

ERC Project - Drafting and Enacting the Revolutions in the Arab Mediterranean. In Search for Dignity from the 1950's until now
CALL FOR PAPER

10-12 February 2021 | "Women in revolt. Mobilizations, pathways, imaginations – the Arab Mediterranean 1950-2020"
Univ. Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne (Campus Condorcet/ Aubervillier)

The ERC Dream programme seeks your contributions for a three-day conference dedicated to women in revolt in the Arab Mediterranean world (1950s to the present). In the framework of the research undertaken on revolts and revolutions, Dream focuses its investigations on the protagonists who are the most invisible in the human and social sciences and in collective memory. While much work has been devoted in recent decades to the place of women in societies and in struggles (Bereni, Révillard, 2001; Kréfa et Barrières, 2018), it is clear that the figure of the revolted or revolutionary woman has more recently been forcefully renewed by women's voices in the context of the Arab Spring of 2011 and the new uprisings in Algeria, Sudan, Lebanon and Iraq.

This conference "Women in revolt. Mobilizations, pathways, imaginations – the Arab Mediterranean 1950-2020" wants to examine the question of the role played by women in the struggles for emancipation in the Arab World. The first step is to grasp this issue beyond the singularization of heroic and exceptional female figures, be they fighters like Leila Khaled (Palestine) or Djamila Bouhired (Algeria), or feminist intellectuals like Nawal Saadaoui (Egypt) or Fatima Mernissi (Morocco).

This work on women's mobilizations is committed to understanding the role played by women in political, cultural and social struggles. The work should also help to understand how women's struggles have transformed these struggles and have been able to instigate radical transformations of society, towards a revolutionary perspective that may not always have been grasped by traditional understandings of the term "revolution". The "women's cause" (Bereni, 2012), in these spaces as elsewhere, is part of the forms of infra-political or discrete "social non-movements" that Asef Bayat (Bayat 2010) describes. It is also on the front line, and in this place it sometimes remains unnoticed. It remains to be understood how these movements and "non-movements" transform the political landscape, and how, through which means, beyond mere proclamations of principle they take place.

The spaces of the “women's cause”

We wish to focus on moments of collective struggles or on questions of circulation of practices and ideas involving a collective or a group of women in a given context in order to grasp a

"space for the cause of women" (Bereni, 2012). By this we mean a space in which a female struggle unfolds, which is not necessarily conceived of as feminist. A *feminine* commitment (Dakhli, Latte Abdallah, 2010) is deployed in revolutionary contexts and in high-intensity protest movements. It outlines a specific space. But it also emerges in the ways women can exercise their "art of presence" in everyday life.

This space is constituted first and foremost by the boundaries it defines or helps to push back or erase. It is to be understood as a space for the permanent negotiation or renegotiation of boundaries, which may be those of gendered roles, those of the public and private spheres, or those of the very space of social and political contestation. This "space for women's causes" is shaped as much through individual trajectories, in the way they articulate with the collective, as through the history of a group or movement. This colloquium will therefore welcome both case studies and analyses in terms of the sociology of networks, or even the integration of both perspectives. It wishes to cover both militant mobilities (training, exile and diasporas, clandestinities, prison entries and exits) and the circulation of objects (books, weapons, uniforms or clothing of struggles, but also objects charged with a particular meaning) as well as the trajectories of ideas (translations of texts considered as foundational, but also transmission of political, spiritual or family legacies and circulation of imaginary of struggle or resistance to women). From these diverse sources, this colloquium finally proposes to grasp the space imagined by women in terms of projection into the future, whether from the home, an office or a cell, a war zone or the street during a mobilization. What space do they wish to open up for themselves and for future generations within the family, the group or the party, the community but also the nation by discussing the now classic works of Beth Baron (2005) And how does this space relate to social issues and problems that affect all citizens?

What temporalities?

The study of revolts and revolutions often privileges the short term and "hot moments" of the revolutionary situation. Without excluding this perspective, this colloquium proposes to broaden it to the long term and to the "cold moments", which can be marked by long-term social and political demands, or even by mobilizations that institutional memory would not have recorded, which would not have been archived. In the spirit of the DREAM project, it is a question of giving these demands and mobilizations their own "time". First the work of locating and processing archives of revolted women is encouraged, both through training and time dedicated to exchanging experiences organized during the conference and through reflection on the relationship between archives and the construction, or even institutionalization, of the protest narrative. Second the aim will be to question the relationship between the actresses' protest narratives and the institutionalized protest narratives, whether with the emergence of the independent nation-state since the 1950s, the organization of militant life in a partisan and/or trade union form, or with the very institutionalization of certain groups, such as NGOs,

