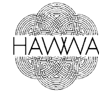
BRILL

JOURNAL OF WOMEN OF THE MIDDLE EAST
AND THE ISLAMIC WORLD 22 (2024) 1–23


brill.com/hawwa

The (Beard-) Veil Also Matters on Facebook: Syrian Men and Women Between Patriarchy and Revolution

Araa al Jaramani | ORCID: 0000-0001-9788-4225
Radboud University, Nijmegen, The Netherlands
araajaramani@gmail.com

Nadia Sonneveld | ORCID: 0000-0001-6415-4699
Leiden Law School, Leiden, The Netherlands
n.sonneveld@law.leidenuniv.nl

Received 9 July 2021 | Accepted 16 September 2024 |
Published online 5 November 2024

Abstract

This article discusses how the publishing of Syrian women's photos on Facebook provokes controversy in Syrian Facebook communities, in the context of ongoing violent political upheaval. After the Arab uprising reached Syria in March 2011, Syrian men and women have been using Facebook extensively to fight for their rights. Yet, the photo of a young dead Syrian woman activist caused a heated debate on Facebook, because she was not wearing a veil. We argue that while gender inequalities, which are prevalent in Syrian society seemingly persist in cyberspace, we are in fact witnessing the emergence of what we call a "limping" mobile society. In this mobile society, authoritative notions of womanhood are challenged, whereas dominant understandings of manhood barely change. In explaining this, this article contributes to scholarly debates in the fields of gender and power in conflict and post-conflict societies as well as social media and gender equality studies.

Keywords

Syria – Arab uprising – cyberspace – gender equality – veil

Published with license by Koninklijke Brill BV | DOI:10.1163/15692086-12341421
© ARAA AL JARAMANI AND NADIA SONNEVELD, 2024 | ISSN: 1569-2078 (print) 1569-2086 (online)
This is an open access article distributed under the terms of the CC BY 4.0 license.

Introduction

On 18 March 2015, the Facebook page *Shabaka al-Thawra al-Suriya* (The Syrian Revolution Network)[1] published the following post describing the death of Rehab Allawi:[2]

> The martyr Rehab Allawi … Allah is welcoming you!
> Rehab, the revolting in the darkness of intelligence and torture basements.
> Rehab, the revolting without media fame or Istanbul conferences.
> Rehab, the revolting from Muhasan city … the 26-year-old girl born in Palmyra.
> Rehab rented houses for the displaced people while studying civil engineering, offered them a helping hand in Damascus … and helped released prisoners get back home.
> Rehab, the revolting … who was a relief activist … participated in all revolutionary fields in Damascus … until what she was scared of and feared happened on the night of January 1, 2013.
> Rehab was taken by the intelligence from her home at night to the infamous 215 section … which number is written on her pure body.
> Rehab used to tell the prisoners in prison: "pray for my martyr … pray for my death …!!"[3]

The post was accompanied by a photo depicting Rehab's dead body. The publication of the photo stirred up a storm of online debate with reactions divided into three categories: those who were sympathetic to Rehab's plight, those who showed contempt about the display of her face and uncovered hair and those who were angered by the latter's reaction. Rehab's case was not unique. In the fight for freedom and equality, Syrian women's contribution is frequently overshadowed by debates about female honour and obedience.

1 *The Shabaka al-Thawra al-Suriya* (The Syrian Revolution Network) Facebook group was founded on Tuesday, 18 January 2011. The founders of this group were Syrian activists fighting to end the hegemony and oppression of the Syrian authority (al-Suriya 2011). For more, see: https://www.facebook.com/Syrian.Revolution/photos/a.10150397575815727/10155503081235727/?type=1&theater.

2 Rehab Allawi, a Damascus resident originally from Deir al-Zor, was an engineering student at Damascus University before the Syrian uprising. She was an activist during the first years of the Syrian uprising and offered help and aid to displaced persons in Damascus. Rehab was about 25 years old when the Raids Brigade, a special raids unit of the military police, arrested her in January 2013. See: https://www.pri.org/stories/2015–12–16/finally-naming-syrias-dead-these-are-victims-assad-regime (Hall 2015).

3 Translated by the first author, Araa al Jaramani.

In Syria and other Middle East and North African (MENA) countries, it is unclear what the impact of the uprisings has been on the rights of women in the years following it (Fox *et al.* 2016: 41). According to Al-Ali (2012) and Satterfield (2013), women's groups and activists that participated in the uprisings have been disappointed in their lack of gains in the aftermath of the uprisings.[4] In Egypt, for example, women were physically harassed on Tahrir Square on International Women's Day and asked to go home and retake their "natural" position in the kitchen. The equality women found on the square just a few weeks earlier did not seem to live on. Moreover, in the two years that followed, a decade of personal status law reform was almost abrogated, including a provision on *khulʿ*, which gives Egyptian Muslim women the right to no-fault unilateral divorce (Sonneveld and Lindbekk 2015).[5]

This article analyses the posting of Syrian women's photos on Facebook in the context of the ongoing Syrian conflict. It asks why the online portrayal of women's faces and uncovered hair provoked so much controversy in a country where men and women took to the streets to fight side by side for a free and equal society (Saleh 2016). We show that in an uprising which appeared to be inclusive and secular, the role of religion and patriarchal culture remained strong, both offline and online. It would be too simple, however, to conclude that offline gender inequalities are perpetuated in cyberspace; our analysis evidences the emergence of what we call a "limping" mobile society.

Mobile societies are network societies[6] enhanced by wireless communication technologies (Castells *et al.* 2009: 6). Characterized by autonomy vis-à-vis spatial location, time constraints and, to a large extent, social and cultural norms (Castells *et al.* 2009: 247), mobile societies have the potential to develop into online spaces of counter-hegemonic debates that challenge and bypass authoritarian control. In Syria and most other MENA countries, notions of proper male and female behaviour are contained in the maintenance-obedience relationship. Both on a social and legal level, women are generally expected to

4 This is not a new phenomenon in the region. For example, after Algeria gained independence in 1962, the memory of women's active participation during the eight year war was deleted or relegated to the background (Djebar 1980).

5 At the time of writing the present article, a new draft law for PSL reform has become the subject of heated public debates. Activists for the rights of women argue that it undermines most of the gains made during a century of PSL reform (1920–2020).

6 According to Van Dijk who coined the term, a "network society" is an infrastructure of social and media networks that takes care of the form and organization of information processing and exchange. This mode of organization permeates all levels (individual, group/organizational and societal). The basic unit of the network society is the individual or the group. Increasingly, individuals or groups in their network society link to other network societies (Van Dijk 2006).

be obedient wives and mothers and men to be protectors and financial providers of their families (Kandiyoti 1988; Welchman 2007). The traditional symbols for women's obedience and submission and men's position as protectors and heads of household are the veil and the beard, respectively (Sonneveld 2012). In the Syrian online spaces under analysis, authoritative notions of Syrian womanhood are subject to debate and change while dominant understandings of manhood barely change. This creates an imbalance, hence, the development of what we call a "limping" mobile society.

