of this type of anxiety was the *Ms.* article, “Will Tunisian Islamists Strip Women of Their Rights?” by Hajer Naili. The headline itself conveys a sense of panic and acts as a presupposition. Naili does not ask *what* will happen if Tunisian Islamists become politically empowered, but suggests to the reader that Tunisian Islamists stripping women of their rights is at least one possibility.

Additionally, at the beginning of the article, Naili states that she “has personal reasons for caring about what happens in Tunisia” because she was born “in France to Tunisian parents,” establishing herself as a “native informant” before making some unfounded assumptions about the future of Tunisia.

In the text, Naili confirms her suspicion of the Islamist party, Ennahda, which was victorious in Tunisia’s revolutionary elections. Specifically, although she admits that Ennahda has promised to preserve laws that protect women’s relatively high status in Tunisia, Naili uses attacks on unveiled female students and teachers by “bearded men” to argue against supporting the party:

> In the past few weeks, female students and teachers have also been attacked and harassed on university campuses in Tunis and Kairouan for not wearing a veil. According to various media sources, bearded men disrupted classes and prevented female teachers who were not covered from teaching. Hundreds of women protested these incidents in Tunis, the capital, a few days ago. Ennahda may not be behind these acts, but the victory of the Islamist party could have emboldened some radical elements.

Western readers do not need to know that the men were “bearded” for the story to make sense. Naili’s inclusion is only relevant given Western associations between bearded Arabs and criminal activities, like those, for instance, propagated through the global circulation of photos of the bearded 9/11 hijackers.

Moreover, in “Iraqi Feminists Sexually Assaulted During Pro-Democracy Protests,” published at *Ms.*, Jessica Stites notes that assaults committed against four female pro-democracy protestors were by Iraqi government-sponsored protestors in “traditional Arab tribal dress.” Her inclusion of the way the perpetrators were dressed is an example of over-completeness, as it was unnecessary unless one were to consider racist associations Americans may have with “traditional” Arab dress. The constructed binary opposition
between liberated women on the one hand, and violent “traditional Arab” men on the other suggests to the Western reader a correlation between traditional Arab culture, specifically pre-nation-state, and authority, violence, and misogyny.

**THE GIRL IN THE #BLUEBRA**

The last three articles that made use of the “dress” trope referenced a video of several Egyptian military personnel surrounding a woman who has since been called “The Girl in the #BlueBra.” In the video, the woman is on the ground, her hijab above her head, exposing her blue bra, as officers drag her, kick her, and strike her with sticks. This particular video inspired a social media campaign referenced with the Twitter hashtag #bluebra.

The articles dealing with this media event use the “dress” trope to, again, victimize Muslim, and by extension, Arab women, and emphasize the power of Twitter (a U.S.-based social media company) in popularizing their struggle against what the publications construct to be a particularly violent Arab patriarchy. This media event speaks to the interconnectedness of representations of Arab culture as predominantly Islamic (even under secularist governments) and particularly misogynistic, in contrast with a seemingly less misogynistic American culture.

Below are the three articles dealing with this media event, arranged by publication date:

1. “Egypt’s Military Carries Out Violent Attacks On Women Protesters” *(Jezebel)*, 12/18/11
2. “Egyptian Women Rally Around ‘The Girl in the #BlueBra’” *(Ms.)*, 12/20/11

Looking at the headlines alone, these two publications tell the story of “The Girl in the #Bluebra” in fairly different ways. In the headlines for the *Jezebel* articles, the Egyptian military and/or government is committing violence against women, whereas in the headline for the *Ms.* article, Egyptian women are the subjects in action. However, none of the three articles presents the story from the perspective of the “Girl in the #Bluebra.” In fact, the Twitter hashtag is the only name assigned to her by any of the three authors.

In *Jezebel’s* “Egypt’s Military Carries Out Violent Attacks On Women Protestors,” author Cassie Murdoch tells of the assault in the context of the military committing violence
against protestors in general. For instance, she opens her article by detailing the brutal attacks on protestors by the Egyptian military, stating that “300 people have been injured and at least nine people have been killed” (Murdoch). Murdoch then uses the case of “The Girl in the #BlueBra” to begin to talk about the politics of the Egyptian military’s treatment of women protestors in particular.

Murdoch notes that the depiction of the generals lifting the woman’s hijab is being picked up as a “sign of the hypocrisy of the generals in charge”. Murdoch’s contention that the stripping of hijab was hypocritical, however, assumes that the generals, who were at that time freshly disassociated with Mubarak’s secularist party, were (at least purporting to be) particularly concerned with women’s adhering to an Islamic dress code in the protests. Citing no other descriptive factors, Murdoch appears to be making this assumption based on their Egyptian nationality and nothing else.

*Jezebel*’s “Egyptian Government Issues Apology, Will Likely Continue Treating Women Like Garbage,” also deals with this particular media event. Author Erin Gloria Ryan tells readers that the image “enraged” none other than Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, acting here as a kind of spokesperson for Western feminism. Ryan then points out that Not all Egyptians share Clinton's disgust over the contents of the photo...In fact, some of this woman's countrymen doubt the shot's authenticity and argued that it was staged, even though it was captured by a Reuters photographer.

Ryan, here, creates a binary between Clinton, who is empathetic to “The Girl in the #BlueBra,” and “some of this woman’s countrymen,” who are hesitant to believe she was assaulted. This binary makes the assumption of false sexual assault accusations appear unique to Egypt and ignores the fact that whenever a sexual assault case is picked up in the mainstream media in the U.S., a great many of Ryan’s own “countrymen” are quick to charge the survivor(s) with crying wolf.

In the last article dealing with this event, *Ms.* “Egyptian Women Rally Around ‘The Girl in the #BlueBra’,” author Anushay Hossein takes steps to emphasize the ways Egyptian women have organized to combat sexual assault in the protests. However, Hossein preferences social media organizing over other types of activism. Although Hossein tells of a protest march garnering several hundred women, she gives the credit to social media and the internet, claiming that the activists “used Twitter to organize the rally, with the hashtag
She later reifies Arab women’s dependency on social media and the internet for change:

Social media and the Internet are women’s weapons to ensure that their protests will be seen and their voices will not be silenced. (Hossein)

The “Girl in the #BlueBra” media event points to the complementary constructions of Arab femininity and masculinity. The publications tended to propagate an understanding of the relationship of men to women in the protests as one of violence committed against the latter by the former.

**Gendered Violence in Protests**

Male-instigated violence in protests was by far the most prevalent theme in my sample, as 58% of the articles in my sample discussed violence towards female protestors at the hands of patriarchal regimes, militaries, or male protestors. Interestingly, 46, or 68% of the “violence” articles (and about 39% of the sample in general) specifically highlighted sexual violence directed at women by any of the former. It is important to note that more articles would have been included in this figure if I had included allusions to sexual violence or harassment; for instance, I am fairly sure that the following sentence referred to sexual violence/harassment but felt it was not explicit enough regarding the gendered or sexual nature of the violence: “At a March 8 International Women’s Day rally, women were met with violence and harassment” (Williams).

*Jezebel* was the most likely to focus on violence in protests; of the 68 “violence” articles, they published the majority with 35. *Ms.* came in at a close second with 31. *Bitch* published two “violence” articles. “Violence” articles were responsible for 62% of *Jezebel’s* total articles, 56% of *Ms.*’s total articles, and 29% of *Bitch’s* total articles.

Moreover, *Jezebel* was also the most likely to focus on sexual assault within the “violence” articles. 74% (25), of *Jezebel’s* “violence” articles focused on sexual assault whereas 61% (19), of *Ms.*’s “violence” articles focused on sexual assault, and 100% or both of *Bitch’s* “violence” articles focused on sexual assault.