since the 1990s. Between repression, invisibilization and legitimization of the narratives of actresses, this colloquium intends to cover the whole spectrum from memory to denial of memory, to oblivion. This approach also aims to propose a renewed chronology of women's revolts and of feminist and women's movements in the light of the paths and strategies of women protagonists, opening up possible comparisons between various regions of the Arab Mediterranean space. At the same time, it enables us to grasp the experiences of time, continuities and ruptures as perceived by the women protagonists, whether they are involved in structured movements or in everyday social practices. The references that these actresses may make to past struggles, or even to prominent figures among them, help us to approach the "generations" of struggles from below, through the genealogies that the activists or "ordinary practitioners" (De Certeau, Giard, Mayol, 1990) of a space construct to give meaning to their action or presence. This approach to contesting genealogies proposes to shift the debate on the "endogenous" or "exogenous", "Islamic" or "secular" references of Arab women's and feminist movements from the analytical (ethical) framework to the framework of the perception of the protagonists (emic) and to restore to them their agency in the making of references used within struggles (Mahmood 2005). In the rebellious decade we have just experienced, a history of women's struggles is being written: how does it find its place in a historical narrative?

Practices and extension of women's fields of struggle

In the same spirit of a bottom-up approach, this colloquium proposes to approach feminisms and social and political femininities as shifting categories, constantly renewed by practices. It is therefore a question of analysing the gender performances of women protagonists, whether they are activists or not, in times of struggle as well as in ordinary times. What are the strategies for creating space for themselves in daily life, in mobilization, or even in armed struggle? Between exceptional journeys and more everyday strategies, women forge repertoires and reinterpret modes of action invented elsewhere, in other places or at other times. This performative aspect of the struggles brings into play the political and social imagination of the actresses, but also their ability to grasp filiations, to take up canons or to transform or even divert them.

The gender performances at work in moments of protest can first of all be seen as integration strategies: "acting like a woman" or on the contrary pretending to be a man can be ways of getting a message across or of making a place for oneself in a movement. In the same way, the exceptionality or banality of the routes must be understood in context, to show how the protagonists can make use of them. Armed women combatants are often perceived as being forced to conform to military ways of doing things and even to military aesthetics. This way of putting on a costume can also be seen as a revolutionary travesty. Haircuts and military clothing can also be transformed and appropriated to elaborate another discourse that focuses specifically on gender (Srouf, 1972). The romantic approach to resistance (Abu Lughod, 1990) that has come to be used to talk about Kurdish, Palestinian or Algerian women fighters, the discourses of reverence towards female icons of protest such as the Sudanese Alaa Salah, the fascination for the Lebanese woman who kicks the guard in the crotch... all this says more about the commentators than about the ways of these revolutionary women. The use of violence, the learning of defence techniques are knowledge transferred to the revolutionary theatre, but

which stem from other women's struggles to ensure their own safety in the streets of the cities. This defence work does not end at the edge of mobilization, it continues in the context of struggles (Lachenal, 2019) and is translated into a politics of violence (Dorlin, 2017; Cardi and Pruvost, 2012).

Certain gendered roles, such as that of guardian of family memory (e.g. mother of a martyr or the disappeared) are in themselves upheavals in the authorized registers of memory and protest. The roles can also be worked on by the actresses themselves, who make them obligatory figures in the political act. The question of whether revolutions change - significantly and permanently - gender relations is very open. Most of the time, these transformations are not manifest (Amar, 2011), even if there are "acts of brilliance" (Dakhli on Amina Sboui, 2013) but rather slower transformations that can be read in the fact that the most recent revolts make specific room for issues related to the place of women within them. It is then that these feminine presences sometimes turn into questions for feminists and feminisms, whose fields of action are transformed and extended by the ongoing struggles.

These strategic and practical questions can be addressed through the analysis of the link between constituted social movements and movements and moments of protest / revolt, including traditional feminist movements. They are also visible in the multiplicity of mobilisations of mothers and women of the disappeared or prisoners, movements of women prisoners or ex-prisoners (Latte Abdallah, 2013; Sorbera, 2014), movements of women workers. Some movements with specific revendications (housing, right to land, struggles for access to health care, but also movement for access to civil status) are carried out in majority by women and contribute to structuring a feminine space of protest, but also to transforming the common space of revolt.

The contributions we wish to receive will have to pose these questions from empirical research grounds. A specific reflection on sources, archives and the act of archiving will have to be present in the proposals.

Please send your proposal (400-500 words, in English or French) before sept. 1st, 2020 to: dream@cmb.hu-berlin.de

For any question or remark, please contact Leyla Dakhli, dakhli@cmb.hu-berlin.de

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