It could be said that in offline spaces, women's obedience to male protectors is also debated, both in Syria and the wider MENA region.[7] However, in these debates, the focus is more on women's obedience on the level of the household and their relationship to husbands and other male guardians. At times of political upheaval and violence when women actively participate in protecting their country, the question of women's obedience gains relatively more significance at the level of the nation. When women die in combat, the question arises concerning the way to evaluate their sacrifice: should they be rewarded martyr status as advocated by the admin of the Facebook group *Shabaka al-Thawra al-Suriya* (The Syrian Revolution Network) or are their dead bodies symbols of men's failure to control women's behaviour and protect them from harm, including physical harassment and rape?

We also show that in the Syrian context, it is easier to engage in this debate in cyberspace than in offline reality. For example, the number of online women's rights organisations has mushroomed. Absent before the uprising, both offline and online, the appearance of at least 75 groups (see below) is a remarkable development but, as we argue, it does not signify a complete disruption of the status quo of gender roles. By showing that in the fight for a free Syria, members of these groups are trying to move forward favouring one aspect (i.e. empowering women and abolishing women's obedience to men) while the other one remains behind (i.e. men are still expected to be protectors and financial providers), this article contributes to scholarship on gender and power in conflict and post-conflict societies as well as social media and gender equality studies.

It proceeds as follows: section one provides an overview of cultural and legal concepts related to notions of manhood and womanhood prevalent in Syrian society across the religious spectrum. They are patriarchy, family honour,

7 See, for example, the legal changes in Morocco and Algeria where women's obedience has been removed from Muslim personal status law in 2004 and 2005, respectively. See also debates pertaining to the right of women to travel without the consent of the husband in Egypt (Sonneveld 2012).

women's sexuality, male protection and sustenance and female obedience. In section two, we question whether the advent of online social networking has brought about a relaxation of constrained offline mixing between the sexes as some scholars have argued. In section three, we analyse Rehab's post and the many shares, likes and comments it generated. We ask whether allowing women to participate in ushering in political change also results in participating in the emerging liberated political community. In other words, are women's sacrifices and contributions becoming subversive memories, disrupting the status quo of gender roles or are their contributions overshadowed by men's and ultimately forgotten in the process of building a new political community? Which groups can claim authority in answering these questions?

Our findings are based on three methods. First, we used discourse analysis to analyse the online responses that the presence of Syrian women in cyberspace evoked after the Arab uprisings of 2011. We analysed eleven posts that were published between 2014 and 2016. In particular, we focused on discussions in the Facebook group, *Shabaka al-Thawra al-Suriya* as, in the period following the publication of the photo of Rehab's dead body in March 2015, this rather docile Facebook group turned into a forum for heated discussion. Second, the online data was complemented by semi-structured interviews with five men and five women from Syria who live as forced migrants in the Netherlands. The respondents were selected through the network of the first author, Araa al Jaramani, and interviewed by way of semi-structured interviews between March and July 2017. The interviews lasted approximately one hour and took place in the Netherlands. For reasons of privacy, all respondents have been given pseudonyms. Finally, using a software tool for social network analysis, we mapped the number of online organisations for Syrian women's rights that were established after the start of the Syrian uprising in March 2011. We found 75 pages and groups which post news reports, videos and photos concerning violence against women committed by the Assad regime and Jihadi groups in Syria.

Manhood and Womanhood in Syria: Religions, Patriarchy, Family Laws and Social Media

Syrian society is a mosaic of social groups belonging to different religions and ethnicities. In 2011, prior to the Syrian war, Muslims and Christians accounted for roughly ninety and ten percent of the Syrian population, respectively (CIA 2020). Although most Syrians are Arabic-speaking Sunni Muslims, there are various Muslim minority groups which speak different languages such as the

Kurds or belong to different denominations such as the Alawis, Druzes and the Shia Muslims, the latter divided into Ismailis and Twelver Shiites. Plurality is also a characteristic of the Christian community with different forms of Western and Eastern Christianity being practiced. This religious diversity is reflected in Syria's religion-based family law system which consists of one Muslim, five Christian, one Druze and one Jewish family law.[8]

Despite the apparent variety, in her study on family law litigation in Syrian courthouses, Van Eijk (2016) showed that a patriarchal family model underlies all the different religions and family laws which dictates that men should be protectors of women's honour and financial providers and women obedient mothers and wives (Van Eijk 2016: 101–2). By being obedient, women, regardless of their religion, safeguard their moral dignity and legal rights. It is the husband's duty to control his wife's behaviour and to prevent her from being exposed to the gaze of unrelated (non-*mahram*) men and, hence, to protect the honour of the family over which he has authority. This dominant "familial ideology" (Dahlgren 2010) is reflected by the fact that prior to the uprising, 85% of Syrian women aged fifteen and older did not work outside the home (Alsaba and Kapilashrami 2016: 8). The onset of the Syrian uprising, however, ushered in numerous changes.

In the early months of 2011, the world was witness to a series of Arab uprisings which started in Tunisia in December 2010 and that led to the removal of long-standing authoritarian leaders from power in Tunisia (January 2011), Egypt (February 2011), Libya (October 2011), Yemen (February 2012) and Sudan (April 2019). The Syrian uprising, which started in March 2011, did not lead to the resignation of president al-Assad but instead progressed to an ongoing violent conflict and humanitarian crisis with many domestic and international actors involved.

Out of a population of 21 million in 2010, nearly 13 million were forcibly displaced by 2018 (Connor 2018). The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights estimates the death toll since the start of the war until March 2020 to be 586.000 and the number of injured to exceed 2 million (SOHR 2020).

As in other Arab countries, social media platforms such as Facebook, YouTube and, to a lesser extent, Twitter (now X) have been ascribed an important role in facilitating protestors' mobilization for collective action (Danju *et al.* 2013; Wolfsfeld *et al.* 2013). In Syria, Facebook made its appearance during the Syrian uprising and registration has remained high ever since.[9] Some

8 The Christian family laws are subdivided into Greek-Orthodox, Syriac-Orthodox, Armenian-Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant laws. In the field of family law, the different recognized religious communities have both legislative and judicial autonomy (Van Eijk 2016).

