

NOTIONS OF PROGRESS: THE FRAMING OF WOMEN IN THE ARAB SPRING

by

LAURA E. STRAIT

A THESIS

Presented to the School of Journalism and Communication  
and the Graduate School of the University of Oregon  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of  
Master of Science

September 2014

THESIS APPROVAL PAGE

Student: Laura E. Strait

Title: Notions of Progress: The Framing of Women in the Arab Spring

This thesis has been accepted and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Science degree in the School of Journalism and Communication by:

Gabriela Martínez	Chairperson
Carol Stabile	Member
John Russial	Member

and

J. Andrew Berglund	Dean of the Graduate School
--------------------	-----------------------------

Original approval signatures are on file with the University of Oregon Graduate School.

Degree awarded September 2014

© 2014 Laura E. Strait

## THESIS ABSTRACT

Laura E. Strait

Master of Science

School of Journalism and Communication

September 2014

Title: Notions of Progress: The Framing of Women in the Arab Spring

The Arab Spring marked a new age of international political participation and support, facilitated by the wide circulation of imagery via social and mass media. Many in the West found themselves in ideological agreement with the political efforts of the protests, upholding the U.S. rhetorical tenets of democracy and freedom of speech. The visual framing of the Arab Spring in U.S. news media played a crucial role in forging this ideological consensus. My thesis focuses specifically on the visual framing of women in the Egyptian uprising by exploring the Western news portrayal of the presence of women in the Egyptian political sphere. In order to ground my assessment of Western perceptions, I conduct a content analysis of coverage of the Egyptian uprising protests from Getty and AP photography databases. My analysis is also supported and influenced by a rigorous theoretical foundation in framing theory, Orientalism, and postcolonial feminist theory.

## CURRICULUM VITAE

NAME OF AUTHOR: Laura E. Strait

### GRADUATE AND UNDERGRADUATE SCHOOLS ATTENDED:

University of Oregon, Eugene  
Columbia College Chicago, Chicago, Illinois

### DEGREES AWARDED:

Master of Science, 2014, University of Oregon  
Bachelor of Arts, Cultural Studies, 2010, Columbia College Chicago

### AREAS OF SPECIAL INTEREST:

Postcolonial theory, feminist theory, critical theory, new media studies, gender and sexuality in Islam, and development studies.

### GRANTS, AWARDS, AND HONORS:

Graduate Teaching Fellowship, University of Oregon, 2012-2014

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to express sincere appreciation to Professors Martínez, Stabile, and Russial for their dedication and support throughout this process.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
I. INTRODUCTION .....	1
II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE.....	4
Woman as Nation.....	4
Orientalism.....	8
Framing and Visual Framing .....	10
III. METHOD .....	17
IV. RESULTS .....	20
Active or Passive Protestors (RQ1) .....	20
Traditional Gender Roles (RQ2).....	22
Visual Marginalization (RQ3) .....	25
V. DISCUSSION .....	30
Women as Active Participants .....	30
Traditionalism .....	38
Visual Marginalization.....	43
VI. CONCLUSION.....	50
REFERENCES CITED.....	54

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Page
1. Wide shot of large crowd of protestors in Egypt .....	20
2. Shot of female protestor exhibiting “protest behavior”. .....	21
3. Shot of women and men intermixed at a demonstration.....	23
4. Shot of small group of women within larger intermixed crowd .....	23
5. Shot of demonstration with women both in hijab and not in hijab.....	24
6. Shot of protestors where foreground/background is unclear .....	25
7. Shot of Egyptian woman alone in photograph.....	26
8. Shot of crowd with women both facing and not facing camera .....	27
9. Shot of women out of focus in foreground of photograph .....	28
10. Shot of women praying at a demonstration .....	32
11. Photograph of women revolutionaries in Algeria.....	34
12. Photograph of Las Soldaderas during Mexican Revolution .....	35
13. Photograph of Afghan women in burqa during Taliban regime .....	36
14. Shot of group prayer during Egyptian Uprising protests .....	37
15. Shot of soldier with Egyptian woman in background.....	44
16. Photograph of Algerian model posing for colonial photography .....	48
17. Colonial photograph of veiled Algerian women walking.....	49

## LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
1. Active or Passive Protestors.....	22
2. Traditional Gender Roles.....	24
3. Visual Marginalization.....	28
4. Percentage Results .....	29

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Early December 2010 to January 2011 marked the publicized beginning of a series of coups and revolutions collectively known as the Arab Spring. Tunisia, Egypt, Bahrain, Syria, Libya, and Yemen are among the countries that have been experiencing political unrest and mass protests since early 2011. Though the title “Arab Spring” created a homogenizing brand for these revolts, each nation experienced a unique and historically situated lead-up and tipping point to revolution in its various iterations. While these individual histories are available to the public via multiple forms of media, popular Western perceptions of this series of events are generally framed by a handful of news agencies reporting on the protest events and their progressions.

A few major tropes emerged in the popular Western consciousness regarding the Arab Spring to date, such as the allegedly determinative role played by social media, Orientalist representations of despots, and widely circulated revolutionary imagery in the form of video, photography, photojournalism, etc. Although the former two tropes are undoubtedly rife with material for analysis, this project is concerned with the third, focusing on still news photography retrieved from Getty and Associated Press (AP) news agencies. The video and imagery circulating around the Arab Spring on news and social media sites engendered a sense of participation and empathy with the nations under revolt in American readers. This support was arguably cultivated by the construction of the revolutions as moving in line with neo-liberal or Western democratic rhetoric. Applying the notion of “spring” to a revolutionary moment has historically been a project of the West in framing an uprising as *progressive*, moving toward an era of (neo)liberal and

democratic national organization. In fact, the term “Arab Spring” was coined in the US trade magazine *Foreign Affairs* (Massad, 2012).

Women have been invoked throughout global history in times of revolution or protest. Just as the image of children often lead rhetorical campaigns against human rights violations, women have historically been highlighted in national moments of revolt against repressive regimes. Due to the highly visual nature of the uprising’s exposure in the West, reading news photography will allow me to analyze how women in the Arab Spring are presented. Within this framework, I will narrow my research to that of photography of protests from the Egyptian Revolution. With this referent data, I can then examine any correlations with not only this speculation, but also those related to the postcolonial feminist theoretical lens through which I will be reading the findings.

In nations with complex histories regarding women and public/private space, specifically in terms of modernity or “progress,” women’s representation in and out of certain spaces is meaningful (Pollard 2005). Historically, Muslim majority nations under the threat of Western influence or rule place the weight of responsibility on their female populations to maintain, represent, or produce meaning for various camps, be they Islamist, nationalist, modernist, etc. Western scholars and politicians also place the burden of representation on women when speaking about non-Western nations in measurement of Western and neoliberal notions of progress, democracy, and modernity. In many cases, the image of an oppressed/backward/non-modern female populace has been at the core of democratizing/modernizing/colonizing missions. This image of women is typically placed in contrast with Western females, who are considered “freer”

than women of Islam, regardless of any social oppression they may have faced themselves (re: suffrage and personal status laws).

Additionally, Western news and photography has in the past framed, constructed, and represented the Eastern “other,” as Edward Said has observed. These representations arguably produce for the Western audience a homogenized reality of a non-homogenous nation of people, and in particular women. While I suspect that modernist concepts of progress would hope to encourage the theoretical “post-Islamist era,” (Mahmood, xviii) the results of this study may prove more complex than the dichotomous Islamist v. secular as backward v. modern. By performing a content analysis of visual representations in the U.S. news circuit of women within the context of the Egyptian Revolution, this study will identify the common themes that arise in Western news frames regarding Egyptian women in order to have a more substantial conversation on potentially Orientalist constructions of the meaning of the Arab Spring protests.