**Practicing Caution, Contextualizing Violence**

Of the three online publications in my study, *Ms.* was the only one that combined reporting on violence in the Arab uprisings with nuanced discussions on Orientalism and
Western involvement in the Arab world. Of the 68 “violence” articles, only nine, all published at Ms., were those in which the author took steps to dispel Orientalist stereotypes regarding the Arab world. An example of this kind of careful contextualization can be found in Article 8 in my sample, “Lara Logan Should Have Stayed Home Because She is a ‘Mommy.’” In this article, author Renee Martin discusses some of the reactions she has encountered regarding the assault of American reporter Lara Logan on behalf of Egyptian protestors:

I have been following the story of Lara Logan and the horrible assault that she survived in Egypt. I have read the articles about people questioning what she was wearing, the asserting that her ‘good looks’ played a role in the assault, claiming that she deserved it because she was in a Muslim country (never mind that rape happens in North America).

Martin’s reminder to readers that rape is not unique to the Arab world is brief but important in that it ensures that the media event on which she is reporting will not lend itself to a dichotomized view of “the Middle East/West” in which rape is a problem that occurs in the former and can be solved by the latter (likely through military intervention, as we have seen in the past).

Only one of the “violence” articles in my sample, again published at Ms., held the U.S./Western world as responsible for unrest in the Arab world. Author Jessica Stites, in the article entitled “Iraqi Feminists Sexually Assaulted During Pro-Democracy Protests,” tells of the assaults on four Iraqi women, representing the Organization of Women’s Freedom in Iraq, by male protestors, apparently supported by the Iraqi government, in a pro-democracy protest. Stites relays a message from Yanar Mohammed, Director for the Organization of Women’s Freedom in Iraq:

Mohammed has a message for Americans:

Even if the U.S. intervention that happened before–the military intervention–has destroyed our lives, we need a civilian intervention now. (Stites)

The inclusion of Mohamed’s statement on behalf of Stites reminds readers that gendered violence in the Arab world is occurring at the same time as the nation is destabilized by U.S. intervention and war-waging. Mohamed’s statement also distinguishes between a military intervention, which has destroyed Iraqi lives, and attention on behalf of ordinary civilians in the U.S. to Iraqi social justice issues.
PAIRING “VIOLENCE” REPORTING WITH FAMILIAR TROPES

On the other hand, several articles combined reporting on violence in the Arab uprisings with familiar tropes. Eight of the 68 total “violence” articles, six published at Ms. and two published at Jezebel, also included the theme “Islamism as a detriment to the goals of the revolutionaries.” Three of the “violence” articles, two published at Jezebel and one at Ms., identified Hillary Clinton, often associated globally with Western feminism or, more roughly, women’s improved status in the so-called modern world, as an ally to the revolutionaries. Moreover, the way revolutionary actors were dressed (as either Western or Islamic/Arab-icized) was referenced in the text of thirteen of the 68 total “violence” articles, six times by Ms. and five times by Jezebel. Furthermore, photographs featuring protestors wearing some incarnation of the veil (hijab or niqab) were paired with 44% (30) of the 68 total “violence” articles, 26% (18) published at Jezebel and 18% (12) published at Ms. More specifically, 21 “violence” articles were paired with photographs of women in hijab, four were paired with photographs of women in niqab, and five included women in either hijab or niqab as well as “Western” dress. The inclusion of the photographs further underscores associations between Muslim women and victimization.

MEDIA EVENTS: THE SEXUAL ASSAULTS OF IMAN AL-OBEIDI AND LARA LOGAN

As I reviewed the articles in my sample, I noticed that two women were routinely highlighted in some of the articles’ headlines. These two women, Iman al-Obeidi and Lara Logan, had experienced sexual assault at the hands of Libyan troops and Egyptian male protestors, respectively. Al-Obeidi first caught the attention of the international media on March 26, 2011 upon approaching a group of journalists at the Rixos Al Nasr hotel and proceeding to testify about her experiences of assault by Libyan troops who had detained her. Lara Logan is a white South African CBS reporter now living in the U.S. who is known for experiencing assault at the hands of male Egyptian protestors in February of 2011.

I combed through my sample a few times in order to see, first, how many stories in which an individual was highlighted in the headline and, second, how many were featured on each of these two women.
I found that Iman al-Obeidi was featured in seven of the article’s headlines while Lara Logan was featured in six. Hillary Clinton was the only other individual to be featured in more than one headline, as she was highlighted in three. Aside from being featured in the headlines of the articles, al-Obeidi appeared in the text of fourteen articles and Logan appeared in the text of eleven. I pulled these 25 articles aside for in-depth analysis in order to examine what topics were being talked about in connection to their likenesses.

**ARTICLES FEATURING IMAN AL-OBEIDI**

Of the fourteen articles featuring Iman al-Obeidi, *Jezebel* authors wrote the most, with nine, *Ms.* authors wrote five, and *Bitch* authors wrote none. Given the very different ways in which al-Obeidi was discussed in *Ms.* versus *Jezebel*, I decided to compare the two with an eye to how her story was framed by each publication using headlines and microlevel rhetorical devices.

Below are the five al-Obeidi articles, including headlines, published at *Ms.* and arranged by publication date:

3. 5/9/11: “Newsflash: Eman al-Obeidi Flees to Tunisia”
5. 7/30/11: “Rosa Parks Revelations and Fearless Feminist Governors: Editors’ Picks, July 24-30”

In *Ms.*’ account, al-Obeidi’s story is one of resistance from the beginning. The second and third headlines provide information on the status of al-Obeidi’s case and her whereabouts. The headlines for the fourth and fifth article are seemingly unrelated to al-Obeidi’s story. In these articles, al-Obeidi’s story is not the subject, but is used as supporting information with which to talk about surviving sexual assault and state-sanctioned rape, respectively.

The authors of the *Ms.* articles take steps to make sure al-Obeidi’s story does not appear unique to the Arab world. In the first article, “Witness to Rape: The Resistance of Eman al-Obeidi,” for example, author Janell Hobson denies that “rape as an act of state terrorism is an anomaly that only occurs under repressive governments such as Gaddafi’s” by
highlighting the general complacency on behalf of white American society regarding “sexual violence as a tool of racialized state terrorism during the Jim Crow era” (“Witness to Rape”).

Moreover, Hobson closes the article by recasting “the rape victim” who has spoken out about her rape as a “rape survivor and an anti-rape activist” (“Witness to Rape”). This is particularly salient given Chandra Talpade Mohanty’s critique of Western feminist representations of Third World women as “archetypal victims” (“Under Western Eyes: Feminist” 24).

The second and third articles, authored by Matthew Burgoyne, are written matter-of-factly and relay al-Obeidi’s description of her detainment by the Libyan government following her outcry to reporters and report that al-Obeidi has flown to Tunisia, respectively (“Newsflash”, “Eman Al-Obeidi”).

In the fourth article, “Loaded Guns, Loaded Metaphors,” by Janell Hobson, Al-Obeidi is mentioned along with American pop singer Rihanna and other well-known victims of gendered violence in order to celebrate women speaking out about sexual abuse in general.

My harshest critique of Ms.’ reporting on the al-Obeidi narrative concerns the last article published at Ms., “Rosa Parks Revelations and Fearless Feminist Governors,” by Annie Shields. This article reads like a list of “the editors” eight favorite internet news stories from the week of July 24-30, so al-Obeidi only warrants a brief mention:

On Wednesday, Eman al-Obeidy, the Libyan woman who bravely accused forces of Col. Muammar el-Qaddafi of brutally raping her, reached sanctuary in New York. CNN reports that al-Obeidy hopes to someday meet Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, whose State Department helped ensure al-Obeidy escaped Libya. (Shields 24-30)

The addition of al-Obeidi’s desire to meet Secretary of State Hillary Clinton is an example of the rhetorical framing device of over-completeness. This addition almost assures Western feminist readers that al-Obeidi could not have done it without Western feminism, personified in Secretary of State Clinton.

