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Review: Women and the Egyptian Revolution: Engagement and Activism during the 2011 Arab Uprisings

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behaviors” (p. 9). But all of these characteristics do not apply to all of their cases, so morality policy turns out to be a catchall category. For example, abortion and capital punishment deal with “life and death,” but the other issues do much less so, if at all. Conversely, many issues that we do not normally classify as morality policies deal with life and death, such as access to affordable health care, the consequences of climate change, and racial disparities in policing. One could make a similar argument about the political properties commonly identified as distinctive about morality policies. Such policies, the authors summarize, “provoke strong emotional reactions and those who hold to those values are unwilling to compromise,” are “non-economic” in nature, easy to understand (i.e., nontechnical), and salient (pp. 7–9).

Yet, many other policies that we do not normally associate with morality policies (again, climate change and health care reform) come to mind, but so do immigration and the COVID-19 pandemic. True, the latter issues usually have a major economic component, but so too does marijuana legalization, capital punishment (think of the costs to the state), and gun rights (think of gun manufacturing and sales). A basic standard for classifying phenomena is that the categories are mutually exclusive, but this seems hardly the case with “morality policies.” Second, the literature on morality policies has misled us into thinking that these issues are about moral judgments concerning behavior that is right or wrong. Because it is hard to think of a significant policy issue that does not involve some moral disagreement or choice, this criterion is not very helpful in distinguishing morality policies from those that do not fit the category. At the same time, whether and how much political advocates actually frame these issues in terms of moral codes and religious principles is a matter of empirical investigation, not something we should take for granted. Elsewhere (“Are Debates about Morality Policy Really about Morality? Framing Opposition to Gay and Lesbian Rights,” *Policy Studies Journal* 39 [2], 2011), I argued that morality policy should be understood as a broad *strategy for framing* issues and proposals, which may be contrasted with framing strategies that emphasize the consequences (benefits or harms) to society from an issue or policy or procedural aspects of policy making and implementation.

My reservations about the “morality policy” category do not take away from the strengths of the book or its important contributions to our understanding of how such policies emerge and evolve over time. Like many works with a broad scope of inquiry, this one raises as many questions as it answers, but that is not a shortcoming. This book should, and will in my opinion, spark a good deal of debate and research into the life cycles and trajectories of policy issues and into why and how they are (or are not) resolved.

Women and the Egyptian Revolution: Engagement and Activism during the 2011 Arab Uprisings. By Nermin Allam.

New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017. 230p. \$105.00 cloth. \$29.99 paper.

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Nermin Allam’s book is a welcome addition to the broader literature on the Arab Spring—a literature that has rarely adopted a substantive gender lens, yet has often anecdotally highlighted the participation of women in the protests. Allam reveals the value added of embracing such an approach and situates women’s political engagement in the historical context of women’s activism in Egypt, which has a pedigree dating to the early 1900s. In this way and through her use of ethnographic interviews, she directly amplifies women’s voices from the frontlines of the Arab Spring protests—tracking their exhilaration in those heady 18 days in Tahrir Square and reflecting on their disappointment with the aftermath. Allam compels the reader to view these women as individuals having real agency in their choices to contest the state and Egyptian society, while also illustrating the specific challenges they faced when enacting these choices within a conservative, patriarchal community.

At its core, *Women and the Egyptian Revolution* explores why the female protesters of Tahrir Square did not actively appeal for greater women’s rights during the Arab Spring uprisings. Much punditry assumes this is due to the Muslim Brotherhood quickly co-opting the protest movement, but Allam sets the record straight through her deft use of ethnographic interview data and her situating women’s activism in Egypt’s history of nationalist struggle and state-building. To answer this question, she draws on some 118 in-person interviews that she conducted from June 2012 to December 2014, and again in 2017, across five sets of key actors who participated in the Arab Spring protests, spanning the Kefaya movement and the Muslim Brotherhood, to activists from the Egyptian Center for Women’s Rights. Allam interchangeably relies on feminist and social movement theories (in particular, the work of Victor Turner and Sidney Tarrow) to investigate how the collective action frames adopted by female protesters affected their likelihood of agitating for women’s rights. She also rallies the political opportunity structures framework to help explain why specific frames resonated more than others and so illuminates the constraints faced by women protesters, which ranged from overbearing parents and male activists’ sexism to the Mubarak regime’s attempts to co-opt the movement.