In order to build a foundation to understand the complex representations of Egyptian women in the context of the Arab Spring, a review of background literature will be useful. I will first continue the above discussion on “woman as nation,” in its varying academic iterations. From there, a brief recap of the relevant topics in Orientalism will theoretically frame the line of inquiry this study will follow. Finally, a discussion of the history and uses of framing theory and visual framing theory will ground my methodology for this analysis.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

#### *Woman as Nation*

The concept of “woman as nation” (sometimes referred to as “the woman question”) pertains to the action of imbuing in a female population a national identity, and the politics that follow from this embodiment. That is, women have long been the site upon which a version of nationalism or national representation is inscribed. Falah (2005) suggests that Western news sources often represent the women of Arab/Muslim majority nations as (1) victims of an oppressive Islamist patriarchy in need of saving, or (2) violent political actors reifying stereotypes of a “Muslim extremist.” In doing so, the image of the Arab woman is often gratuitously invoked to convey the overall political climate of a nation: “It would be as if magazines and newspapers in Syria or Malaysia were to put bikini clad women or Madonna on every cover of a magazine that featured an article about the United States or a European Country” (Abu-Lughod, 2006, p. 2).

On the other hand, political parties in Arab/Muslim majority nations have long engaged women’s rights as a site upon which to struggle for ideological and political influence. In late 1970s Egypt, women’s civil rights were passed back and forth for political means: initially more rights were awarded in an effort to undermine Islamist influence, but these were later revoked in the 1980s under the Mubarak regime because of Islamist opposition to the reformation (Al-Ali, 2002). In a discussion of gender, feminism, and Islamism in pre and postcolonial Egypt, Ahmed (1992) ascribes the Islamist aversion toward feminism to its political association with the West, while Abu-

Lughod (1998) builds on this notion by positing that the Islamist repudiation of feminism actually “cherry-picks” the feminist ideals as to oppose Western, liberal constructs.

Women’s rights and socio-cultural practices were, and continue to be, influenced by state and political actors around the world. It happens that on the global stage, Arab and Muslim majority countries remain at the forefront of this scrutiny because of the visible nature of what Western liberal beliefs deem the oppressive cultural imperatives of Islam. To build a theoretical as well as methodological framework for this study, I will generally maintain focus on colonial and postcolonial stages of near and middle-east Islamic nations, since their notions of “woman as nation” is applicable to and shares meaning with many global and temporal histories.

Chatterjee dissects the topic of “the women’s question” in his book *The nation and its fragments: Colonial and postcolonial histories* (1993), in a chapter on 19<sup>th</sup> century Bengal and the use of women in the process of stating and reinstating meanings of national identity. He explains that the Bengali people believed that their inherent superiority in the spiritual (interior) sphere would protect their national identity from the Westernizing effects of modernity that had been creeping into Bengali society (exterior sphere). Chatterjee presents a dichotomous parallel drawn between women and spirituality (inner=spiritual=female; outer=material=male) that ascribes the maintenance of the “inner” sphere to women, and thus the embodiment of national identity.

Many scholars have delved into the “woman as nation” theme through discussions on national mothering, understood as an ideological set of rules and practices to attain a level of cultural acceptability within the critiques of and ideals set by Victorian Europeans. National mothering is the idea that women are responsible for the formation

and maintenance of national identity, embodied in the acts of housekeeping, mothering, and providing a civilizing counter-balance to masculinity. Shakry (1998) says, “Motherhood, as taken up within the context of colonialism, was fundamental to the constitution of national identity and entailed the formation of a series of discursive practices that demarcated women as both a ‘locus of the country’s backwardness’ and a sphere of transformation to be reconstituted and raised up onto the plane of enlightened rationality.” In 20<sup>th</sup> century Iran, nationalists and modernists reacting to European assumptions of uneducated wives and mothers began to reform the role of women in the home. While earlier familial hierarchies placed child rearing in the hands of the father, the modern version called for the man of the house to be an active Iranian citizen, involved in nationalism and the political arena. In this modernizing mission, it became the job of women to not only bear the future Iranian citizen, but to raise him under the national ideal. Some feminists argue that this shift to a modern household was a step forward for women, as some were then promoted to “managers” of the house, which required a higher degree of education than in earlier times. Within this new education, women were taught basic life skills alongside a conditioning for behaving in heterosocial spaces (Najmabadi, 2005).

In early 20<sup>th</sup> century Egypt, the mission to “craft” a better national mother was explained in detail in various instruction manuals on child rearing (*tarbiya*) intent on modernizing and therein better equipping Egyptian mothers. Modernist notions of “public” and “private” space created a new emphasis on the home and its meaning as a location for a scientific practice of mothering (Shakry, 1998). These practices of endowing responsibilities of national cultivation on women via mothering, family

politics, and the general realm of domesticity were implemented by both Egyptian modernists and British colonials. The “civilizing mission” of colonial Britain insisted upon a refining of Egyptian “backwardness,” a judgment largely disseminated by European travel literature. Eroticized accounts of inappropriate Egyptian domesticity were relayed to the colonial homeland as justification for colonization. Colonialists like Lord Cramer (Egypt’s consul general) would justify the colonial endeavor by emphasizing the “otherness” of the Egyptian citizen by detailing health, hygiene, cultural practices and their respective divergences from Victorian English ideals of modernity. Lord Cromer contributed to the majority of colonial rhetoric on the Egyptian domestic sphere, and in this quote regarding progress and Europeanization, once again located Egyptian national identity in the woman: “The position of women in Egypt, and in Mohammedan countries generally, is, therefore, a fatal obstacle to the attainment of that elevation of thought and character which should accompany the introduction of European civilization, if that civilization is to produce its full measure of beneficial effect” (as quoted in Pollard, 2005, p. 96).

Victorian modernity became the measure to which women were expected to be held, used as a standard to which different groups of women did not conform, thus signifying backwardness. That is, in establishing national identity in women, modernists were able to tangibly appraise modernity, as well as methodologically reproduce it in its citizens and future generations. On the other hand, colonial powers used this same symbolic embodiment to motivate the “civilizing mission” of colonialism by *scientifically* speaking about and therein defining the Other.

## *Orientalism*

Said's *Orientalism* (1978) provides much of the theoretical foundation for this research project. For Said, one iteration of the theory asserts that Orientalism as a category or term was used to describe areas of study regarding "oriental" subjects, as well as an "ontological and epistemological distinction made between 'the Orient' and (most of the time) 'the Occident'" (p. 2). These are superficial and utilitarian versions of Orientalism used for mainly descriptive purposes, though these categorizations are inherently enmeshed with the work of Orientalism as Said develops it.

The definition of Orientalism that this project is concerned with has to do with the institutionalization of Orientalist practices of "dealing with the Orient." By this, Said is referring to the material construction of notions of the Orient via the Western imagination. According to his work in *Orientalism*, this process is enacted both institutionally and rhetorically. To support this assertion, he engages a Foucauldian vantage point to emphasize the very *systemic* incorporation of Orientalist constructions through discourse:

It is an *elaboration* not only of a basic geographical distinction (the world is made up of two unequal halves, Orient and Occident) but also of a whole series of "interests"...it is, above all, a discourse that is by no means in direct, corresponding relationship with political power in the raw, but rather is produced and exists in an uneven exchange with various kinds of power, shaped to a degree by the exchange with power political (as with reigning sciences like comparative linguistics or anatomy, or any of the modern policy sciences), power cultural (as with orthodoxies and canons of taste, texts, values), power moral (as with ideas

about what “we do and what “they” cannot do or understand as “we” do).

(emphases in text, p. 12)

This “uneven exchange with various kinds of power” refers to a Gramscian theory of hegemony wherein the Oriental “other” is systemically and pervasively identified as such to a degree in Western culture that “consent” promulgates a “flexible *positional* superiority” (emphasis in text, p. 7) over the Oriental other.