In contrast to Ms.’ fairly responsible reporting, Jezebel’s articles regarding al-Obeidi easily lent themselves to Orientalist tropes. Below are the nine al-Obeidi articles, including headlines, published at Jezebel and arranged by publication date:
1. 3/28/11: “Libyan Rape Victim Shouts for Justice, Violent Melee Ensues”
2. 3/29/11: “Libyan Woman Reportedly Sued By Her Rapists”
3. 3/31/11: “Qaddafi’s Daughter & the Other Women on the Front Line in Libya”
4. 4/7/11: “Libyan Rape Victim Iman al-Obeidi Gives First TV Interview”
5. 5/8/11: “Libyan Rape Victim Iman al-Obeidi Escapes to Tunisia”
6. 5/18/11: “Libyan Government Investigated for Viagra-Fueled Gang Rapes”
7. 6/6/11: “Libyan Rape Victim Iman Al-Obeidi is Deported, Heads to U.S.”
8. 8/1/11: “Libyan Rape Victim Iman Al-Obeidi is Now in the U.S.”
9. 12/28/11: “Vote For Jezebel’s Woman of the Year”

Looking at the headlines alone, what immediately stands out is the framing of al-Obeidi as a “Libyan rape victim” in five of the nine Jezebel articles, rather than an emphasis on al-Obeidi’s resistance in the face of sexualized state violence.

Moreover, Jezebel’s articles sensationalize the events surrounding al-Obeidi’s story in a way that Ms.’ matter-of-fact reporting does not. For instance, in five of the nine Jezebel articles, (1, 2, 4, 5, and 9 from the list above), the authors (Irin Carmon for 1 and 2, Margaret Hartmann for 4, 5, and 9) refer to Gaddafi’s troops as “thugs,” a term which carries racial connotations in the U.S.¹

Furthermore, none of the al-Obeidi articles published at Jezebel draw attention to the fact that state-sanctioned sexual violence has been used against women in other societies, much less Western societies. If anything, the sixth article in this list, “Libyan Government Investigated for Viagra-Fueled Gang Rapes,” reinforces the idea that state-sanctioned rape is a Libyan problem by suggesting first, that “the brutal rape Iman al-Obeidi suffered is far from an isolated incident,” before elaborating on the former statement with “reports that rape is being used as a weapon of war by Gadhafi’s forces, and hundreds of women have been victimized” (Hartmann). The implication here is that the brutal rape al-Obeidi suffered was

¹ The word “thug” is closely associated with American hip hop, as many rappers refer to themselves and/or associates as “thugs” (i.e. Tupac and “thug life,” Bone Thugs n Harmony, etc.). Moreover, Erin Murphy’s discourse analysis of a “Thug Life” party at Warren Wilson College demonstrates the connection white students there made between being a “thug” and being “black,” as their party served as a way for white students to “dress” and “act black.” The first entry in the Oxford English Dictionary definition for “thug,” “One of an association of professional robbers and murderers in India, who strangled their victims,” also refers to a particular type of non-white, and also Eastern masculinity (“Thug,” def. 1).
not isolated because it was in fact endemic to Gaddafi’s forces rather than (repressive) governments in general.

In the first “al-Obeidi” article published at Jezebel, “Libyan Rape Victim Shouts for Justice, Violent Melee Ensues,” author Irin Carmon concludes her article with a presupposition:

Here is another sobering fact: Proof will probably be offered of Obaidi's release in the form of video, but there will be no way to know whether her statement is being made under coercion, or whether there will be any real justice. Whatever that would look like.

Carmon’s assertion that the Libyan government is likely to offer some kind of false video proof of al-Obeidi’s release, although presented as a “fact,” is effectively baseless.

The headline of the third article, “Qaddafi’s Daughter & the Other Women on the Front Line in Libya,” also authored by Carmon, suggests to readers that the article will discuss some notable major players in the Libyan uprisings. Al-Obeidi is only mentioned in the first paragraph:

Amid headlines of NATO taking charge of air operations and CIA presence on the ground in Libya are headlines of three women in very different positions. Iman Obeidi, the woman who bravely told of her rape, is sadly still missing. The only other woman mentioned, Lynsey Addario, is an American journalist for The New York Times who we are told was kidnapped and released along with her colleagues. Readers are led to assume, then, that aside from al-Obeidi, whose role has already been established as that of the archetypal victim, the “women on the frontlines” are Aisha Gaddafi, who is against the revolution, and Lynsey Addario, an American. Missing from the story are Libyan women activists on the side of the revolution.

In contrast to the brief conclusion to al-Obeidi’s narrative given by Ms., Jezebel’s al-Obeidi articles pay considerably more attention to al-Obeidi’s reaching sanctuary in the U.S. In the seventh article, “Libyan Rape Victim Iman Al-Obeidi Is Deported, Heads to U.S.,” Obeidi is described as having said in, not one, but “several interviews that she would like to live in the U.S.” (Hartmann). The State Department is heroized, as readers are told they are “prepared to provide whatever help and support Eman may need” (“Libyan Rape Victim Iman Al-Obeidi is Deported, Heads to U.S.”). Secretary of State Clinton is also reported to have been “deeply interested in the case” (“Libyan Rape Victim Iman Al-Obeidi is Deported, Heads to U.S.”). In the second to last Jezebel al-Obeidi article, entitled “Libyan Rape Victim
Iman Al-Obeidi is Now in the U.S.,” also authored by Hartmann, we are told that al-Obeidi is “finally in the United States,” as if Western feminist readers were holding their breath until she had made it. Again, readers are encouraged to see the U.S. as playing a liberatory role, as we are told that al-Obeidi “thanked the U.S. government and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton for helping her leave Libya”. Moreover, Hartmann reports that al-Obeidi is not only relieved, but “excited and happy to be here” (“Libyan Rape Victim Iman al-Obeidi is Now in the U.S.”). The term “excited” obscures the reason al-Obeidi fled in the first place, making her trip to the U.S. seem adventurous rather than merely life-saving.

ARTICLES FEATURING LARA LOGAN

As was the case for the al-Obeidi articles, I examined the articles featuring Lara Logan with an eye to the headlines and rhetorical devices. I soon began to notice that, in addition to supporting a myth of Arab male lechery, Logan’s assault was frequently subjected to a race-blind analysis, meaning hers was often compared to the assault of al-Obeidi and others in the Arab uprisings without attention to Logan’s differently racialized and nationalized body. The discussion of Logan’s assault as essentially similar to al-Obeidi’s posits Arab men as the common denominator, suggesting that there is something inherently violent and/or barbaric about Arab masculinity/culture.

Of the eleven articles regarding Lara Logan’s assault, Ms. authors wrote five, Jezebel authors wrote four, and Bitch authors wrote one. Below are the articles featuring Lara Logan published at Ms., including headlines and arranged by date:

1. 2/16/11: “Lara Logan and Egypt’s Next Revolution”
2. 2/18/11: “Yes Comment! Don’t Let Lady Antebellum Host Your Black History Month Party”
3. 2/23/11: “Lara Logan Should Have Stayed Home Because She is a ‘Mommy’”
4. 3/23/11: “‘Virginity Tests’ Forced on Egyptian Women Protesters”
6. 5/1/11: “To the FBI, Lara Logan Wasn’t Raped”

Ms.’ articles regarding Logan were generally more problematic than theirs on al-Obeidi. In the first article in this list, the author, Holly Kearl, makes several assumptions about Egyptian society that lend themselves to supporting stereotypes about Arab male lechery. Kearl starts her article with:
Last Friday, soon after Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak announced he would leave office, a group of men in Cairo beat and sexually assaulted American CBS reporter Lara Logan, after separating her from her crew.