9 See, for instance, https://gs.statcounter.com/social-media-stats/all/syrian-arab-republic.

studies attribute the spread of Facebook and other social media platforms to globalism and cosmopolitanism (Leurs and Ponzanesi 2018)[10] but in the Syrian case, it is more likely that necessity is the mother of invention. Before the start of the uprising in March 2011, Facebook registration in Syria was low and actually showed a declining trend. Figures show a sharp rise in searches for Facebook in Syria (and Egypt) after 25 January 2011 which marked the beginning of the Egyptian revolution (Wolfsfeld *et al.* 2013: 128–9).[11]

Oppression by the Syrian regime and the blocking of Internet access (Wolfsfeld *et al.* 2013) led protestors to use virtual private networks (VPN) to protect their online identities and access banned websites (Alhayek 2016), initially, from home but increasingly from the relative safety of an internet cafe. When the Syrian intelligence (*mukhabarat*) started monitoring these cafes and demanding the release of the names of clients, Facebook users became even more careful and started hiding their names, pictures and locations on Facebook. While this applied to both male and female users, our analysis shows that in the case of Syrian women, an additional factor explains why Muslim and non-Muslim women alike still prefer not to disclose their faces and identities online, up until today. The online display of their faces and in the case of Muslim women, their hair, was a revolutionary act in itself, turning upside down longstanding conventions on female morality and obedience. This raises two questions. First, does the influence of offline social and religious notions of appropriate male and female behaviour also extend to cyberspace and, second, are (groups of) individual online actors capable of preserving or disrupting the status quo of gender roles?

Below, we turn to an analysis of the impact of online social networking on gender roles, in general, and in Syria, in particular.

Online Social Networking: Disrupting or Preserving the Status Quo of Gender Roles?

The advent of online social networking has allowed users with different cultural, religious and political beliefs to exchange information and communicate globally in so-called network societies and when enhanced by wireless communication technologies, mobile societies. This, scholars have frequently argued, effects extant attitudes and behaviour (Castells *et al.* 2009;

10 "… [A]s of May, 2014 the total number of Facebook users in the Arab world was 81,302,064 – up from 54,552,875 in May, 2013" (Miladi 2016: 3939).

11 "Syria trends: Mining underused datasets." Synaps. Publication 07/31/2017. https://www.synaps.network/post/syria-conflict-trends-google-data (Synaps 2017).

Young *et al.* 2014: 317). The Muslim world does not seem to be an exception. In Indonesia, the country with the largest Muslim population in the world, women use Instagram to propagate a particular form of veiling in a context of middle-class consumerism and preaching *da'wa*, the call to Islam (Baulch and Pramiyanti 2018). In a study covering more than twelve countries in the Arab world, Al Omoush *et al.* (2012) concluded that social networking sites have the ability to increase freedom of speech and reduce the effects of traditional cultural values that limit free social interaction (Aouragh, 2016: 482). A study among 253 Iranian women revealed that longer use of Facebook and other social networking technologies is associated with "reduced likelihood of wearing a veil in Facebook pictures among Iranian women" (Young *et al.* 2014: 319). Social media pictures of Syrian Muslim and non-Muslim women, with or without a veil, also seem common as witnessed by numerous online dating sites that display photos of Syrian women, both veiled and unveiled, who are living in Syria, the wider region or the West.

In the award-winning film *ChicagoGirl: The Social Network Takes on a Dictator*,[12] we see how a veiled nineteen-year-old Syrian-American student uses Facebook, X and camera phones to coordinate from her bedroom in Chicago the uprising in Syria, her country of birth. In the film, she is presented as a brave and smart young woman who diverges from the gender role expectations for Syrian women. These characteristics are demonstrated through her physical visibility online, her interactions with men and the fact that she has 1,200 Facebook friends and 2,000 followers on X. She is also shown to have the dedication as well as logistic and technical skills to coordinate the resistance on the ground. Here, instead of men protecting women, a female student protects male resistance fighters from harm. This film and the abovementioned studies show that mobile societies can be spaces of free expression and participation that have the potential to invert the status quo of gender roles.

Similarly, our data shows that Syrian women's organizations tried to use social media as a "liberation technology".[13] The establishment of Syrian online women's rights organizations is an important development as women's organizations were and are officially forbidden. While the Syrian women's movement was very active until the coup d'état of 1963, in comparison to other MENA countries, from 1963 until today, the only Syrian women's organization with a license to operate is the government-supported General Union of Syrian

12 The film was released in 2013 and is directed by Joe Piscatella. It won the Cinema for Peace award in 2014 (Piscatella 2013).

13 The term "liberation technology" is used by several scholars (Milan 2013).

Women.[14] The non-existence of offline Syrian women's rights groups contrasts with other countries in the MENA region such as Egypt and Morocco despite the fact that, in these countries, women's organizations are also exposed to varying levels of governmental monitoring and repression. The absence of Syrian women's organizations is reflected in academic literature where there is an abundance on studies dealing with women's groups' activism in Egypt, Morocco, Tunisia and Algeria but where studies dealing with Syria are scarce (Asad 2020).

On the basis of our social network analysis, we found that some Syrian women's organizations have the largest traffic and network communication within the Syrian online community. A good example is *Nasawyia* (Feminism). Consisting of a team of approximately thirty-five female and male activists and writers who are mostly from Syria but also from other Middle Eastern and North African countries, *Nasawyia* is "devoted to achieving full equality for women in the Middle East and North Africa through film and media, education, and litigation".[15] With more than 400,000 Facebook followers, *Nasawyia* is smaller than, for example, the aforementioned *Shabaka al-Thawra al-Suriya* (Syrian Revolution Network) which has more than 2 million followers.

However, the value of a network not only depends on the size of its membership but also on the intensity of interaction between its members (Castells *et al.* 2009: 251), usually called engagement in social media studies (Wang *et al.* 2017). *Nasawyia* has more online interactions (views, likes, comments, shares) than *Shabaka al-Thawra al-Suriya* and many other prominent online groups. For example, the video on why women should talk about sex and why men love immoral women received 140,773 views and 1,425 comments,[16] showing that these and many other issues encourage intense debate. Based on members' engagement, *Nasawyia* is more of a potentially counter-hegemonic mobile society than, for example, *Shabaka al-Thawra al-Suriya* where followers often are recipients rather than communicators of information, the important exception being Rehab's post (see below).

14 This not only applies to Syrian women's rights organizations but also to other civil society organizations. All civil society organizations have been dissolved and have been brought under the control of the Syrian regime (Devlin 1991).

15 See Nasawyia's homepage: https://www.facebook.com/Nasawyia/?ref=page_internal.

16 See youtube.com/watch?v=vWYKC9HRvvM&ab_channel=Nasawyiaالنسوية (July 2019) (Nasawyia 2019; Hofstede 2019).

A Dutch national newspaper also reported that in a Rotterdam-based mosque, online presentations from female speakers attracted thousands of visitors, more than all the male speakers combined (Van Beek 2020: 8–9).