The Orient, as well as the Occident, Said explains, are largely man-made concepts with their own histories and semiotic significance that the West can use not only to define and therein subjugate the East, but also to construct its own ontological identity as “self” to the Oriental “other.” This notion of “othering” is a core tenet of Said’s theories, and will also be useful in the context of this project in terms of framing women in the Arab Spring, as Western understandings about the East can constitute the work of Orientalist discourse. Much of Said’s popular work on Orientalism consists of the representation of Islam in media of all sorts, including artwork, literature, TV and films, and even undergraduate course catalogs.

Said continues this line in the third installment of his trilogy of books, *Covering Islam: How the media and the experts decide how we see the rest of the world* (1997). Here he applies the theoretical developments of *Orientalism* to the news coverage of the Iranian hostage crisis in order to point to material examples of Orientalism at play. He elucidates the notion of knowledge as power by discussing the inherent (at the time) assumption of objectivity in the news which very often promulgates Orientalist imagery and rhetoric: “the Arab is always shown in large numbers. No individuality, no personal characteristics or experiences. Most of the pictures represent mass rage and misery, or

irrational (hence hopelessly eccentric) gestures. Lurking behind all of these images is the menace of *jihad*” (Said, 1978 p.287). This method of depersonalization has worked to subjugate colonized populations for centuries, and continues to work to promote an incommensurable relationship of representation of the East from the West. The following section addresses the role that the media play in perpetuating Orientalist notions by building and reinforcing stereotyping through repetitive imagery and rhetoric.

### *Framing and Visual Framing*

The literature on frame analysis spans multiple eras and academic fields. The contemporary concept of framing is derived from Goffman’s (1974) work on frame analysis that draws attention to the applied effects and therefore significance of contextualizing messages in mass media. More relevant to this project is a later definition of framing, which is the idea that certain subtextual aspects of a story are made “more salient,” according to Entman (1993), “in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described” (p. 52). This means that framing is a way in which to direct the connotative decoding of texts by the audience while simultaneously presenting the content of the piece. Gamson (1987) developed a constructionist model of frame analysis that includes media and public as “part of the same cultural system” (Baylor, 1996, p.1), implying that both the producers and the consumers of media generate and reify frames. It is thought that frames construct a discursive reality within which audiences can classify their interpretations of texts based on their experiences; these systems of meaning-organization are called the “schemata of interpretation” (Goffman, 1974). News sources are often analyzed as daily publication and mass audiences provide a platform to

disseminate stories and images representing the world at large (Mendes, 2011). Within Entman's analyses, the concept of "frame setting" is foundational. Different from "frame building," a body of work interested in the construction of frames, frame setting involves the interrogation of the effects that framing has on audiences (Scheufele, 1999).

In a study of framing blacks in Chicago news media, Entman (1992) presents evidence toward a theory of modern racism in determining a number of frames by which consumers navigate the representation of blacks in the news. The results of this study may be applicable to studies involving cross-cultural representation through negotiated frames. As Entman puts it, "Prejudice is fed by a tendency to homogenize, to assume there are no significant differences among individual members of the outgroup" (p. 350). In fact, framing can be viewed as a self regulating and recurring process within the "cascading activation" network developed by Entman (2003) as a model to better analyze post Cold War political associations to framing in the news. Cascading activation, essentially, describes a more dialectical understanding of the flow of influence between the public, the media, and federal administration within the U.S. There are additional studies that aim to prove the relevance of an audience's preconceived negotiation systems as quantitatively significant in the effects of news framing (Shen, 2004). This "issue-interpretation linkage" is most relevant in studies of framing effects regarding current and unfolding events (Tewksbury & Scheufele, 2008) under the assumption that presenting information in specifically contextualized ways will systematically inform news consumers on how to feel about a given news instance (Price, Tewksbury & Powers, 1995). This aspect of framing is quite relevant to this project -- not only because of the

recent and ongoing Arab Spring activities, but also in terms of popular Western preconceived notions of Arab women.

Frame analysis has often been engaged in the field of sociology, where it gained popularity in the mid 1980s as a vehicle to analyze social movements, “so much so, in fact, that framing processes have come to be regarded, alongside resource mobilization and political opportunity processes, as a central dynamic in understanding the character and course of social movements” (Benford & Snow, 2000, p. 612). Much of this literature has to do with *collective action frames*, or the way social movement organizations (SMOs) deliberately attempt to represent themselves to the media. While this project will not be focusing specifically on collective action frames, the notion of explicit self-representation should be kept in consideration during analysis. Interest groups or SMOs often do not have the resources to direct media framing, a luxury that can directly affect the type of ideological, monetary, and political support the movement receives (Baylor, 1996).

A specialized area of framing theory, which is increasingly relevant to this study, is visual framing. While the significance of framing in general terms (textual content, interaction of text and images, thematic publishing patterns, etc.) has been somewhat established above, there is an emergent field that focuses mainly on the framing involved in the communication of graphic imagery. Some justification for this focus lies in the assumption that visuals target a more peripheral brain function and therefore are often consumed by the audience with less negotiation or resistance (Rodriguez & Dimitrova, 2011). It is also suggested that images evoke stronger emotional responses than text

(Scheufele, 1999) as well as provide first impressions and longer residual memories of a news story.

In their 2011 study, Rodriguez and Dimitrova posit that visual framing literature has lacked cohesion within an established body of literature. They presented a methodological solution based on a previous categorizations of visual framing characteristics presented by Messaris and Abraham (2001): the analogical quality of images, the indexicality of images, and the lack of explicit propositional syntax in images. The approach defined by Rodriguez and Dimitrova consists of four levels of framing, each representing a category of “visual framing that progressively become more sensitive to the assignment of meanings to visual depictions” (pg. 52). The four levels are as follows: (1) visuals as denotative systems, (2) visuals as stylistic –semiotic systems, (3) visuals as connotative systems, and (4) visuals as ideological representations.

Engaging this (second level) stylistic-semiotic system of framing interpretation, Fahmy’s 2004 study applied five categorical frames to Associated Press (AP) photography of Afghan women before and after the fall of the Taliban. The aim of this study was to discern how and whether (or not) the AP framed women in Afghanistan in terms of their relative liberation after the removal of what was widely considered by the secular West to be an oppressive regime. “Picturing Afghan women” here exemplifies a material application of the blend of postcolonial and framing theory as a methodology for analysis.

The first two frames in Fahmy’s study looked at whether Afghan women in the AP photo selection were portrayed in oversimplified contexts in terms of Afghan women’s liberation. (1) *Visual Subordination* in this project refers to the depiction of

Afghan women wearing or not wearing the full-body covering burqa and (2) *Imaginary Contact*, which refers to the behaviors and portrayals of Afghan women when they are or are not making eye contact with the viewer, which can signify passivity and powerlessness. The next two frames involve the physical frames of the photography as it informs stereotyping of Arab women. (3) *Point of View* refers to the camera angle being used as a subordinating device in the imagery and (4) *Social Distance* involves analyzing the distance and focus in these photographs between the camera and the female subject, which indicates either social relationship between viewer and subject or a lack of a social relationship that in this case indicates powerlessness. The final frame category (5) *Behavior* discerns whether Afghan women are being portrayed as more empowered through their activities and locations in the photograph. Are they pictured in modern Western dress, participating in the workforce, etc. In this instance, disempowered women would be framed in more traditional roles, while empowered women are pictured partaking in modern activities.

“Picturing Afghan women” remains one of the only current studies on this topic that quantitatively analyzes data regarding representation through the lens of postcolonial theory. While there is a great breadth of work within the field of feminist postcolonial theory on the representation and agency of Arab and Muslim women, little beyond the work of Said (1978) – who does not primarily talk about women – has crept into quantitative media studies. Framing theory specifically addresses race and gender representations in media, but often remains tied to reigning media effects theories or older critical theories such as Said’s. The goal of this project, then, is to bridge these two areas of scholarship in order to contribute a more theoretically updated quantitative

analysis of a topic which has long been discussed in the humanities, but seldom engaged in the social sciences. In doing so, the study will ideally lend empirical data to related studies in the humanities, while encouraging a more critical and theoretical rigor in quantitative studies on representation.