Firstly, her pairing of the events of Mubarak’s resignation and Logan’s assault suggests to readers that the two are somehow related – that without the heavy hand of an American-approved/allied dictator, sexual harassment by Egyptian/Arab men might just spiral out of control, affecting even “our own” Western women/society.

She goes on to state that it doesn’t surprise her that the assault happened in Egypt because while “harassment and assault of women in public places is a global problem, its occurrence in Egypt is well documented” (Kearl).

Without further elaboration, readers are left to assume that the issue arises frequently in Egypt because Egyptians, or Arabs in general, are particularly prone to sexual harassment. She could have, for example, also done research that would have pointed to a thriving Egyptian feminist movement as another possible explanation for the occurrence of sexual harassment in Egypt being “well documented.”

Two other articles collapse Logan’s assault into a general narrative about sexual assault directed at women participants in social movements. In “‘Virginity Tests’ Forced On Egyptian Women Protestors,” written by Amelia Thomson, Logan’s assault is discussed in the context of gendered violence directed at protestors without pointing out that Logan was not a protestor, but a CBS reporter, or, in other words, a representative for the Western media. In “Witness to Rape: The Resistance of Eman al-Obeidi,” author Janell Hobson includes the following parenthetical reference to Logan after a paragraph about government spin on rape cases:

Witness the victim-blaming response to Lara Logan’s rape allegations during the Egyptian Revolution last month.

The above parenthetical reference did include a link that is now broken, so I cannot be sure what Hallet wants readers to “witness.” However, this article once again unites Logan with al-Obeidi and others who were assaulted in the uprisings without contextualizing Logan’s assault. In both cases, the Ms. writers incorrectly utilize Logan’s assault as an example of gendered violence directed against Arab women protestors to the effect of strengthening their cases that Arab protests are not safe spaces for Arab women.
Three articles placed Logan’s assault in the context of domestic U.S. politics. In “To
the FBI, Lara Logan Wasn’t Raped,” author Stephanie Hallet critiques the FBI’s legal
definition of rape as requiring penis-vagina intercourse/penetration, using Logan’s story to
illustrate an example by which an extreme form of sexual assault is technically not
considered “rape.” Moreover, in “Yes Comment! Don’t Let Lady Antebellum Host Your
Black History Month Party,” which does not list a particular author, Ms. highlights a debate
amongst internet commenters about whether or not to call Logan’s assault “rape,” again
drawing attention to the ways rape is differently conceptualized to the American public.

As was mentioned earlier as an example of self-reflexivity amongst Western writers,
Renee Martin, in “Lara Logan Should Have Stayed Home Because She is a ‘Mommy’,”
Attempts in the first paragraph to disrupt stereotypes about Arab male lechery:

I have read the articles about people questioning what she was wearing, the
asserting that her ‘good looks’ played a role in the assault, claiming that she
deserved it because she was in a Muslim country (never mind that rape happens in
North America) and the debates that women reporting in that area represent a
potential lawsuit to their employers.

The rest of the article deals more specifically with an article entitled “Women with Young
Kids Shouldn’t Be in War Zones,” written by Peter Worthington of The Toronto Sun.

Compared to Jezebel’s telling of al-Obeidi’s narrative, the Jezebel articles regarding
Lara Logan emphasize survivorhood and resistance to a greater extent. Below are the four
articles featuring Lara Logan published at Jezebel, including headlines and arranged by date:

1. 2/15/11: “CBS Reporter Lara Logan Sexually Assaulted in Egypt”
2. 3/9/11: “Egyptian Women Protest, are Groped and Beaten for It”
3. 5/2/11: “Lara Logan Breaks Ground with Graphic Description Of Her Rape,
Injuries”
4. 6/8/11: “Women’s Post-Combat Stress Similar to Men”

A comparison of the headlines alone casts al-Obeidi as a “Libyan rape victim”
“shouting for justice,” “being sued,” “fleeing,” and so on versus Lara Logan as a “CBS
reporter” who “breaks ground” with her story. Moreover, as was the case in the Ms.
headlines, Egyptian women are brought into Logan’s story, as if what happened to Logan is
the same kind of thing that happens to Egyptian women. The converse, Lara Logan appearing
in the headlines regarding al-Obeidi’s narrative, did not happen in either of the publications’
accounts.
In “Lara Logan Breaks Ground with Graphic Description of Her Rape, Injuries,” author Anna North describes Logan in terms much different from those used to depict al-Obeidi and her assault. North tells readers several times that Logan delivered a “strikingly candid” account of her assault (“Lara Logan Breaks Ground”). Logan was “totally frank…as she listed her injuries”; the interview in which she discussed her assault was “especially striking because we rarely hear sexual assault or the injuries it causes discussed so frankly” (North, “Lara Logan Breaks Ground”). Furthermore, North states that, by discussing the gory details of sexual assault, which is often taboo, Logan has “stood up for all the women in the world who don't want the possibility of sexual assault to curtail their freedom” (“Lara Logan Breaks Ground”). Furthermore, Irin Carmon, in “Women’s Post-Combat Stress Similar to Men,” highlighted some positive outcomes of Lara Logan’s sexual assault, stating that it spurred a report which was “the first comprehensive look at female journalists working in war-torn or lawless areas.” Although Jezebel reports that al-Obeidi told journalists she was tied up and peed on in “Libya Rape Victim Shouts for Justice, Violent Melee Ensues,” she was not applauded for her frankness or credited with empowering women around the world. This points to the oppositional characterizations assigned to white/Western versus Arab women who have experienced sexual assault.

In “CBS Reporter Lara Logan Sexually Assaulted in Egypt,” also authored by Anna North, North makes a few presuppositions regarding CBS’ statement on the assault that lend weight to myths of Arab male lechery. Below is an excerpt from the article which includes CBS’ statement:

The network has released a statement, presumably with Logan's permission:

In the crush of the mob, she was separated from her crew. She was surrounded and suffered a brutal and sustained sexual assault and beating before being saved by a group of women and an estimated 20 Egyptian soldiers. (North, “CBS Reporter”)

North then critiques the statement and communicates her desire for more information, for instance, whether the Egyptian army — which in an interview the night before her attack, Logan accused of detaining her, blindfolding her, keeping her in “stress positions,” and beating her driver — were really the heroes the CBS statement makes them out to be. (“CBS Reporter”)

North is seemingly subscribing to a conceptualization of the “Egyptian army” as one entity versus women, and specifically, “Lara Logan” a professional, white, Western woman, on the
other. It is from this perspective that she is in apparent disbelief that the same Egyptian army that detained Logan, blindfolded her, etc. before her assault would contain twenty individuals that may come to her immediate aid in another context.

Irin Carmon’s “Egyptian Women Protest, are Groped and Beaten for It” also lends itself to stereotypes that cast Arab men as inherently violent. Carmon references Logan’s assault in her discussion of a march organized by Egyptian women in Tahrir Square against sexual harassment:

Many Egyptian women had said, before and after reports of Lara Logan's attack, that the sexual harassment they'd experienced in Cairo had abated during the anti-Mubarak revolution. But one woman told Krajeski she'd been harassed on her way to the protest: “The men are back to their old habits”.

It is important to note that the source she cites as relaying expertise on Egyptian men’s “habits,” Jenna Krajeski, is a writer for the U.S.-based publication, the New Yorker. Furthermore, although Carmon does appear to making a distinction between Logan’s attack and attacks on Egyptian women by Egyptian men in the protest setting, the latter is presented as a “habit.” It is to be inferred, then, that assaults of Egyptian women by Egyptian men are the norm and that what happened to Logan is a risk she took as a Western woman by entering into that type of cultural setting.