However, other studies provide a different understanding of the impact of social online technologies on cultural and religious attitudes and behaviours (Alhayek 2016). Sotoudeh *et al.* (2017), for example, concluded that while Facebook users use the Internet to engage in online romance in seven countries in the larger MENA region,[17] their data also "indicate that individual Facebook users who breach these norms in cyberspace tend to be the same people who breach them in actual physical space" (Sotoudeh *et al.* 2017: 437), with men more likely to use online dating than women (Sotoudeh *et al.* 2017: 436–7). Hence, in this case, deviant offline behaviour is continued in cyberspace; it does not originate in cyberspace.

Despite the skyrocketing popularity of Facebook after January 2011, Syrian women were reluctant to use Facebook. Whereas the Indonesian women mentioned above used Instagram to promote a particular form of veiling and even invited viewers to focus exclusively on their body and faces (Baulch and Pramiyanti 2018: 4), one of the Syrian women interviewed stressed that, in Syria, many women carefully watched other women to see how viewers would react to the display of photos that revealed these women's faces. They were careful not to provoke the disapproval of family members. Castells *et al.* (2009) argue that one of the social consequences of mobile communication is "safe autonomy". This autonomy vis-à-vis spatial location, time constraints and, often, social and cultural norms is safe in as much as it allows individuals to relate to the world at large while still relying on their infrastructure of personal support (Castells *et al.* 2009: 248). In the Syrian case, however, women's participation in mobile society sometimes caused offline safety networks to turn against them. The story of one of the interviewees, Takwa, illustrates the severe offline consequences as pertaining to the publication of her profile picture, depicting her face but not her hair.

At the start of the Syrian uprising, Takwa's father was one of the first family members who actively used Facebook to instigate peaceful protesting in the streets. Following his example, Takwa and her husband, both Sunni Muslims, started using Facebook to support the uprising. They uploaded to their individual pages a profile picture showing their faces. Even though Takwa was wearing a veil, the exposure of her face to public gaze turned her life upside down. Everyone in her family became involved; her mother-in-law and sisters-in-law thought she did not have good manners. Winking, one of her sisters-in-law told her that she would soon start receiving many friend requests from male Facebook users.

17 They are Algeria, Egypt, Iran, Pakistan, Palestine, Tunisia and Turkey.

This infuriated Takwa's husband who smashed her phone and forbade his wife from using Facebook ever again. Takwa said: "… I told him that it was unfair to forbid me to do this since he was also using a picture for his account. I also told him that Islam does not say that a woman's photo is forbidden and a man's allowed. He then beat me and I left for my parents' house." Takwa's father was also angered by the posting of her photo on Facebook but nevertheless accepted his daughter in his home. Takwa realized that while both her husband and father were fighting for the freedom of their country, they did not allow freedom to flourish in their own houses. It led Takwa to divorce her husband, build a new life abroad and continue her fight, this time not only against dictatorship but also against patriarchy.[18]

However, the fact that images are allowed on Facebook, sometimes leading to controversy as seen in the cases mentioned, does not imply that Facebook impedes feminist engagement compared to hashtag-driven platforms like X. Syrian feminist groups, like other protest movements, favoured Facebook over X during the 2011 uprisings due to its ample space for content expression and sharing. Furthermore, studies have indicated that while Facebook permits and popularises image-sharing, platforms like Instagram are genuinely image-oriented. On Instagram, the user gains self-esteem through the number of views while Facebook relies more on content (based on both text and images) and the user gains self-esteem through the number of likes they receive from page friends (Limniou *et al.* 2022). The more serious nature of Facebook partly explains the choice by the Syrian feminist movement for Facebook over platforms such as X and Instagram. Facebook does not hinder online feminist engagement; instead, it brought to light the problematic practice of posting women's images on social media. Simultaneously, it provided a platform to discuss not only concepts of womanhood in the new nation but also of manhood.

Men also had to deal with patriarchal understandings of female shame and male family honour. They felt pressure to control their wives' morality and obedience, not only offline but also in cyberspace. Within households, this led men to implement different rules for their wife's behaviour in online spaces depending on their religious beliefs. For instance, Ibrahim, a married journalist in his fifties with an intellectual and secular background, said he had heard many negative comments about women who had posted their pictures on Facebook. His friends had even teased a co-worker because his wife had posted a nice picture of herself online. He said: "I believe we do not all look at

18 Interview with Takwa. 20 May 2017, The Netherlands.

women in the same respectful way." As Ibrahim did not want this criticism to be levelled at his unveiled wife, he agreed with her that she would not post a photo of herself online.[19] Adam made a similar agreement with his wife but on different grounds. This Sunni businessman, in his thirties, explained that since a respectful religious woman does not flirt and speak with men in public in offline reality, she is supposed to behave the same on Facebook. She can have Facebook friends but if she were to accept friendship requests from unrelated men, she will be harassed even if she wears a veil.[20] In order to prevent harassment from occurring, Adam advised his wife to post a profile photo depicting herself with her husband and children.

In another interview, Ala'a, a Sunni woman in her mid-twenties, recalled how her female neighbour, Mouna, was forced by her angry husband to either omit her profile picture from Facebook or post one that portrayed her with her husband and children. While Mouna was from a branch of Shia Islam where women do not wear the veil, her husband nevertheless felt that a married woman cannot appear alone on social media and must be accompanied by her male protector. Mouna opted for the family profile picture and was very surprised to find out that Ala'a used an individual profile picture on Facebook. Ala'a explained that she and her husband believe that if a woman is veiled and uses a serious profile picture, she will be considered a respectable woman. Her husband, she claimed, understands the principles of the Islamic religion and does not mind that she has an individual profile picture on Facebook.[21]

The interviews show that free social interaction online is restricted. In contrast to the Syrian student organizing resistance activities from her home in Chicago, social interaction online is not free from authoritarian control, that is to say, from the dictates of Syria's patriarchal and religion-based familial ideology, not even when one is secular or not obliged to wear the veil. Solutions found are either to refrain from posting a profile picture showing the face (but often a flower instead) or to depict the individual woman with her male protector, usually, her husband. When individual Syrian women expose parts of their body to the gaze of men online, this can have serious consequences not only during their lifetimes but also when they are dead. The case of Rehab, mentioned at the beginning, forms a good example to which we will turn now.

Rehab was a university student involved in resistance activities who was arrested by the intelligence service in January 2013. The picture of her unveiled dead body was posted online in March 2015 by *Shabaka al-Thawra al-Suriya*

19 Interview with Ibrahim. 5 March 2017, The Netherlands.
20 Interview with Adam. 7 February 2017, The Netherlands.
21 Interview with Ala'a. 10 March 2017, The Netherlands.