Fahmy's study led to the conclusion that yes, Afghan women were portrayed through frames of Western liberation following the fall of the Taliban regime. Aside from somewhat relevant subject matter, this study will be useful for structuring my own work as I believe that incarnations of Said's Orientalism underscore the efforts of Fahmy's study and will be used to inform the frames defined in this project as well. By appropriating Fahmy's frames for the context of this endeavor, this project will explore the following research questions:

*RQ1: Are the women of the Egyptian Revolution portrayed as active members of the physical protest?*

To answer this question I will be using Fahmy's notion of *Imaginary Contact* to code photographs that frame women as either active or inactive members of protests. For this I will first ask if women are or are not present in the protest photography, and from there look at whether the women are exhibiting "protest" behavior (i.e. yelling, fists or signs in the air, etc.)

*RQ2: Are the women portrayed in traditional gender roles?*

I will be using Fahmy's *Visual Subordination* frame to inform my codes for this question. While Fahmy asked whether Afghan women were pictured in burqas, I will look at whether women are displayed in any form of hijab (headscarf) and whether they are pictured heterosocially or gynasocially. Conventionally, notions of a conservative

Muslim indicate that women behaving more traditionally would be grouped primarily with other women, instead of intermixed with men.

*RQ3: Does the photographic framing marginalize the women who are present at protests?*

For this question, I will adopt Fahmy's use of *Social Distance* and *Point of View* in order to determine the actual photographic framing of women's involvement in the Arab Spring protests. Here I will look at whether women are featured in the foreground or background (or unfocused) in the photograph, as well as whether or not individual women are facing the camera.

## CHAPTER III

### METHOD

In an effort to make generalizations about Western representations of women in the Egyptian Revolution protests, a visual content analysis was performed on the news coverage from the event. The dataset consists of images gathered from two major news agencies: the Associated Press (AP) and Getty Image databases. These agencies provide photographs taken of major news events, including the Egyptian Revolution. The universe was narrowed down to each database's photography of the revolution from January 25 (the "official" start to the protests in Tahrir Square, Cairo) through February 11 (the official date of Mubarak's resignation).

A survey of news photography from three of the most widely circulated US newspapers revealed that a large amount of news photography, especially on foreign affairs or potentially dangerous events, comes from news agencies. AP and Getty were among the most highly-used sources of photographs: *The New York Times*' coverage of the revolution was supplemented about 50% of the time with Getty or AP photographs, while *The Washington Post* used the two agencies for roughly 72% of its photography on the revolution. Finally, *USA Today* uses photography entirely from various news agencies, and over 90% of the photographs used in stories on the Egyptian Revolution were supplied by Getty and AP. Not all photographs available on these image databases are published in major US newspapers, but for the purpose of this analysis, a general sample of the types of photographs available for use/purchase/licensing will be sufficient.

Due to the immense volume of photographs from both agencies, the first step involved a systematic random sampling to obtain approximately 150 images from each

database<sup>1</sup>. To do this, I have chosen every  $n^{\text{th}}$  photograph where  $n = \text{total photos in dataset}/150$ , skipping any duplicates that have already been included in the sample. In AP Image's database for the Egyptian Revolution  $n = 5$ , while for the much larger Getty dataset  $n = 22$ . The population was then refined through preliminary coding in order to analyze specifically the portrayal of women. The data set was categorized into 3 sections: photographs that feature women, photographs that do not feature women, and an "undefined" category for any photographs where the gender of the persons in the image is not discernible (a zoomed-out photograph of a very large crowd, for example). The photographs that then feature women were coded according to the three frames and their qualifying codes listed in the previous section. Inter-coder reliability was initially tested with an agreement percent of 76.7% and coding categories were revisited and appropriately refined. For instance, some photographs featured more than one woman and therefore split the results; this was remedied by specifying that coding would be based on the *majority* of the women in a given picture.

There are some limitations that may arise from the universe as well as the method that should be noted. Content analyses are considered to be one of the weakest quantitative research methods. This is due to a higher degree of subjectivity in the researcher as well as the coders trained for the project, which is in a way accounted for with a test for inter-coder reliability. Because this study is not above all a content analysis, but a holistic exploration of the topic, this method will provide an adequate degree of quantitative analysis in order to substantiate a larger theoretical assumption developed throughout the paper. As noted in Wimmer & Dominick (2006), a content

---

<sup>1</sup> Comrey & Lee (1992) determined that a sample of 300 qualifies as a "good" population total in multivariate studies such as this one.

analysis cannot stand on its own when making an assumption about a given topic. Often the findings of a content analysis are supported with some form of media effects theory in order to make assertions about the influence of content on a demographic. In the case of this study, this supplementation will take the form of Orientalist theories, as well as those widely used in studies of women and gender in Middle East and Muslim majority populations, which are detailed in the literature.

## CHAPTER IV

### RESULTS

#### *Active or Passive Protesters (RQ1)*

To determine whether women were portrayed as active members of the protests of the Egyptian Revolution, coding determined first that only 63 of 300 – 21% of photos in the population clearly contained women. 34 of 300 may have contained women but were set aside because the genders of the subjects in the photographs were indiscernible. This was typically because the photograph was a wide shot of a very large crowd [Figure 1], or because the subjects in the photograph were photographed from the waist down, etc. Photographs where the gender was indiscernible and photographs that did not contain women were then set aside.



Figure 1. Wide shot of large crowd of protestors in Egypt (AP Images)

The 63 remaining photographs were then coded for protest behavior. Coders responded to the question “Are the majority of women in the photograph exhibiting

protest behavior?” Protest behavior here was detailed as fist/hands in the air, yelling, and sign holding [Figure 2]. As this study seeks to examine the Western perception of female participation in the Egyptian Revolution, prayer was not coded as protest behavior. This falls under the assumption that Westerners view protest in a specific manner, and that the liberal democratic standpoint might theoretically distance itself from religious rhetoric. Of the 63 photographs, only 20 (roughly 7% of the total population) were coded with women exhibiting protest behavior. 42 of the 63 contained women seemingly inactive in the protest, and in 1 photograph, coders were unable to determine whether or not the women in the photograph were active or inactive members of the protest [Table 1]. From these numbers, we can generalize that women were generally portrayed as inactive protest members during the revolution.



Figure 2. Shot of female protestor exhibiting “protest behavior” (AP Images)

	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Unclear</b>
<b>Are women present in the photographed protest?</b>	63	203	34
<b>Are the women exhibiting protest behavior?</b>	20	42	1

Table 1. Active or Passive Protestors

*Traditional Gender Roles (RQ2)*

To determine whether the women in the Egyptian Revolution are featured in perceived traditional gender roles, this frame codes photographs in the dataset by two variables. Coders were first asked if the women present in the photograph were featured primarily with other women (gynasocially). Intercoder reliability testing indicated consistent responses but the content analysis provides numbers which indicate little statistic significance in comparing “yes” to “no” responses. This is because many photographs feature women standing amongst men [Figure 3], and many of the photographs of women in groups are featured within a larger heterosocial grouping [Figure 4]. According to the results, 24 of the photographs featured women gynasocially, while 36 of 63 did not. Three photographs were marked as unclear.

Coders were then asked if the majority of the women in each photograph were wearing hijab (in this context *hijab* refers to any form of head scarf). An overwhelming number of responses indicate that women were primarily photographed in hijab during the Egyptian Revolution. A number of photographs featured one or more women without



Figure 3. Shot of women and men intermixed at demonstration (AP Images)



Figure 4. Shot of a small group of women within larger intermixed crowd (AP Images)

the hijab but because coders were asked to code the *majority* of women in the photograph, they were not recorded in this study [Figure 5]. Results show that 55 of 63 photographs contain women wearing hijab while only 8 photographs contain bareheaded women [Table 2]. While the second variable suggests that women were generally portrayed in traditional gender roles, the first variable suggests that men and women were generally photographed as intermixed during the protests.