It is also interesting to note that Carmon reports that the march did not go as planned, as

It was called, ambitiously, a million woman march, but turnout was estimated at 1,000. (“Egyptian Women Protest, are Groped and Beaten for It”)

A 1,000-woman march is by no means small, although Carmon diminishes its size by comparing it to a hypothetical group of a million women. Carmon’s disparagement of the women’s march in Tahrir Square has the power to give readers the impression that there is no significant awareness of sexual harassment in Egypt.

The only article in the sample which thoroughly addresses Arab male lechery as a myth was “Race Card: Xenophobia and Racism Surface in Reaction to Reporter Lara Logan’s Sexual Assault in Egypt,” published at Bitch on June 4, 2011 and authored by Nadra Kareem Nittle. Nittle tells of mainstream media reports that chide Logan for not knowing “better than to make her way through a mob of brown, Muslim men”. She goes on:

Why didn’t Logan realize that all Arab men are misogynistic beasts who haven’t the slightest respect for their own women, let alone Western women—all of
whom they regard as whores? Yeah, that about sums up the message boards on sites from the Los Angeles Times to the New York Times to Salon. (Nittle)

The author then gives examples, citing three separate comments from readers of The L.A. Times, The New York Times, and Salon. She ends with the following paragraph, in which she demystifies stereotypes about Islam as inspiring a particularly oppressive patriarchal climate:

But Islam has as much to do with Logan’s assault as Christianity does with the fact that a rape occurs in the U.S. every two minutes. Moreover, let’s not forget that Egypt isn’t just home to Muslims but to Christians and atheists as well. More importantly, let’s not forget that the group of women and soldiers who rescued Logan from her attackers were Egyptian. That fact makes it much harder to swallow commentator Debbie Schlussel’s drivel about Egypt being a “country of savages” and Islam a religion of violence. (Nittle)

However, Nittle’s article is not without flaw. Nittle also states that commenters who suggest that Logan, as a “hot blonde,” shouldn’t have gone into the crowd at Tahrir Square are “racist,” obscuring the notion of racism as a structure which benefits whites, including Logan. Furthermore, Nittle encourages readers to imagine if Logan had been black before contending that

It’s difficult to envision the public suggesting that the reporter brought the crime on herself because she’s black and should’ve known better. If it wouldn’t be appropriate to blame a woman of color for being raped in such a situation, it’s certainly not appropriate to blame Logan for the color of her skin and hair.

Nittle’s claims that the victim-blaming response to Lara Logan’s rape is based on Logan’s “whiteness,” and so would have been absent from discussions if Logan were black, ignore the history of black racism in the U.S. which has historically worked to code black women as inherently un-rapable. The rape of a “black Lara Logan” probably would not have garnered much media attention in the first place and would have likely utilized a greater degree of victim blaming, albeit perhaps presented differently, in the forum comments.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Although Ms. and Jezebel published the same number of articles on the uprisings, a greater percentage of Ms.’ articles centered the Arab Spring as opposed to using the events associated with the uprisings to discuss other topics. Ms. writers made more textual references to the styles of dress of actors in the protests than writers at Jezebel. Bitch did not discuss the styles of dress of actors in the protests. Jezebel, on the other hand, was more
likely to focus on protest violence than Ms. or Bitch, and was more likely to equate protest violence with sexual assault than Ms., although both of Bitch’s articles on protest violence focused specifically on sexual assault.

Writers at Jezebel tended to discuss Iman al-Obeidi’s assault more than Lara Logan’s whereas Ms. writers highlighted Logan’s assault to a greater degree than that of al-Obeidi. Ms. discussed violence, and specifically, the assaults of Iman al-Obeidi and Lara Logan more responsibly than Jezebel did, but still slipped into framing the assaults, particularly that of Lara Logan, in a way that might support Orientalist notions about gender and/or democracy in the Arab world. Bitch, although publishing much less than the other publications, seemed to take careful steps to avoid a framing of the protests that would lend weight to Orientalist ideas about gender and/or democracy in the Arab world.
CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Mainstream feminist coverage of the Arab uprisings of 2011 presented Arab democracy as dysfunctional and dangerous, especially to women, ultimately supporting Orientalist stereotypes about the Arab world and its people. Characterizations of actors in the uprisings were both racialized and gendered. Photographs and descriptions of their styles of dress served to mark their status as ethnic Others while descriptions of their roles in the uprisings constructed Arab men and women in opposition to one another. Throughout the coverage, Arab men were overwhelmingly presented as perpetrators of violence whereas Arab women were continuously victimized. Moreover, the three feminist publications in question represented the West/U.S. as providing assistance, liberatory knowledge, and/or technology to Arabs struggling against stifling cultural and/or political climates.

The mainstream U.S. feminist media discourse gave preferential coverage to male-instigated violence in protests, social media as assisting the goals of the revolutionaries, and the question of the relationship of political representation to women’s status in the Arab world. The same discourse virtually ignored other long-standing social movements in the Arab world, the most well known globally being the Palestinian intifada, and did very little to examine the role of the West in contributing to unrest in the MENA region.

The importance placed on social media and women’s participation in official political spheres coupled with the ignorance of issues of priority in the Arab world and diaspora reflect support on behalf of the publications in the study for a liberal feminist ideology that reifies the dominance of Western political and information technologies. In the words of Rabab El-Mahdi, the Western media focus on the importance of social media in the uprisings, for instance, communicates to Westerners that we are once again “the stimulator and the model.’ It’s the ‘white-man’s burden’ in a new form” (Abu-Lughod and El-Mahdi 689).

Depictions of the way protestors were dressed as well as gendered violence within the protests also constructed Arab democracy as dysfunctional without Western assistance.
ANALYSIS OF U.S. FEMINIST MEDIA COVERAGE OF DRESS OF ACTORS IN UPRISINGS

My analysis of mainstream U.S. feminist discussions of the styles of dress of the protestors in the Arab uprisings of 2011 relies on post-colonial, transnational, Arab-American, and Islamic feminist theories that highlight the extent to which dress, and more specifically, “the veil,” has been politicized in the West. Historically, Westerners have connoted the veil with a type of uniquely Islamic gender oppression. The veil serves as a demarcation line between “Us” and “Them,” secularism and religion, traditionalism and modernity, etc. However, the veil as a Western feminist priority also points to the imperial character of Western feminism(s). An overemphasis on the veil deemphasizes feminist issues actually defined by women in the Middle East/North African region, many of which confront U.S. oil and foreign policy interests in the region.

Although the theme of dress of the revolutionary actors in the protests appeared in the texts of the articles in my sample to a lesser extent than did some of the other themes, the amount of articles which featured veiled women speaks to the lingering appropriation of the veil by Western feminists as symbolic of the monolithic Arab woman, and, by extension, nation. Moreover, given mainstream U.S. feminism’s history regarding the mobilization of the veil, I had hoped to see more than the singular article published at Ms. presenting a critical perspective of Western discussions about dress in the Arab world. Also clear from this examination of the publications’ mobilization of dress of the revolutionary actors in the uprisings is the continuance of a kind of Western feminist panic regarding the perceived threat of Islamism. As was evident from the publications’ discussions on the “Girl in the #BlueBra,” women living in the Arab world are portrayed as monolithic in their oppression under Islam, regardless of the degree to which their respective governments espouse Islamism.

“OTHERING” THROUGH REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN’S DRESS

By invoking representations of women in the Arab world as visually different than women living in the West, the mainstream U.S. feminist publications in question recall discourses that have utilized dichotomous conceptual relationships between Arab and Western cultures in order to justify colonial practices. In these cases, Western women have
been coded as relatively liberated in comparison with their Arab counterparts, and therefore speak to the “civilization” or “modernity” of Western society in general.