(The Syrian Revolution Network). While the admin of this Facebook group praised Rehab as a martyr, fierce discussion erupted over the fact that she was not veiled and some commenters on the post even questioned whether the doors of heaven would open to Rehab: For example, one commenter said: “It is highly prohibited to publish a girl’s photo without a veil even if she is dead, especially when all the Hadith point out, with clear evidence, that if women want God to allow them a good ending, they should be veiled.”[22]

Rehab’s photo was part of the so-called Caesar files, a collection of approximately 28,707 images, corresponding to at least 6,786 dead male detainees that were made public by a defector, code-named Caesar, who had worked as an official forensic photographer for the Military Police (HRW 2015: 2). Out of a collection of 6,786 images, Rehab’s was the only one depicting a woman (HRW 2015: 32, 51).[23] While the detained men who had died for the same cause were automatically bestowed martyr status, although they were tortured and unclothed, this was not the case for Rehab.[24] Seemingly, even in a period of great political upheaval, longstanding notions of manhood and womanhood remain remarkably robust. Dunn (2010) and other scholars also argue that “martyrdom [in Christianity and Islam] does not seem to impact the social norms that govern gender relations … other than the occasional female martyr” (Dunn 2010: 217).

In the next section, we analyse the controversy surrounding the portrayal of Rehab’s photo on Facebook. We use Rehab’s story to argue that the popular Facebook group *Shabaka al-Thawra al-Suriya* is an example of an online community slowly developing into a mobile society free from authoritarian control. In the Syrian context, authoritarian control has a twofold meaning. While the prospect of the removal of a longstanding authoritarian ruler seems further removed than ever before, the online revolution against patriarchy and male authoritarian control continues, albeit slowly.

Gendered Notions of Sacrifice and Martyrdom in the Free Syria

In January 2013, Rehab Allawi, a civil engineering student in her mid-twenties, was taken to the notorious 215 Section in Damascus. Section 215, also called the Branch of Death (HRW 2015: 8), is run by the Military Intelligence Directorate

22 This comment was posted on 18 March 2015.

23 https://caesar-fsg.org/ (Caesar 2020).

24 The same applies to other Syrian women and girls whose images of their dead bodies appeared in the period following the posting of Rehab’s photo. These images were not part of the Caesar files.

(*al-Mukhabarat al-ʿAskariya*) and one of the numerous detention centres in Syria's capital, Damascus. According to her brother, "Rehab worked in one of Damascus's local coordination committees – loose networks of activists – and she assisted internally displaced persons who had fled Homs [city in West Syria]" (HRW 2015: 51). According to the Facebook post, she helped internally displaced persons rent houses and assist released prisoners in returning home. For a long time, Rehab's whereabouts remained uncertain until the photo of her dead body was posted on 18 March 2015 on the Facebook page of *Shabaka al-Thawra al-Suriya* (Syrian Revolution Network).

The online publication of the Caesar files spurred outrage. But where, as noted, the dead male detainees were automatically elevated to the status of martyr, Rehab's martyrdom was questioned by some on the basis of the public exposure of her face and uncovered hair. Although Rehab had been wearing the veil before her detention, in Syria's detention centres, women are frequently stripped of their veil and then stripped naked. According to the dominant familial ideology, Syrian men have the duty to control their wives' behaviour and make sure women are not exposed to the gaze of unrelated men. This would tarnish women's honour and, by extension, that of their families. In a context of regime resistance, the question arises how men and women deal with the phenomenon of likely sexual assault of female resistance fighters by men from the regime. Will women's actions and experiences be remembered or will their experiences be considered shameful and omitted from history?

Appropriate Female Behaviour in the Free Syria

In writing the history of the free Syria and the role of men and women in it, Hamamra (2018b) argues that the agent of narration and the audience play an important role. In *Shabaka al-Thawra al-Suriya*, we consider the network's administrator who published Rehab's post to be the narrator and the network's members the audience. The fierce debate that erupted over Rehab's post shows that in this relatively docile Facebook group, this time, the audience were not passive recipients of information but actively involved in interpreting the message. In the span of a few days, the post received 1,009 comments, 4,500 likes and 905 shares, dividing the community into different groups which made sense of the message within their personal and social contexts.

One could argue that the agent of narration, the male moderator of this large Facebook page, sanctioned the participation of women in ushering in political change by posting Rehab's photo and by repeatedly referring to her

as “the woman who rebels” (*al-tha’ira*). According to the dominant familial ideology, Syrian women are supposed to be obedient mothers and housewives. By portraying Rehab as “the woman who rebels”, the page administrator implied socially deviant female behaviour. At the same time, however, he also referred to more traditional gender roles for Syrian women when listing the “revolutionary” activities undertaken by Rehab such as helping homeless people find housing. In short, in portraying Rehab both as a revolutionary and a homemaker, the page administrator reinforced socially accepted notions of womanhood at the same time as he seemed to destabilize strict gender roles (Dunn 2010: 203).

At first, audience members followed in the lead of the page admin by showing sympathy for Rehab and her family and by clearly speaking of Rehab as a martyr. But the tone of the comments changed quickly when some members asked the page administrator to remove Rehab’s photo, claiming it was inappropriate to display her without the veil. For example: “My brother, please remove the post because she is unveiled. There is no good in uploading a picture of a woman without a veil. May God have mercy on her and make her a martyr.” This comment implies that a Muslim woman can only become a martyr when she behaves and dresses according to dominant gender norms of what it means to be a woman. A woman without a veil does not automatically become a martyr, not even when everybody agrees her veil was stripped off against her will and she sacrificed her life-blood for the good cause.

Studies on female martyrdom in Christianity and Islam (Dunn 2010; Gandolfo 2007; Hamamra 2018a, b; Shirazi 2012) show that even when women are credited as martyrs, this does not translate into greater political equality with men in life, precisely, because of the dual self-exclusive roles the female martyr seems to embody which make her appear male and female at the same time (Dunn 2010). In patriarchal societies, where women are not supposed to leave the house without the permission of the husband or other related men, fighting and martyrdom cause confusion about the proper place of women in the new political community. Should women remain obedient homemakers and custodians of honour or be given a possibility to enter the public sphere, fight for their country and, ultimately, assume positions of power (Dunn 2010)? Or should transgressive gender behaviour only be allowed temporarily as the response of the user cited above seems to imply?

Whereas some users requested that Rehab’s picture be removed, others felt it was important to widely publish the crimes committed by the al-Assad regime against its own population. Responding to those who asked for the removal of Rehab’s photo, one member said: “O brothers, you are right but

the picture is published for all the world to see the crimes of the filthy one."[25] While admitting that women without veils should not be exposed to public gaze, this member and others believed that pre-existing notions of women's honour and modesty had to be set aside in the light of the political struggle against the regime, at least, temporarily. These users clearly put the interest of the greater political cause before the interest of Rehab and her family. More generally, when women are still expected to dress modestly and be custodians of honour, what impact does the temporary setting aside of gender norms have on the lives of women and their families?