Figure 5. Shot of demonstration with women both in hijab and not in hijab (AP Images)

	Yes	No	Unclear
Are the women featured gynasocially?	24	36	3
Are the women featured in hijab?	55	8	0

Table 2. Traditional Gender Roles

### *Visual Marginalization (RQ3)*

The final frame in this study sought to determine whether women were visually marginalized in the protest photography covering the revolution. Coders were first asked if the majority of women in each photograph were featured in the foreground of the scene. Results do not indicate any imbalance of frequency of which part of the photograph women are primarily positioned. This variable was one of the most difficult to code, as many of the photographs featuring women were often of large groups, of which a foreground and background are difficult to distinguish [Figure 6]. Additionally, some of the photographs of women did not picture many other people or much depth [Figure 7], and so the subject of the photograph defaulted to the foreground, regardless of their physical location.



Figure 6. Shot of protestors where foreground/background is unclear (AP Images)



Figure 7. Shot of Egyptian woman alone in photograph (Getty Images)

Coders were next asked if the majority of women in each photograph were facing the camera, or looking away from it. Nearly twice as many photographs (41) that featured women were taken of women looking away from or not facing the camera (21). One photograph was labeled as unclear because a number of women in the photograph are facing the camera head-on while many others' profiles are visible as they appear to be running to or from something [Figure 8].

The final variable in the question of visual marginalization asked if the majority of women in each photograph were photographed in focus or not [Figure 9]. Again, the results do not indicate that women are visually marginalized or not by being photographed out of focus. Thirty-two of 63 photographs feature women in focus while 30 of the photographs are out of focus shots of women.



Figure 8. Shot of crowd with women both facing and not facing camera (AP Images)

One photograph was labeled as unclear. In sum, the three variables within the frame of visual marginalization indicate that when women were photographed during the Egyptian Revolution, they were visually marginalized at least 47% of the time [Table 3]. Within the total population, women are then photographed and done so in a way that implies consciousness, agency, and participation roughly 11% of the time [Table 4].



Figure 9. Shot of women out of focus in foreground of photograph (AP Images)

	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Unclear</b>
<b>Are the women in the foreground of photograph?</b>	30	33	0
<b>Are the women facing the camera?</b>	21	41	1
<b>Are the women in focus?</b>	32	30	1

Table 3. Visual Marginalization

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Percentage of sample</i>	<i>Percentage of population</i>
<b>Present in protest</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>Exhibiting protest behavior</b>	<b>31.7</b>	<b>6.7</b>
<b>Featured gynasocially</b>	<b>38.1</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Wearing hijab</b>	<b>87.3</b>	<b>18.3</b>
<b>In photograph foreground</b>	<b>47.6</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Facing camera</b>	<b>33.3</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>In focus</b>	<b>50.8</b>	<b>10.7</b>

Table 4. Percentage Results

## CHAPTER V

### DISCUSSION

#### *Women as Active Participants*

Women and feminists have long been participants of political discourse in Egyptian society, though not always in the parlance of Western liberal feminism. In her book on women's activism in Egypt, Sherine Hafez concludes that this field does not necessarily have a language for the Muslim feminist, and that activism's relationship to Islam has shifted over time. She breaks the history of feminist action in Egypt into 4 major eras. The first era of modern state building (1800s-1922) marked the early emergence of women's discursive participation, as Malek Hefni Nasif and Nabawiyya Musa laid a framework for future feminist endeavors in speaking out about women's education and public worship. This was followed by an era of liberal reform projects following the 1919 revolution. In modeling the state off European liberalism, women were denied political participation and instead formed the Egyptian Feminist Union (EFU), led by Huda Sha'rawi. The same European liberalism encouraged these women to remove the veil and push for social reform regarding specifically education and the personal status law. Conversely, Zeinab al-Ghazali formed the Muslim Women's Society under the premise that the issue with women's issues in Egyptian society was due to conspiratorial Western influence.

In the Nasser era (1952-1970s), women were indirectly granted more rights as the socialist government began reforms. The secularization of the political sphere forced Islamists into political seclusion, which would later produce prominent Islamist scholars and theorists whose impact is still felt today, including women's right advocate Safinaz Qazim. The *Infitah* (open door policy) era of the 1970s onward implemented liberal economic policies, inciting a rural migration to the city. The ensuing class shift would then become the incubator for the anti-Western Islamic Revival seen today.

Today's Islamic Revival in Egypt is largely led by women activists. This includes a surge in private mosques and Islamic NGOs. This era marks not only the highest levels of female support for Islamism, it also includes the most leftist and feminist activist efforts in Egypt's history. These efforts are supported by women who rise high in Islamic social rankings, and furthermore by Islamic women's scholars and/or feminists such as Heba Raouf Ezzat and Omaima Abu Bakr (Hafez 2003).

While this project analyzes depictions of women protesting physically in Tahrir Square during the revolution, it is essential to note not only the active history of women and activism in Egypt, but the current feminist participation in the political sphere. This incarnation is more than ever being driven by progressive Islamic feminism, a notion complicated by the parameters of a oft-secular liberal feminism. Therefore, the photography produced for and consumed by a Western audience may formulate specific reactions to a narrow concept of activism, which may or may not conform to those constructed by the subjects of the photographs. For example, the act of prayer in Western culture would not be framed within a democratic understanding of activism, while it very well could be the protest practice of a politically Islamist demographic [Figure 10]. For

this reason, acts of prayer were not included in the definitions of protest behavior during the content analysis.



Figure 10. Shot of women praying at a demonstration (Getty Images)

Because this project seeks to evaluate the Egyptian Revolution and its female participants based on a *Western* lens of what visually constitutes liberal/democratic activism, the framing codes were constructed to reflect these values. These codes included typical activism tropes such as shouting, holding signs, and hands or arms thrust into the air or otherwise not relaxed at one's side (hence *active-ism*). While considering all practical arguments for only 31.7% of the sample to feature women expressing protest behavior (photographic timing, cultural mores about public behavior, lack of women exhibiting these codes, etc.), the objective of this study is to read protest photography within the parameters of Western perceptions. With that in mind, it would seem as though

the small number of women who were photographed during the revolution may not have been perceived as active participants.

This conclusion conflicts with some on the ground accounts of the protests (Hafez, 2012), as well as the history of women participants in the Egyptian political sphere. It expresses first that women are relatively inactive in Egyptian politics, and second that the women present in the protest photography may be present on happenstance, or to accompany a man to the public event. The notion of inactive women in a Muslim-majority nation such as Egypt harkens back to reports from colonialists and travel writers/photographers justifying colonial civilizing missions based on the oppression of the nation's female population. While in some cases, women's lack of mobility and education was indeed due to the patriarchal regimes within which they resided, often the conditions of women were hyperbolized and magnified as a capstone of liberal (read liberating) colonial teleology.

This begs the question, "what does the presentation of women in the Egyptian Revolution function as?" In Afghanistan, photographs of burqa-clad women in submissive positions and activities (or inactivities) functioned to support the Western mission of liberating the oppressed and "dehumanized" female population from the oppressive Taliban regime, as detailed in Fahmy's study. Photographs of female revolutionaries in the Algerian Revolution cultivated a sense of nationalism among the population [Figure 11]. During the Mexican Revolution, photographs and images of Las Soldaderas circulated as a means of propagating a populist ideology against the Diaz regime [Figure 12] (Poniatowska, 1999). In the latter two instances, women are evoked as part of a collective action frame. That is, the revolutionary parties utilized the

participation of women in the revolution (regardless of how accurate those depictions are) in order to further their own political goals. However, the example from Afghanistan, while explicit and situational, represents an objective framing employed by Western news media [Figure 13]. With this in mind, we can begin to consider the implications of the representation of women in the Egyptian Revolution. It is through the imagery produced through Western news agencies that a political representation of Egypt and its women is formulated for the Western audience. This widespread imagery may influence the Western viewer's understanding of an otherwise highly complex and historically situated revolution.