Veiled Arab women highlighted in the articles were often portrayed in victimized roles whereas Western women in the articles were coded as strong. For instance, writers at *Jezebel* frequently referred to Iman al-Obeidi as a “Libyan rape victim” whereas writers for the same publication framed Lara Logan as a survivor and anti-rape advocate. Furthermore, Hillary Clinton was represented in several *Ms.* and *Jezebel* articles as empowered to the point of aiding archetypal Muslim victims, including al-Obeidi.

Chandra Talpade Mohanty’s “Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses,” first published in 1984, still stands as a relevant critique of Western feminist scholarship as it concerns “Third World” women. In “Under Western Eyes: Feminist,” Mohanty discusses “Othering,” a strategy by which Western regimes of knowledge codify “Others as non-Western and hence themselves as (implicitly) Western” (18). Similarly to how Said’s Western/Occidental subject is defined in opposition to a monolithic Oriental subject, Western representations of monolithic “Third World” women are often used to inspire ideas about “First World” women. Western feminists have historically referenced the “plight” of the Arab and/or “Third World” woman to legitimize Western feminist thought.

Moreover, since the character of a nation is often represented by the patriarchal regulation of its women, Western representations of women often work to say something about an Arab and/or Islamic nation in general (Smith, *Conquest*; Kaplan, Alarcón, and Moallem; Moghadam). If the veiled (Muslim) woman is always constructed as in need of saving, it is to be implied that the culture behind this type of veiling is oppressive in regards to gender relations, justifying colonial interests in the region on behalf of “modern” or “progressive” nations. British colonialism in the nineteenth century, for instance, utilized rhetoric of “unveiling the ‘veiled woman’” as part of a modernization project (Grewal 537). At the same time, similar associations between the Middle East/North African region and “traditionalism” on the one hand and the West and “modernization” on the other were disseminated to Americans through high and low cultural production alike.

Linda Steet, in *Veils and Daggers*, analyzes the application of the trope of the veiled woman in the esteemed popular educational publication, *National Geographic*, in its
coverage of the Arab world from 1888-1988. Steet found that discussions of clothing
contained strings of associations. The veil was often associated with Islam, the Arab world
(geographically), and a kind of “backwardness” attributed to “traditionalism.” Conversely,
Western dress seemed to indicate to the National Geographic writers an adoption of
“progressive” ideas or values.

Steet discusses the establishment and propagation of stereotypes about Arab women
in the first time period she analyzes, the 1880s-1920s. This period is marked by the challenge
to, and displacement of, Ottoman rule of the Arab world by Western colonialism (Steet 32).
In National Geographic’s accounts of meetings with the inhabitants of the new colonies, the
veil was central to the construction of the monolithic Arab woman “type.” Statements such as
“in Cairo all Mohammedan women cover their faces” construct the veil as compulsory for
Muslim women, for instance (Steet 60).

Moreover, National Geographic writers encourage readers to feel that differences
between themselves and Arab women and men can largely be attributed to Islam. A female
author in this period writes that between “us—women of the West—and these daughters of
the desert is a gulf, impassable and not of our own making; it is a barrier of religion” (Steet
62). The veil, then, comes to symbolize a system of gender oppression unique to
“Mohammedan,” or Muslim women.

Steet writes that in National Geographic’s coverage of the Arab world, through
colonial as well as post-colonial periods, women’s style of dress “was the most often used
sign of progress—that is, Westernization or lack of it” (133). Throughout the 1930s and 40s,
“European colonial networks were disintegrating,” the United States and the Soviet Union
rose as new world powers, and Arab national liberation movements began to challenge the
remaining colonial powers in the region (Steet 82-90). In the National Geographic coverage
during this period, Arab women were portrayed as essentially exploited by their male
counterparts. One exemplary description by a visiting American author casts Morroccan
women as “‘veiled faces secreted behind high walls…who toil like beasts of burden in the
sun’” (Steet 90).

By the 1950s-1960s, “large U.S. investments in Saudi Arabian oil production led to
its replacing Britain as the main Western influence” (Steet 107). Of Arab women during this
period, one National Geographic author writes that he
sensed their gradual independence in the variety of styles. . . . Their personalities are changing, too. Veil-less women are outgoing and positive, while those clinging to tradition are shy. (Steet 110)

Dress, in this sense, is presented as being indicative of personality. Veiled women are “those clinging to tradition” in the face of what is presented as an almost inevitable modernization project, perhaps ushered in by contact with U.S. culture.

While Arab women are portrayed as beginning to, in many cases, apprehensively, adopt a Western style of dress, an article which features commentary on a photograph of a white American woman in niqab reports that the veil “made breathing difficult” for the woman (Steet 108). Readers are encouraged to imagine the white American woman as occupying an advanced, “modern” position from which the veil, as a symbol of traditional/Islamic Arab society, seems insufferable.

THE VEIL AS SYMBOL OF THREAT OF ISLAMISM

My findings reflect a tendency on behalf of Ms. and Jezebel to utilize the trope of “dress” to represent the distinctly Islamic character of all or most Arab women and/or gender roles, and thus Arab society in general. This was communicated through photographs featuring veiled women as well as assumptions of an adherence to Islamic law on behalf of even secular transitional governments (i.e. Egypt’s SCAF in the “Girl in the #BlueBra” narrative).

For many Western feminists and policymakers, Islamic dress symbolizes not only Islam, but also religious fundamentalism. The female author of one RAND Corporation publication, for instance, critiques the Bush administration’s attempts to use photos of veiled women on the State Department’s website “as a means of depicting the US as tolerant toward Muslims” (Rastegar 467). She claims that

the ‘‘hijab’ is neither a neutral lifestyle issue nor a religious requirement’ but a ‘political statement…against American culture and unequivocally associated with female subordination.’ (Rastegar 467)

The associations between Islamic cultural markers and a kind of particularly misogynist political orientation resonate with many Americans, as is evident by the popularity amongst Americans of Middle Eastern and North African women’s articulations of experiences of violence associated with religious fundamentalism (Donadey and Ahmed-Ghosh).
The U.S. feminist discursive practices used to code the uprisings of 2011 as inevitably Islamic in character speak to a sense of wariness about Arab democracy insofar as it has the potential to empower Islamists. The logic follows that if Arabs hold free elections, they might elect Islamists who will then impose restrictions on women, or that essentially, democracy that is organic to the Arab world might be inherently bad for women. Nadine Naber, in “Imperial Feminism, Islamophobia, and the Egyptian Revolution,” confirms these findings, writing that her hope for the success of the Egyptian revolution has been met with fear of an Islamic fundamentalist takeover, which “legitimizes the U.S. administration’s complicity in Mubarak’s violent efforts to quell the revolution.” In this particular case, Naber suggests that U.S. policymakers would prefer a violent secularist dictator than a democratically elected Islamist.

**ANALYSIS OF U.S. FEMINIST MEDIA COVERAGE OF GENDERED VIOLENCE IN THE PROTESTS**

Violence against women is a global phenomenon, the eradication of which must certainly be taken seriously as a global feminist priority. However, when discussing gendered violence in the Arab world, it is our responsibility as Western feminists to be aware of the tradition in which we write that has made political use of Orientalist tropes that cast Arab men as particularly violent. Gendered violence in the Arab world is a myth in that it is ultimately a vehicle “for foreclosing discussions of politics” which uses “characters and situations that depict hierarchical relationships” (Wright 4). The primary characters acting in this particular myth include the Arab “savage” or, in recent times, “terrorist,” the white “imperial adventure hero,” and the victimized woman, who may be Arab or white, although the two carry slightly different political connotations and uses.