In an interview with a Syrian opposition newspaper, Rehab's brother explained how in January 2013, Rehab was arrested for a first time. An hour after her arrest, her mother, sisters and female cousin were also taken and subjected to insult and torture. Although all women were released, Rehab's brother said he and his family suffered from social injustice and ostracism. The social backlash even came from those closest to them who viewed his arrested sisters as being raped (Al-Rifa'i 2015). The case of Rehab and her female relatives was far from unique. The Syrian regime and other warring parties widely use violence against women as a tactic of war because they know sexually violated women bring shame to their marriages and families. As one female survivor of one of al-Assad's detention centres recalls: "Every survivor had someone from their family waiting for them with ululations [zaghareet] and joy, except for me" (Nassar 2020). Instead, this woman was repeatedly asked whether she had been raped (Nassar 2020).

In other cases, released women found out that their husbands had married again and that they, having lost their honour from being raped, were expelled from the marital home.[26] Some regime opponents such as the above user, muster cases of sexual violence against "their" women to advance a political cause. However, by failing to simultaneously stand up against dominant notions of womanhood at home, "their" women's sacrifices remain unrecognized, resulting in what Hamamra calls the patriarchization of memory, that is to say, remembering only what men have done and forgetting the experiences or actions of women (Hamamra 2018a: 52). It would be too simple, however, to only portray women's contributions and sacrifices as unrecognized and stigmatizing. In the process of writing history, men's contributions are also judged on appropriate display of male behaviour with non-normative men also suffering, albeit in different ways.

25 This comment was posted on 18 March 2015.

26 Also see the interview with Dunya. 18 January 2020, The Netherlands. For a similar account on post-revolutionary Tunisia: Gray 2020: 48, 94, 110–1.

Appropriate Male Behaviour in the Free Syria

In *Shabaka al-Thawra al-Suriya*, a significant number of members were highly critical of those who had asked the admin to remove Rehab's photo. They claimed that it was not so much the al-Assad regime which had failed Rehab but the very men criticizing the display of her dead body and uncovered hair. One of them said: "… go put veils on your beards, as you are the women of this time! Or better, you wear the veil as it's an obligation on you now!! Because you have no relevance to manhood!! Your women are being raped, tortured and widowed while you talk about their hair!! …"[27] According to this user and others, men who are upholding the dominant familial ideology have no relevance to manhood when they do not fulfil their part of what (Kandiyoti 1988) has famously coined as the "patriarchal bargain". That is to say, a man must earn female obedience by guarding the chastity of female family members and by providing for them. When users command men to don a beard-veil, they are implying these men failed in fulfilling the duty of men within the Islamic religion. By being unable to protect Muslim women and have them be raped and tortured in prison cells, Muslim men were undeserving of the beard, the symbol of male authority, par excellence (Sonneveld 2012: 69–72, 7–8).

There is abundant scholarship on gender in the MENA. This literature, however, mostly pays attention to notions of womanhood, neglecting the question of what it means to be a man in this region (Al-Ali 2012; de Hart *et al.* 2017; Sonneveld and Lindbekk 2015). The debate outlined above made clear that in this Facebook group, long-standing notions of both womanhood and manhood played a significant role in the political struggle. This not only applies to *Shabaka al-Thawra al-Suriya* but also to the other online groups we analysed. One of the main themes discussed in these groups, especially after the photo of Rehab was posted online, were the issue of the veil and the public exposure of women's faces online. But while the possibility of women claiming individual honour as martyrs was becoming a possibility, signifying a shift in notions of appropriate female behaviour, the same could not be said of men. Even when women were not wearing the veil and were likely raped, their martyrdom was considered by most members of *Shabaka al-Thawra al-Suriya*, even propagated by some, including the admin. When men are said to be irrelevant to manhood because they fail to protect women, this criticism implies perpetuation of the dominant familial ideology in the new Syria. When men

27 This comment was posted on 22 August 2015.

are still required to be protectors and financial providers of women, one aspect of the maintenance-obedience relationship is maintained.

Syrian men who sustain war related injuries, such as amputated limps, risk social stigma (Waters 2020). Unable to work, they fail to be breadwinners for their families and in contrast to male survivors who return in one piece and who are greeted with ululations, impaired men's sacrifices remain "uncounted" (*Idem.*). While injured and even raped men do not dishonour their families in the same way women do (Gray 2020: 49), their situation shows that long-standing social notions of men as protectors and financial providers of women are slow to change. On the legal level too, Van Eijk (2016) shows that in the Muslim and Catholic family courthouses of Damascus, a common ground for women's divorce is men's failure to be providers. A similar pattern occurred in post-revolutionary Egypt where a group of divorced mothers fought for the preservation of the maintenance-obedience relationship. Members of this group vociferously opposed the fathers of their children who were demanding a greater role in the emotional upbringing of their children. Divorced mothers counterpoised that fathers who do not provide for their families have no right to see and care for their children (Sonneveld and Lindbekk 2015).

In the Egyptian post-revolutionary public debate (2011–2013), divorced fathers' voices, progressive from a pedagogical and Human Rights perspective, were vilified by divorced mothers. Ironically, this resulted in divorced fathers and Egyptian feminists being in agreement with each other on the need to reserve a greater emotional and social role for fathers in the upbringing of their children. Divorced mothers and members of the political parties of the Muslim Brotherhood, Freedom and Justice Party, which is now forbidden, and the Salafi's Al-Nur wanted to maintain the prevalent pattern of caretaker roles. It made clear that in the period between 2011–2013, a new public sphere had emerged with a larger and more diverse group of participants who were fiercely debating the place of both men and women in the liberated nation. In this debate, no one voice had final authority (Sonneveld and Lindbekk 2015). Below, we ask whether the same applies to *Shabaka al-Thawra al-Suriya*.

The debate on *Shabaka al-Thawra al-Suriya* reveals three patterns which show that senders and recipients are not homogeneous and mutually exclusive categories. First, when users were recipients of messages, i.e. the admin's post and group members' replies, they also transmitted information to others. In this communication process, meaning was clearly created and negotiated. Hence, more than being senders and receivers, users were "communicators" (Pierce and Corey 2009). Second, women, as much as men, were communicators and actively producing messages that influenced the subsequent responses produced in the communication interaction. Third, men and women were not

homogeneous categories. If we accept that users' online names indicate their gender, it becomes apparent that women as a group communicated different messages. Whereas some women advocated a move away from female shame to individual female honour, others did not eschew from resorting to sexist language to defend Rehab. By suggesting that men should be protectors and providers of women, these women were maintaining one aspect of the patriarchal familial ideology: men's duty to be protectors and provide maintenance. Men also communicated different messages. Whereas some unconditionally accepted Rehab as a martyr, others thought female martyrdom was conditional upon women hiding their shame from the public gaze.