Figure 11. Photograph of women revolutionaries in Algeria



Figure 12. Photograph of Las Soldaderas during the Mexican Revolution



Figure 13. Photograph of Afghan women in burqa during Taliban regime

When reviewing the results of this analysis, the stark comparison of women present vs. women not present in the protests seems to lead the discussion on female political participation in Egypt. As only 21% of the photographs surveyed clearly pictured women, it would seem that women are hardly present, or at least photographed in the revolution protests. This number is not far from the scantily recorded eyewitness accounts, which place women somewhere vaguely between 20 and 50 percent of protesters on any given day (Hafez, 2012). When taking into consideration the percentage of photographs wherein the determination of gender was indiscernible, approximately 17% of the population, as well as the fact that the *number* of women in each photograph was not recorded, both the eyewitness number and the representative analysis results seem fairly agreeable.

That being said, the number of photographs in the population clearly featuring women is representative of the number of photographs that news agencies produce to supply to newspapers in the West. Now, this does not account for the curation of newspapers and news sites, and how many photographs of women they choose to publish for whatever reason; this project looks at the pool from which the images can be drawn. That number (21%) is at the low end of the reported potential physical participation of women in the protests, and as such might promulgate the idea that women in Egypt are less active in political discourse. This conflicts with the proposition that Western news photographers framed the uprising in the same vein as *Foreign Policy's* naming of the Arab Spring framed the movement as that moving toward a preferred Western socio-political sphere. It does so in the supposition that the Western audience would prefer to

see the participation of more women in physical protest as marker of a liberalized democracy in the making.

It is also possible, however, to avoid dichotomous lines of logic in this discussion, to view the representation of women in Egypt's uprising as a negotiated construction of liberalization in an increasingly Islamic country. It is negotiated in that it melds the generalized Western definitions of protest, activism, democracy, etc. with the inherent practice of Islam in the Egyptian political sphere [Figure 14]. In order to accept and support the points of rhetorical agreement between the two worlds, the Western audience must wrestle with the fact that this "other" population (which is coming into its own democracy and therein its own humanity) voluntarily engages (non-Anglican) religious doctrine in the public/political sphere.<sup>2</sup>



Figure 14. Shot of group prayer during Egyptian Uprising protests (Getty Images)

---

<sup>2</sup> This is regardless of a large proportion of the (Largely Islamic) protesting population fighting to remove Sharia from state governance.

### *Traditionalism*

This negotiated acceptance of an uprising largely fueled by the Islamic Revival heavily pertains to the second frame analyzed in this project. In supporting the Egyptian Revolution, and the Arab Spring in general, the Western audience is faced with accepting wholly or partially the double-sided coin of neo-Islamic feminism and activism. It is paramount to recognize the interrelation of Islam, feminism, and activism when speaking about women's involvement in the Egyptian Revolution protests -- as was mentioned earlier, the current women's movement in Egyptian politics is largely fueled by Islamic (feminist) groups.

Therefore, a notion of a negotiated acceptance of a conflicting liberal dichotomy is faced with various representations of Islamic traditionalism – imagery and storytelling of which has long been fodder for Western adjudication of the Muslim-majority world. For this reason the frame of traditionalist representations of women and men in the Egyptian Revolution is important to evaluate in terms of this potentially new reading of the East by the West.

As discussed in previous sections, the (lack of) presence alone of women in public (and therein political) spheres in a Muslim majority community has long been a justifying factor for Western interventionism. Colonialists as well as colonial travel writers frequently wrote of the segregation of genders and harem cultures as barbarous, backward, and in need of reform. Later, Western influence of Victorian mores again relegated women to the inner sphere as “educated wives and mothers” (Najmabadi, 2005). The image of Egyptian women out in the streets, therefore, appeals to

contemporary ideals of female mobility while simultaneously rejecting past notions of the Arab woman forced into the interior.

The variables observed in this study assume the above conjecture and specifically focus on two signifiers of traditional behavior for Muslim women: wearing hijab, and gynasocialization. These are considered both commonly traditional behaviors in Muslim-majority communities, as well as timeless stereotypical representations of those communities in the West, which may or may not be accurate today. Veiling, as an academic interest, has in recent history been at the forefront of theoretical discussion between scholars when discussing feminism, oppression, and agency in the near and middle East. The topic acts as a symbolic forum for the current state of discourse on the subject of women's rights from both hemispheres – as a point of argument from the West, and simultaneously a site for scholars near and within these communities to work decolonially toward a localized epistemology.

The controversial subject of veiling and unveiling permeates history as symbolic utility for both colonialists and nationalists, as well as for the women who wear it. This utility takes many forms depending on the party invoking the veil as a symbol, as well as the aims of that invocation. For many, including colonialists, modernists, and the like, the process of veiling women is and has long been drawn as a parallel to backwardness, traditionalism, and most pointedly, oppression. Nineteenth century British colonials used this line of logic as a justification for the “civilizing mission” of colonizing Egypt. The practice of veiling was often at the forefront of this mission, simultaneously defining the submissiveness of the Egyptian woman and the barbarism of the Egyptian man. Unveiling Egyptian women became the epitome of the British moral mission of

modernization under the guise of a feminist endeavor to free women from their oppression (Ahmed, 1992):

Discussions of women in Islam in academies and outside them, and in Muslim countries and outside them, continue either to reinscribe the Western narrative of Islam as oppressor and the West as liberator and native classist versions of that narrative or, conversely, to reinscribe the contentions of the Arabic narrative of resistance as to the essentialness of preserving Muslim customs, particularly with regard to women, as a sign of resistance to imperialism, whether colonial or postcolonial. (p. 167)

The invocation itself of the veil as a symbolic national representation carries its own set of complex and contested histories. Najmabadi (2005) engages the rhetorical use of the veil as a twofold propagator of backwardness in early 20<sup>th</sup> century Iran: first as a symbol that demarcated difference between the veil-wearing Muslim woman and the bare-headed European woman, “To become modern required one’s modernity be legible for the already modern” (p. 137), and second as an impediment to heterosociality and consequently heteroeroticism. Following the early Qajar dynasty in Iran, the national modernist camp was amending a background of homoerotic behavior. It was thought that the veil essentially blocked women from men, forcing men into gynasocial situations, which would therein encourage homoerotic behavior. Here the veil becomes an even more complex cultural artifact, as nationalists viewed a separation between European and Iranian women as desirable, while constitutionalists viewed the veil as a marker of a bygone Iran, signifying Arab conquest and hegemony. The official unveiling in 1936 by Riza Shah as an effort to modernize Iran in the eyes of the Western world further

complicated the debate, as many women became more cloistered after the unveiling due to familial law or personal preference to be covered in public (Najmabadi, 2000).

In mid-20<sup>th</sup> century Algeria, the veil holds an equally complex significance to nationalists following the Algerian revolution. Woodhull writes on women's situations following the revolution as representative of the nation's intrinsic "betweenness" due to the modern socialist culture emerging from the revolution as well as a return to pre-colonial traditionalism. The veil, in this context, "plays a central role in producing and maintaining both Algeria's difference from its colonial oppressor and the uneasy coalition of heterogeneous and conflicting interests under a single national banner" (p. 569). The multiple "cultural works" of the veil as described indicate the great weight that women of a nation must carry atop their heads.