Her content analysis of the interview data and of news media reports from Egypt and abroad reveals that these women often strategically framed their activism around

their sense of nationalism rather than feminism; they chose to prioritize unity and equality across all Egyptians, rather than focus on the more divisive question of gender (p. 163). Feminist and nonfeminist women activists alike were hesitant to promote women-specific issues at a time when “the nation” and presenting a “united front” were at stake as twin pillars of the uprisings. Allam starkly illustrates this feature by recounting interviews in which protesters and local pundits distanced themselves from feminism as an ideology and also intimidated feminists’ perceived connection to the Mubarak regime—especially in the chapter titled “*Intu bito Suzanne*” or “You are Suzanne’s Clique.” Here, Allam refers to the popular notion that Egyptian feminists were in league with Suzanne Mubarak and her husband’s disingenuous brand of feminism for international consumption. Many of the interview participants figured that a “citizen” rather than a “feminist” frame was sufficient for their purposes and couched their choice in terms of the sense of equality and solidarity they experienced standing shoulder to shoulder with their male counterparts in Tahrir Square. However, even the relative freedom of Tahrir Square was heavily circumscribed: the same women activists and protesters reported experiencing harassment outside of the bounds of the square itself from police and male protesters alike (pp. 105–15 discusses the “absence” of sexual harassment). Tellingly, female participants still asserted they “did not want to disrupt unity” (p. 90), while also recognizing that “the national unity talk is sometimes real but also and for sure partly orchestrated, particularly at times of contentions and political struggles” (p. 92). This is nothing new for Egyptian women, who have had their activism hijacked before in the national interest, with Huda Sharawi as the most notable example during the early twentieth century.

Allam’s scholarly analysis unfolds somewhat unevenly from chapters 2–6, with chapter 1 serving as an historical primer on the activism of Egyptian women from the nationalist uprisings of the 1920s through to the Free Officers’ Revolution and up to the Arab Spring. In general, this historical discussion largely documents a more secular variant of feminism, so readers interested in the historical role of Islamist women would be better served to look to other authors for more detail. Chapter 2 builds on this historical discourse by exploring the current media ecosystem in which Egyptian women operate across both the domestic and international press. It touches on how the news media often confine and constrain women’s political agency both deliberately (as in the case of the newspapers *Al Ahram* and *Wafd*) and, at times, inadvertently (the *New York Times*) in terms of how they depict women and delimit actionable behaviors and norms within Egyptian society. Although I applaud the conceit of this chapter, I do wish Allam had made a stronger case for how these news outlets directly affected protester activism. Chapters 3–6

actively marshal Allam’s interview data, and here she uses more of the personal insights and the experiences of the protesters themselves to unpack how they framed their activism—through citizen versus female collective action frames (chapter 3), their lived experiences of the 18-day uprising (chapter 4), and their limited political opportunities in an environment where state feminism dominates the gender discourse, and also where many of them faced rampant sexism and ageism while protesting (chapter 5).

Chapter 6 is the most interesting in the book, introducing the novel idea of the potential power behind the politics of disappointment and how it can serve to keep a repertoire of resistance alive for the “next cycle of contention.” Allam finds activist resilience blossoming through social and artistic initiatives (p. 144), as well as in new spaces created to challenge the dominant security discourse of the state. She finds many activists making a conscious choice to continue to develop skills, both in their public and private lives, that can help sustain the memory of resistance. They do this through a renewed commitment to social work and public service, as well as through art, philanthropy, and other modes of low-key transgression that might not directly attract the attention of the authorities (p. 159).

Overall, Allam makes a strong and compelling case for why Egyptian women protesters deployed nationalist rather than feminist frames during the Egyptian Revolution, she outlines the ultimate cost of that choice for substantively advancing women’s interests. In amplifying women’s voices in this way, she shows them as active participants in what turned out to be an unsuccessful bid for change, but one in which they fully and consciously engaged. Ultimately, Allam extends the discussion of collective action frames to a very dynamic non-Western setting, showcasing the importance of recognizing that robust frames of resistance existed and continue to exist in authoritarian contexts, while also demonstrating the revelatory power of embracing a feminist lens for this type of research. In her closing chapters, she hints that disappointment may not represent an end to contestation, but rather a beginning for new forms of resistance. In doing so Allam makes one final appeal for us to recognize Egyptian women’s agency and resilience in the face of their ongoing struggle for substantive rights.

Why Bother? Rethinking Participation in Elections and Protests. By S. Erdem Aytaç and Susan C. Stokes. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2019. 172p. \$99.99 cloth, \$29.99 paper. doi:10.1017/S1537592720003321

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In recent months, major protests erupted in several cities in the United States against systemic racism and police