Although we were able to establish the gender of some members, generally, online gender identity is not necessarily easy to establish. Especially in the Syrian case where users hide their online identity from security agents and where women's public appearance, both offline and online, is controversial users may engage in online gender-switching. Rather than thinking along the lines of gendered power inequalities, in *Shabaka al-Thawra al-Suriya*, no voice assumed final authority and users expressed their opinions on the basis of a "shared field of experience" (Pierce and Corey 2009), in this case, Syria's dominant familial ideology. One aspect of the familial ideology, i.e. women's honour and obedience, was hotly debated, with no voice assuming final authority while the transformation of the other aspect, namely, men's protection and maintenance had barely started with the result that men were still expected to wear the beard.

Conclusion

Social media scholarship frequently links the use of social media platforms to Middle Eastern women's empowerment and the removal of gender inequalities. This article asked why publishing photos of Syrian women on Facebook provokes much controversy in the Syrian Facebook community in the context of ongoing violent political upheaval.

An analysis of the controversy was conducted by interviewing Syrian men and women as well as by examining the backlash which the publication of a photo of a dead female Syrian activist provoked on *Shabaka al-Thawra al-Suriya*, a large anti-government Facebook group. The analysis illuminated how notions of appropriate female behaviour are hotly debated and it made clear that the dominant ideology of how men and women should behave was important in creating a new and free society. This ideology dictates that men should be protectors and providers of women and women, in turn, should be

obedient and not expose their bodies to the public gaze. It stands in contrast to the rights that opponents of the government are fighting for in the new Syria: freedom, justice and equality for all.

While the familial ideology remains important, we also showed that whereas authoritative notions of womanhood were hotly debated, dominant understandings of manhood were hardly questioned. The Facebook group *Shabaka al-Thawra al-Suriya*, we concluded, is an example of a "limping" mobile society. It is mobile in the sense that its members can discuss controversial issues without one voice being able to claim final authority. Yet, it is limping since one aspect of the familial ideology – dominant notions of appropriate female behaviour – is challenged while the other aspect – dominant notions of appropriate male behaviour – is hardly questioned.

In the new Syria, members are trying to move forward favouring one aspect while the other one remains behind. Further research should establish whether this is a general pattern in Syrian society, both offline and online. The fact that academic attention for the lived realities of men who, for whatever reason, fail to fulfil adhering to the dominant familial ideology is scant, reveals that scholarship on gender in the MENA region is as much limping as are the men they fail to include in their gender analyses.

Bibliography

Al-Ali, Nadje. 2012. "Gendering the Arab Spring." *Middle East Journal of Culture and Communication* 5 (1): 26–31. doi: https://doi.org/10.1163/187398612X624346.

Al-Rifa'i, F. 2015. "The brother of "Rehab Al-Alawi" reveals to "Zaman Al Wasl" the story of her arrest and the blackmailing of her family by the regime officers and brokers (in Arabic)." *Zaman al-Wasl*, 23 March 2015. https://www.zamanalwsl.net/news/article/59183.

al-Suriya, Shabaka al-Thawra."Shabaka al-Thawra al-Suriya (The Syrian Revolution Network)." *Facebook group*, January 18, 2011. https://www.facebook.com/Syrian.Revolution/photos/a.10150397575815727/10155503081235727/?type=1&theater.

Al Omoush, Khaled Saleh, Saad Ghaleb Yaseen, and Mohammad Atwah Alma'aitah. 2012. "The impact of Arab cultural values on online social networking: The case of Facebook." *Computers in Human Behavior* 28 (6): 2387–99. doi: https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2012.07.010.

Alhayek, Katty. 2016. "ICTs, Agency, and Gender in Syrian Activists' Work among Syrian Refugees in Jordan." *Gender, Technology and Development* 20 (3): 333–51. doi: 10.1177/0971852416660649.

Alsaba, Khuloud, and Anuj Kapilashrami. 2016. "Understanding women's experience of violence and the political economy of gender in conflict: the case of Syria." *Reproductive Health Matters* 24 (47): 5–17. doi: 10.1016/j.rhm.2016.05.002.

Aouragh, M. 2016. "Social Media, Mediation and the Arab Revolutions". In *Marx in the Age of Digital Capitalism*. Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill. https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004291393_016.

Asad, Rula. 2020. "Attempting to Organize a Syrian Feminist Movement: War, Exile, and Intergenerational Tensions". *Kohl: a Journal for Body and Gender Research*, Vol. 6 No. 1 (01 June 2020). https://kohljournal.press/attempting-organize.

Baulch, Emma, and Alila Pramiyanti. 2018. "Hijabers on Instagram: Using Visual Social Media to Construct the Ideal Muslim Woman." *Social Media + Society* 4 (4): 2056305118800308. doi: 10.1177/2056305118800308.

Caesar. "Caesar Files Group." 2020. https://caesar-fsg.org/.

Castells, Manuel, Mireia Fernandez-Ardevol, Jack Linchuan Qiu, and Araba Sey. 2009. *Mobile communication and society: A global perspective*: MIT Press.

CIA."Central Intelligence Agency." *The World Factbook*, 2020. https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/sy.html.

Connor, Phillip. 2018. "Most displaced Syrians are in the Middle East, and about a million are in Europe." *Pew Research Center*, 29 January 2018. https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/01/29/where-displaced-syrians-have-resettled/.

Dahlgren, Susanne. 2010. *Contesting realities: the public sphere and morality in southern Yemen*: Syracuse University Press.

Danju, Ipek, Yasar Maasoglu, and Nahide Maasoglu. 2013. "From Autocracy to Democracy: The Impact of Social Media on the Transformation Process in North Africa and Middle East." *Procedia – Social and Behavioral Sciences* 81: 678–81. doi: https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2013.06.495.

de Hart, Betty, Nadia Sonneveld, and Iris Sportel. 2017. "New Perspectives on Gender in Shari'a-Based Family Law Studies: Moving Beyond the Women's Issue." *Religion and Gender* 7 (1): 42–52. doi: https://doi.org/10.18352/rg.10210.

Devlin, John, F. 1991. "The Baath Party: Rise and Metamorphosis." *The American Historical Review* 96 (5): 1396–407. doi: 10.2307/2165277.

Djebar, Assia. 1980. *Women of Algiers in Their Apartment*. CARAF Books, Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia.

Dunn, Shannon. 2010. "The Female Martyr and the Politics of Death: An Examination of the Martyr Discourses of Vibia Perpetua and Wafa Idris." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 78 (1): 202–25. doi: 10.1093/jaarel/lfp090.