It is important to note that my focus on the veil as a political symbol is not an attempt to remove agency from the women who do or do not wear it. Most recent scholarship on the subject examines the ways in which the veil can be used by women as an expression of national, political, social, or religious alignment. Women have taken up the veil since the 1970s in Egypt in order to convey their modern Egyptian identity as pious and learned "and can be read as a sign of educated urban sophistication" (Abu-Lughod, 2006, p. 4). Others maintain the practice of veiling in opposition to the infiltration of Western culture and ideology (Megahed & Lack, 2011). Mahmood's (2005) influential work on the subject of Egypt's recent women's mosque movement looks at the veil as a form of Aristotelian habitus, wherein women choose to develop their moral ethical selves through their pious actions and choice of dress. Despite agency and intention, the Western obsession with the image of the veiled Arab woman is rarely a

simple plea for women's rights, and often homogenizes the "subjects" in question. As Abu-Lughod (2006) succinctly puts it: "I would argue that the use of these images has also been bad for us, in the countries of the West where they circulate, because of the deadening effect they have on our capacity to appreciate the complexity and diversity of Muslim women's lives – as human beings" (p.1)

The number of women in hijab made up a substantial number of the women photographed in this study. 87.3% of the 63 photos featured a majority of women in hijab – a number that is theoretically backed by the work of current Islamic feminist scholars who claim that contemporary feminists in Egypt are acting within an Islamic discourse. This lends to the conclusion that women are indeed participating in revolutionary protest, and they are doing so within their individual parameters of identity and faith.

The history of exoticization of "the Orient" led to the development of the second variable within the frame of traditionalism as represented in photographs from the revolution. As mentioned earlier, accounts of harems and segregated gynasocial spaces were thought by Westerners to be sites of oppression and backwardness. Applying this variable to the study implies that remnants of a stereotype or cultural memory about an "othered" population might persist in contemporary judgments about the progress of those societies to meet with Western liberal expectations. The fact that women were rarely featured solely with other women suggests that this cultural assumption is either incorrect, or has shifted in modern history.

It is paramount to consider social incommensurabilities when thinking about independence, autonomy, and agency. In the West, a woman's prerogative to act alone or intermixed with men is considered a behavior consistent with notions of independence

and autonomy. This may or may not be the case throughout the world. Seldom in the US do women find strength and support in gynasocial groups as a means for successful political action, unlike past and current feminist groups in Egypt.

When viewing this framing category as a whole, it is made clear that historical assumptions about what is/is not traditional and whether those behaviors are/are not accepted into the modern liberal discourse on freedom and democracy, are rarely as clear as those dichotomous categories. As Egypt moves into a new political era, varying iterations of Islamic culture are no longer easily denoted as “traditional” v. “progressive” but instead form a *mélange* of religious behavior bound with political action and a revised sense of Egyptian identity.

### *Visual Marginalization*

The final frame constructed for this study looked less at the rhetorical representations present in the Egyptian Revolution protest photography, and more at the material construction of the framing of women in these photographs. This frame was largely inspired by the similar work of Fahmy (2004) detailed earlier in this paper. In her study on the framing of Afghan women in pre and post-Taliban, Fahmy elucidates the power of Western news media in harnessing an Orientalist discourse for the purpose of garnering positive public opinion and support for the US intervention. In essence, these pre-Taliban photographs can be compared to historical accounts of pre-colonial Egypt, wherein an Orientalist representation of Egyptian culture was evoked and propagated for the sake of soliciting social approval for the colonization and “civilizing” of Egypt. Just

as a narrative such as this can be curated when recounted from the East to the West, news photography can just as malleably be framed.

The frames formulated in Fahmy's study and appropriated for this one largely focus on the dehumanization and visual subordination of the subjects in the photographs. For example, the positioning of the camera higher in relation to the subject can evoke a sense of oppressedness in the subject. The lack of eye contact in a photograph is not only dehumanizing, but also connotes that the subject is powerless and passive. Some constructs of framing are more salient and obvious – photographs that relegate women to the background or margins of the photograph help to persuade the viewer to ignore those subjects' presence [Figure 15]. In the purview of this study, these frames are reconfigured to look less at the passivity of women in a Muslim-majority nation, and instead aim to measure the representativeness of *activity* of the Egyptian woman.



Figure 15. Shot of soldier with Egyptian woman in background (AP Images)

The frames engaged in this analysis seek to determine whether or not women are being represented as present, important, and active members of the revolution. This area of discussion is therefore also impacted by the first frame: the lack of women in the photography is the ultimate marginalization. To recall, this number amounted to 63 of 300 photographs which clearly featured women. From there, women's placement in the photographs was assessed. Of the 63 photographs featuring women, only 47.6% pictured women in the foreground of the photograph and 50.8% were photographed in-focus. Within Fahmy's *social distance* framework, this would imply that women are somewhat visually marginalized, but that men may be equally as marginalized upon consideration of photograph composition. About half the time were women seemingly within the photographer's frame of focus, implying that if women were present to be photographed, they were often represented as visually present and equal to male protesters.

A more stark figure of 33.3% indicated that while women are not nearly as marginalized as in say, Fahmy's study, they still fail to return the gaze of the photographer. The fact that when women were photographed, they were not photographed head-on in 2 of every 3 photographs conveys the representation of women at these protests as passive much of the time. Although the physical presence of women is felt in this series of photographs, the lack of visual connectedness implies a participation that is more complicit than confrontational. If we are to view women's participation in these protests as a microcosmic representation of women's participation in the Egyptian political sphere as a whole, these photographs might suggest that participation to be less involved or benign. Additionally, the personhood and individual identity of the subject of the photograph is made less salient in pictures where the subjects are not facing the

camera. This is a recurring Orientalist tactic to dehumanize a population for the sake of denying national agency and maturity and is explored in Malek Alloula's *The colonial harem* (1986) which showcases photographic postcards from colonial Algeria:

It will be noted that whenever a photographer aims his camera at a veiled woman, he cannot help but include in his visual field several instances of her. As if to photograph one of them from the outside required the inclusion of a *principle of duplication* in the framing. For it is always a group of veiled women that the photographer affixes upon his plate. (p. 11, emphasis in text)

The entirety of these assumptions is predicated on the assumption that news photography is viewed as a reflection of reality, which subsequently can assist in constructing a worldview about a given demographic. To Barthes (1982) and Alloula, this tautology is understood to play a major role in the negotiated readings of postcards. Many framing scholars would posit that news photography is tautologically akin to postcards in that they are often read uncritically and as an exact reflection of material reality.

Alloula's book specifically views colonial postcards sent from Algeria by French colonials during the occupation. In that historical moment, no other era obsessively produced as many publicized photographs of women as did the French produce of *la algerienne*. In his book, Alloula compiles a series of these postcards in which models were hired to act out the *phantasm* of the colonial presence in order to deconstruct the Western depiction and therein perception of the female Algerian population.

Though Alloula's work largely focuses on the eroticization of the colonial impression of the harem, it is theoretically and historically relevant to this work in a number of ways.

Today, nostalgic wonderment and tearful archeology (Oh! those colonial days!) are very much in vogue. But to give in to them is to forget a little too quickly the motivations and the effects of this vast operation of systematic distortion. It is also to lay the groundwork for its return in a new guise: a racism and a xenophobia titillated by the nostalgia of the colonial empire. (p. 4)

He argues that photographers constructed these postcards as a form of revenge for the Algerian woman's veil as a denial of his "*scopic desire*" where the subject is inaccessible to the gaze of the photographer, and acts as a hollow or negative space in the final print. The photographer therefore uses models to depict scenes wherein Algerian women are shown removing the veil and exemplifying Orientalist stereotypes [Figure 16]. While this theoretical assumption is slightly outside of the scope of this project, Alloula's work can act as foundation to understanding the process of news agency photographers and their depictions of women. He surmises a frustration in the photographers to capture that which was made inaccessible by the veil [Figure 17], the obsession of which is symptomatic of a colonial/colonized relationship like that defined in Fanon's *Black skin, white masks* (1967). Today's photographic frustration of the veil and therein lack of easily accessible subject might produce a less retaliatory result. It instead might sublimate in a photographic avoidance. As the act of photography moves from colonial mechanism to artistic or commercial endeavor, the photographer might opt to simply not photograph the inaccessible.