My findings reflect constructions of violent Arab masculinity that reinforce racist stereotypes in support of U.S. nationalism and war. In discussions regarding violence in the protests, gendered/sexed violence by either male protestors or government representatives was underscored while violence directed at male protestors by repressive governments appeared nonexistent. The publications’ coverage of gendered violence in the protests reflected constructions about Arab men that have historically been used to reinforce positive constructions of American patriarchal authority as well as to justify the maintenance of non-Western societies and to police Arab men and/or “undesirable” immigrants.
THE TROPE OF THE “ARAB SAVAGE” IN COLONIAL AND POST-COLONIAL DISCOURSES

Arab men of various political orientations and degrees of official power were represented in my sample as having one thing in common – their violent treatment of the women around them. The feminist publications also made use of physical descriptions of Arab men in ways that recall the “terrorist” figure in homeland security discourses (i.e. setting up a binary opposition between “bearded men” and female teachers in “Will Tunisian Islamists Strip Women of Their Rights?”).

The construction of the “Arab savage” is one stereotype created by the West and used to prop up notions about Western masculinity. The trope of the “Arab savage” necessitates what Sarah Kaiksow calls the “imperial adventure hero,” referring specifically to the portrayal of British commander T. E. Lawrence in the 1962 American film Lawrence of Arabia (63). The critically acclaimed Lawrence of Arabia is an Orientalist film based in part on accounts of British commander T. E. Lawrence’s role in the Arab Revolt against Ottoman Turkish rule of 1916-18. What Kaiksow terms the Lawrence myth is “a post-1918 English-British masculine ideal,” which “emerged in relation to a sense of devastation in the metropole at the end of World War I” (Kaiksow 63). Essentially, Britain’s success against the Ottomans in light of challenges to imperial rule posed by Egypt and others in the region offered a new opportunity for the “reconstitution of imperial masculinity” (Kaiksow 64). The popularity of both Lawrence’s autobiographical account published, Seven Pillars of Wisdom (1922), and Lawrence of Arabia in the U.S. and Britain attest to the construction and employment of a Western notion of masculinity that is inextricably tied to empire politics.

Linda Steet’s discourse analysis of National Geographic’s coverage of the Arab world from 1888-1988 illustrates the ways that the stereotype of the “violent Arab man” has been mobilized similarly in both colonial and post-colonial contexts. The period of the 1930s and 40s witnessed instability in the region, with the disintegration of British and French colonial powers, rise of the United States and the Soviet Union on the world political stage, and the sprouting up of Arab nationalist movements. At the same time, articles published by National Geographic regarding the Arab world portrayed Arab men as violent and radical in order to justify continued colonial involvement in the region. For instance, it was reported that “They always fight in Iraq,” that in Yemen, “Arabs were ‘predatory, and quarrel with all
and sundry over a few muddy waterholes,” and that in Morocco, “the men ‘take color from their surroundings. They are cruel and oppressive and full of guile…a community of men seething with life and passion” (Steet 82-90).

In the time period that was most characterized by Arab opposition to colonial rule and independence for many Arab states, the 1950s-1960s, representation of Arab men changed little. The cover photo for a 1966 issue of National Geographic portrayed “an Arab on horseback with raised sword” (Steet 114). With captions like “‘A Saudi Arabian’s steely gaze seems to reflect his warrior heritage’,” which referred to a 1972 issue which showed close-up photo of Arab man’s face, readers were meant to infer that Arabs have always been violent; violence was constructed as part of their nature and/or culture rather than a rational response to imperialism and war (Steet 140).

Moreover, post-9/11 “homeland security” discourses make use of a particular Arab stereotype, “the terrorist,” to secure our borders against unwanted immigrants as well as drum up support for U.S.-led wars in the region and silence those who speak out against Israeli occupation. Inderpal Grewal in “Transnational America: Race, Gender, Citizenship After 9/11,” conducts a discourse analysis of statements published by then-president Bush and his Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld as well as national and global media coverage of the September 11th attacks on the World Trade Center.

She suggests said discourses make use of a “racial and gendered notion of danger” which justifies the criminalization “of certain kinds of bodies which are identified as inclined to commit violence or having tendencies of violence” as in the interest of the security of the state (Grewal 539). Immediately following 9/11, Arab masculinity was mobilized through the circulation of photographs of the highjackers in newspapers, “all males, presumably Muslims” (as is suggested by their turbans and beards, associated with Islam) representing a racial formation of the Muslim male as terrorist, made barbaric by allegiance to religion and thus as different from the civilised cosmopolitan or westerner who could overcome religious allegiances by allegiance to or sympathy for a secular American nation. (Grewal 545-546)

Conversely, Grewal noted that American media sources also circulated images of “flag-draped Americans with families,” suggesting a dichotomized relationship between the two; the safety of one is predicated on the criminalization/incarceration of the other (551).
The particular status of the U.S. as a hegemonic cultural power means that media produced here is often circulated globally. The saturation of global media with, for instance, images of the attacks on the World Trade Centers, solicited sympathy for and solidarity with the U.S. and made possible the appropriation of American discourses on terrorism by other states wishing to curtail the rights of Arabs and/or Muslims. In India, for example, 9/11 discourses offered right-wing anti-Islamic Hindu groups “an opportunity for further demonisation of such a figure” (Grewal 545).

**IMAN AL-OBEIDI: LIBERATING “THEIR” WOMEN**

The construction of a violent relationship between Arab men and women has historically ensured that white men are in a position to save “brown women from brown men” (Spivak 287). The feminist publications’ coverage of al-Obeidi’s articulations of sexual assault by Libyan troops is a kind of “native informant” testimony that supports war-waging in the Arab world in the name of liberating Muslim/Eastern women. Popular testimonies of such “high profile secular Muslim women as Ayaan Hirsi Ali, Irshad Manji, Wafa Sultan and Azar Nafisi” as to the oppressive nature of Muslim-majority countries, for instance, have been instrumental in making a kind of case for Western claims to political maintenance of the MENA region (Rastegar 468).

Women, as symbolic representations of the nation, are often the subjects of patriarchal power struggles between Western and Eastern states. Afghanistan is one such country that has witnessed much patriarchal contestation regarding the status of Afghan women. Post-9/11, discourses of modernization v. traditionalism have been mobilized in order to construct the U.S. as the superior masculinist protector of Afghan women. Although Afghanistan is not an Arab country, as an Eastern and Muslim-majority state, it is perfectly poised as an example of the power struggle and contestation of the east and the west; the Christian and the Islamic, the modern and the traditional entirely through control over women’s bodies, all in an attempt at economic domination of the region by the West. (Ahmed-Ghosh 158)

The Taliban, after rising to power in 1996, imposed harsh restrictions on Afghan women under the guise of “protecting” them from Western influence. Some of these restrictions included enforcing strict dress codes, closing schools to women, preventing female doctors from working, sometimes preventing male doctors from treating women,
requiring a male escort for women’s travel outside of the home, banning women from public hot baths (causing severe health implications for women and children), and so on (Hans 237).

The U.S. has since used these restrictions on women’s civil liberties as justification for the invasion of Afghanistan in 2001. More than 30 years of active war has forced at least 7 million Afghans out of their homes and contributed to a clean water shortage. Additionally, the forced labor and abduction of girls and women continues to rise and, in Afghanistan, “90 percent of births take place at home leading to the second highest maternal mortality in the world.” Furthermore, from 2002-2006, of approximately $13 billion in aid from the U.S., only 9 percent ($1.16 billion) had been used for humanitarian aid, while 85 percent ($10.2 billion) was used to fight the al-Qaeda and the Taliban. A mere 3 percent ($365.5 million) was allocated for reconstruction assistance in the same time period (Ahmed-Ghosh 145). The discourse that positions Afghan men/masculinist institutions as particularly oppressive to Afghan women is thus exposed as a mere strategy which supports U.S. interests in the region.