Fox, Ashley M., Sana Abdelkarim Alzwawi, Dina Refki. 2016. "Islamism, secularism and the woman question in the aftermath of the Arab Spring: evidence from the Arab barometer." Politics and Governance 4 (4): 40–57. doi: https://doi.org/10.17645/pag.v4i4.767.

Gandolfo, Elizabeth O'Donnell. 2007. "Women and Martyrdom: Feminist Liberation Theology in Dialogue with a Latin American Paradigm." *Horizons* 34 (1): 26–53. doi: 10.1017/S0360966900003923.

Gray, Doris H. 2020. *Leaving the shadow of Pain. A cross-cultural exploration of truth, forgiveness, reconciliation and healing*: Logos Verlag Berlin GmbH.

Hall, Richard. 2015. "Finally naming Syria's dead: These are the victims of the Assad regime." *The World*, 16 December 2015. https://www.pri.org/stories/2015-12-16/finally-naming-syrias-dead-these-are-victims-assad-regime.

Hamamra, Bilal Tawfiq. 2018a. "Sacrifice/Martyrdom in Lady Lumley's Iphigenia and Contemporary Palestine." *Critical Survey* 30 (4): 22–39. doi: 10.3167/cs.2018.300403.

Hamamra, Bilal Tawfiq. 2018b. "Witness and martyrdom: Palestinian female martyrs' video-testimonies." *Journal for Cultural Research* 22 (3): 224–38. doi: 10.1080/14797585.2018.1511941.

Hofstede, Bregje. 2019. "Arabisch feminisme woont ook in Haarlem: maak kennis met Dareen Hasan Halimah." 29 July 2019. https://decorrespondent.nl/10375/arabisch-feminisme-woont-ook-in-haarlem-maak-kennis-met-dareen-hasan-halimah/1322163917250-ee843ff4.

HRW. 2015. "Human Rights Watch." *If the dead could speak: Mass deaths and torture in Syria's detention facilities*, 2015. https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/report_pdf/syria1215web_0.pdf

Kandiyoti, Deniz. 1988. "Bargaining with patriarchy." *Gender & Society* 2 (3): 274–90. doi: 10.1177/089124388002003004.

Leurs, Koen, and Sandra Ponzanesi. 2018. "Connected migrants: Encapsulation and cosmopolitanization." *Popular Communication* 16 (1): 4–20. doi: 10.1080/15405702.2017.1418359.

Limniou, Maria, Yasmin Ascroft, and Sarah McLean. 2022. "Differences between Facebook and Instagram usage in regard to problematic use and well being." *Journal of Technology in Behavioral Science* 7: 141–150. doi: https://doi.org/10.1007/s41347-021-00229-z

Miladi, Noureddine. 2016. "Social Media and Social Change." *Digest of Middle East Studies* 25 (1): 36–51. doi: https://doi.org/10.1111/dome.12082.

Milan, Stefania. 2013. *Social Movements and Their Technologies: Wiring Social Change*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Nasawyia. "*YouTube video*, July 2019. https://youtube.com/watch?v=vWYKC9HRvvM&ab_channel=Nasawyiaالنسوية.

Nassar, A." Freed from regime prisons, Syrian women seek refuge from social stigma." *Syria Direct*, 6 August 2020. https://syriadirect.org/news/freed-from-regime-prisons-syrian-women-seek-refuge-from-social-stigma/.

Pierce, Teresa, and Amy M. Corey. 2009. The Evolution of Human Communication: From Theory to Practice. Oshawa (Ontario): EtrePress.

Piscatella, Joe."Chicago Girl film." *IMDB*, 2013. https://www.imdb.com/title/tt2607968/.

Saleh, L."In Syria, from fighting to blogging, the many roles of women." *The Conversation*, 6 October 2016. https://theconversation.com/in-syria-from-fighting-to-blogging-the-many-roles-of-women-65176.

Satterfield, R. 2013. "An unfulfilled promise? The role of women in the Arab awakening." *Journal of Women Human Rights in the Middle East* 1: 20–30.

Shirazi, Faegheh. 2012. "Death, the Great Equalizer: Memorializing Martyred (Shahid) Women in the Islamic Republic of Iran." *Visual Anthropology* 25 (1–2): 98–119. doi: 10.1080/08949468.2012.629173.

SOHR. "Syrian revolution NINE years on: 586,100 persons killed and millions of Syrians displaced and injured." *Syrian Observatory for Human Rights*, 14 March 2020.

Sonneveld, Nadia. 2012. *Khul Divorce in Egypt, Public Debates, Juridical Practices, Everyday Life*. Cairo: American University in Cairo Press.

Sonneveld, Nadia, and Monika Lindbekk. 2015. "A Revolution in Muslim Family Law? Egypt's Pre-and Post-Revolutionary Period (2011–2013) Compared." *New Middle Eastern Studies* 5: 1–19.

Sotoudeh, Ramina, Roger Friedland, and Janet Afary. 2017. "Digital romance: the sources of online love in the Muslim world." *Media, Culture & Society* 39 (3): 429–39. doi: 10.1177/0163443717691226.

Synaps. "Syria trends: Mining underused datasets." *Synaps. Publication* 31 July 2017. https://www.synaps.network/post/syria-conflict-trends-google-data.

Van Beek, M. "De online opmars van vrouwelijker sprekers." *Trouw*, 11 July 2020.

Van Dijk, Jan. 2006. *The Network Society: Social Aspects of New Media*. 2nd ed: Sage Publications Ltd.

Van Eijk, Esther. 2016. *Family law in Syria: Patriarchy, pluralism and personal status laws*: Bloomsbury Publishing.

Wang, R., J. Kim, A. Xiao and Y.J. Jung. 2017. Networked narratives on Humans of New York: A content analysis of social media engagement on Facebook. *Computers in Human Behavior*. 66: 149–153.

Waters, G. 2020. "The Uncounted: Life after War for Syria's Living Martyrs." *Atlantic Council*, 29 January 2020. https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/syriasource/the-uncounted-life-after-war-for-syrias-living-martyrs/.

Welchman, Lynn. 2007. *Women and Muslim Family Laws in Arab States: A Comparative Overview of Textual Development and Advocacy*, ISIM Series on Contemporary Muslim Societies. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.

Wolfsfeld, Gadi, Elad Segev, and Tamir Sheafer. 2013. "Social Media and the Arab Spring: Politics Comes First." *The International Journal of Press Politics* 18 (2): 115–37. doi: 10.1177/1940161212471716.

Young, Sean D., Abbas Shakiba, Justin Kwok, and Mohammad Sadegh Montazeri. 2014. "The Influence of Social Networking Technologies on Female Religious Veil-Wearing Behavior in Iran." *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking* 17 (5): 317–21. doi: 10.1089/cyber.2013.0338.