**LARA LOGAN: PROTECTING “OUR” WOMEN**

U.S. mainstream feminist coverage of the assault of Lara Logan reflect another mode of framing Arab masculinity: as threatening to Western/American women, and by extension, to the West/U.S., making it vital to justifications for the restriction of civil liberties in the name of “security.” This narrative makes reference to a simultaneous sexualized interest in, and disrespect for, Western women on behalf of Arab men, and relies on xenophobic scripts for its relevancy.

Linda Steet, in her discourse analysis of 100 years of National Geographic’s reporting on the Arab world, highlights a kind of sexualized contempt for Western women on behalf of Arab men. For example, Steet references a photograph which shows a Western woman from the back sunning topless on what we are told is a Tunisian beach. An Arab man is walking past her, looking back at her interestedly. In the words of Steet,

The message of this visual representation was reproduced in the text a few pages later: ‘Tunisians are confused about their freespirited visitors. Many...do not perceive the distinction between the shedding of inhibitions at the beach and the demands of decorum elsewhere.’ (146)

The same author also reported his having seen “Tunisians grab at European women as they would dare not do with Arab women” (Steet 146). White women, here, are constructed as enjoying a certain degree of freedom that Arab women do not. The implication is that the
freedom of white women may be at stake were it not for the protection of those “imperial adventure heroes” or soldiers.

Historically, representations of violent relationships between non-white Third World men and white Euro-American women have been utilized in support of anti-immigration policies in the West. Exemplary of this myth is the “white slavery” “phenomenon” by which white girls and women were supposedly deceived and/or kidnapped by foreign men and sold as sex slaves at the turn of the 20th century. The inclusion of “white” in the term served to distinguish between white women, for whom the role of “slave” was abhorrent, and non-white women, whose roles as slaves were at the time popularly justified. In both Europe and the United States, foreigners, especially Jews, served as the figurative “slavers” standing to benefit from the exploitation of white women. In fact, the term “white slavery” first appeared in 1839, “in an anti-semetic context” (Doezema 30). The anti-“white slavery” campaign in the U.S. led to the creation of the Mann Act of 1910, which was used to police black men and prostitutes (Doezema 30). In Canada, Chinese men were discursively positioned as “white slavers,” which helped to justify a series of anti-immigration policies and eventually one that would put a stop to all “legal migration of people from China to Canada” in 1923 (Sharma 99). Post-9/11, Americans have seen much curtailing of our civil liberties in the name of countering terrorism or providing “security” (i.e. the PATRIOT Act, which was passed about a month after 9/11 and reduced restrictions in federal agencies' gathering of intelligence).

MOVING FORWARD: A VISION OF SOLIDARITY

My findings reflected an alarming ignorance about post-colonial and transnational feminist critiques of Western feminist discursive practices regarding Arab gender roles, as the Western writers of the articles in my sample rarely took steps to dispel stereotypes regarding the Arab world and certainly neglected to implicate their societies in the events leading to the Arab uprisings of 2011. It is clear that several individual writers of the articles in my sample had come into contact with post-colonial and/or transnational feminist theories that problematized Western feminist knowledge production as it concerns Arabs and the Arab world. However, none of the publications integrated commitments to transnational feminist solidarity into their practice and/or missions in general.
It is my contention that of the three publications, *Ms.* displayed the highest level of familiarity with, as well as commitment to, transnational feminist politics, perhaps on account of its historical association with feminist movements in the U.S. and emphasis on news and global politics. *Bitch*, as a popular culture publication focusing mainly on works of fiction, was relatively silent regarding the 2011 uprisings in the Arab world, although when they did report on the events, they did so in a careful, self-reflective tone. *Jezebel*’s articles, on the other hand, tended to lend themselves fairly easily to Orientalist arguments for war and continued U.S. intervention in the Arab world.

Perhaps the problematic areas I have highlighted might be, at least in some part, remedied with the implementation of occupational training in regards to responsible feminist reporting in a transnational era. Moreover, when reporting on foreign affairs, popular U.S. feminist educational materials such as *Ms.*, *Bitch*, and *Jezebel* would benefit from cross-promoting/linking to, or at the very least reading, Arab-based sources for news and critical analysis on similar events (like *Jadaliyya.com*, for instance, which is published in English with an eye to audiences in the U.S.). It would also benefit U.S. feminist writers in both academic and popular educational circles to exchange critical dialogue through scholarly or popular educational publications or in-person conferencing so as to identify blind spots and misunderstandings between the two roughly defined communities.

Ultimately, my aim with this discourse analysis has been to promote the kind of dialogue between feminist movements in the U.S. and the Arab world that was outlined by Chandra Talpade Mohanty in 2002 in “’Under Western Eyes’ Revisited” In this essay, Mohanty states that she did not write “Under Western Eyes Revisited” as a testament to the impossibility of egalitarian and noncolonizing cross-cultural scholarship, nor did I define “Western” and “Third World” feminism in such oppositional ways that there would be no possibility of solidarity between Western and Third World feminists. Yet, this is often how the essay has been read and utilized. (502-503)

In actuality, Mohanty hopes to create solidarity between so-called Western and Third World feminist movements through critical dialogue. Sylvia Walby in “Beyond the Politics of Location: The Power of Argument in a Global Era,” elaborates on Mohanty’s solidarity perspective. By critiquing Western feminism’s partial perspective, Mohanty is claiming that much of Western feminism “is not merely different, but wrong…She hopes to argue white feminism into agreeing with her” (Walby 199).
One of the ways in which Western feminist scholarship has been “wrong” is in its assumption that women, regardless of race, class, ethnicity, and/or cultural factors, are constructed as a homogenous group with similar priorities and interests. In this conception of “womanhood,” what women have in common globally is their subjugation by men, albeit to different degrees. This logic, Mohanty argues, turns women into “‘objects-who-defend-themselves,’ men into ‘subjects-who-perpetrate-violence,’ and (every) society into powerless (read: women) and powerful (read: men) groups of people” (“Under Western Eyes Revisited” 24).

It follows, then, that gendered violence is often assumed by Western feminists to be the priority issue for women living in the MENA region. This narrow focus on behalf of mainstream Western feminists serves to conceal high-priority issues faced by the women they purport to speak for, issues like

- the poverty of economic and health resources for many third world Muslim women,
- the sex trade against women in southeast Asia and elsewhere,
- the double burden of brutal foreign occupation and homegrown patriarchy for Palestinian women,
- marital laws in the Gulf states that are biased against women marrying foreign nationals causing a high rate of older single women who want an honorable alternative to their single state,
- obscenely perverted rape laws in Pakistan, and
- the ‘glass dome’ and misogynistic attitudes keeping women from leadership positions in American Muslim mosques and organizations. (Kahf 182)

Moreover, according to post-colonial and transnational feminists, it is not enough for Western feminisms to merely include the “Others” in discussions on gender oppression, or to acknowledge cultural differences between themselves and women and/or feminisms in the Third World, but Western feminisms/isms must consider the ways that they are connected relationally to those “Others” by way of colonial histories and global capitalism (“Under Western Eyes Revisited” 522).

Moving forward, then, U.S. feminists are faced with the task of taking seriously and responding to critiques of our complicity within imperialist projects. As U.S. feminists, practicing solidarity ultimately necessitates the exchange of critical dialogue amongst each other and with feminists living outside of the U.S. as well as a reorganization of our priorities, including a heightened attentiveness to those regions and communities that are most affected by U.S.-instigated and/or supported war, militarized sexual violence, violent occupation, and poverty. We can no longer claim commitments to egalitarian politics while
providing justifications for societal destruction, rights violations, and death of those in the Arab world.
REFERENCES