Figure 17. Colonial photograph of veiled Algerian women walking (Alloula, 1986)

Aside from the Orientalist implications of dehumanizing or disconnecting photographic frames, the effects that visual marginalization have on the representation of women in a confrontational setting such as a protest do more than just marginalize. By visually relegating women to the literal and metaphorical background, the photograph connotes women's participation in the Egyptian political sphere as ineffectual. This is essential to understanding the representation of Egyptian women in the news, as a lack of political potency can indicate a stereotypical backwardness to the Western audience.

## CHAPTER VI

### CONCLUSION

By breaking down these framing categories and analyzing a selection of photographs from Western news agencies on the Egyptian Uprising, this study set out to construct a notion of the Western media's representation of women's involvement in the revolution. Because of the gap in literature between the relevant fields of study engaged in this thesis, research questions and therein framing categories for a statistical content analysis were derived largely from historical and theoretical literature on the subjects of women, the state, political participation, and representation. Literature on "women as nation" or "the women's question" laid the groundwork for the relevance of discussing specifically women and their representation in the uprising (*RQ1: Are the women of the Egyptian Revolution portrayed as active members of the physical protest?*). Within this area, a discussion on traditional v. modern in terms of women and Islam in Egypt made pertinent the cultural representation of Egypt in this moment (*RQ2: Are the women portrayed in traditional gender roles?*). From there, literature on framing theory as well as Said's Orientalism led to questions about the highly visual nature of these protests, and the potential for propagation of various stereotypes and political perceptions of women in a Muslim-majority nation (*RQ3: Does the photographic framing marginalize the women who are present at protests?*).

In pursuing a study such as this with a background in critical race and gender as well as postcolonial theory, the inclination to apply a preconceived theoretical nametag to the impending results was compelling. Because media scholars often engage cornerstone cultural/critical theories regarding race, gender, and representation, the theoretical gray

areas are often shadowed by method and results of data collection. That being said, the results of this study do not neatly fit into an extant theoretical line (as is typically the case). Instead, the collective results highlight the highly complex historical and future nature of women's political participation and influence in urban Egyptian society.

In preparing this project, an assumption that the results would indicate either: (a) The Western news media produces Orientalist imagery of the Egyptian Uprising, or: (b) The Western news media framed the protests in line with a Western liberal rhetoric, led to a conflicting reading of the data. In many cases, Orientalist stereotypes were challenged by women in the protest photography. In other instances the variables indicated an infusion of Islamism within the protest behavior, challenging a secular Western view of "progress" or modernity. In terms of the first frame, women are generally presented as inactive or passive members of the uprising's protests. This representation is in part due to the limited scope through which a liberal democratic understanding of resistance is viewed. Second, the results at times conflict with the understanding that Egyptian women have historically been political participants – perhaps because women's political participation has often been in the less visible form of public intellectualism .

The conflicting nature of the results led me re-examine the lens from which I was viewing the political statement that women's presence in protests might make. I argued that instead of an extant theoretical assumption about the representation of and therein potential perception (see: the *reading*) of women in the uprising, a more fluid and transitory understanding is called for. This negotiated consumption of imagery of the protests includes the ideologically palatable Western liberal rhetoric alongside an Islamic

activism unfamiliar to Western audiences. I believe that this idea of negotiated consumption can work alongside boundary-breaking technology to diffuse major political incommensurabilities in future generations. While the digital divide is both a current reality and a future threat, globalized social understandings have begun to break down modern perceptions (via representation) of “othered” groups and the binary differences that might separate them. Public interactions between various religious or ethnic groups can be made more reflexive with the development of new communication technology where it is available <sup>3</sup>.

These new media avenues for expression come in the form of blogs and Facebook groups such as “The uprising of women in the Arab world” where feminists in the Arab world connect to build awareness of experiences, produce art and campaigns for political movements, and build a community around a demographic that shares similar concerns across national borders. #Lifeasamuslimfeminist recently became a popular Twitter hashtag where Muslim women around the world could share experiences and grievances of expressing feminist views within Islam without being overshadowed by the white liberal feminist hegemon. The participation in digital discourses by Muslim women allows for the circumvention of solely Western media representations for the Western audience. These sites instead allow for an open conversation and self-representation by a group who has for century been written about and photographed (and therein culturally ossified) by the Western media producer.

When this project was in its early stages, a colleague asked, “so what should we do?” They were referring to the solution to the issue of stereotype-perpetuating news

---

<sup>3</sup> Again, this is still considered by many to be a privileged position that is not necessarily accessible to the entire global population – developing a “globalized” identity, which in itself is exclusive of certain groups that are either undeveloped or do not follow the same liberal democratic line.

photography, and how to avoid contributing to that mode of (mis)representation. As I have concluded, the conflicting rhetorics (within a Western liberal framework) materialized in these photographs are not necessarily counterproductive. A productive discursive shift could potentially occur from the struggle to theoretically pigeonhole a mode of representation. That being said, if news photographers seek to work decolonially in their profession, they might reconsider the common tropes invoked for photography of revolution, specifically in regard to near and middle-east populations. Aerial shots of massive groups of protesters or prayer serve to represent the scale, and therein importance, of an event; on the other hand, this type of photography effectively dehumanizes the group in question. In order to shift the way mass audiences learn about struggle and revolution, and those who partake in it, journalists and news photographers could observe a more in-depth look at local and grassroots socio-political organizations and the individuals who organize them.

## REFERENCES CITED

- Abu-Lughod, L. (1998) The marriage of feminism and Islamism in Egypt: Selective repudiation as a dynamic of postcolonial cultural politics. In L. Abu-Lughod (Ed.) *Remaking women: Feminism and modernity in the Middle East*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- Abu-Lughod, L. (2006) The Muslim woman: the power of images and the danger of pity. *Eurozine*. Retrieved from the World Wide Web: <http://www.eurozine.com/articles/2006-09-01-abulughod-en.html>.
- Ahmed, L. (1992) *Women and gender in Islam: Historical roots of a modern debate*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Al-Ali, N. (2002) The women's movement in Egypt, with selected references to Turkey, United Nations Research Institute for Social Development, Civil Society and Social Movements Programme, Paper Number 5, April 2002.
- Alloula, M. (1986) *The colonial harem*. (M. Godzich & W. Godzich, Trans.). Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press. (Original work published in 1981).
- Baylor, T. (1996) Media framing of movement protest: the case of American Indian protest. *The Social Science Journal*, 33-3, 241-255.
- Benford, R. D., & Snow, D. A. (2000) Framing processes and social movements: an overview and assessment. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 26, 611-639.
- Chatterjee, P. (1993) *The nation and its fragments: Colonial and postcolonial histories*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- Comrey, A.L., & Lee, H.B. (1992). *A first course in factor analysis* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Entman, R.M. (1992). Blacks in the news: Television, modern racism, and cultural change. *Journalism Quarterly*, 69-2, 341-361.
- Entman, R.M. (1993). Framing: Toward clarification of a fractured paradigm. *Journal of Communication*, 43, 51-58.
- Entman, R.M. (2003). Cascading activation: Contesting the White House's frame after 9/11. *Political Communication*, 20, 415-432.
- Fahmy, S. (2004). Picturing Afghan women: A content analysis of AP wire photographs during the Taliban regime and after the fall of the Taliban regime. *Gazette: The International Journal for Communication Studies*, 66, 97-112.

- Falah, G.W. (2005) The visual representation of Muslim/Arab women in daily newspapers in the United States. In G.W. Falah & C. Nagel (Eds.), *Geographies of Muslim women: Gender, religion, and space* (pp. 300-320). New York: Guilford Press.
- Goffman, E. (1974). *Frame analysis: An essay on the organization of experience*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Hafez, S. (2003). *The terms of empowerment: Islamic women activists in Egypt* (Vol. 24 No.4). American University in Cairo Press.
- Hafez, S. (2012) No longer a bargain: women, masculinity, and the Egyptian uprising. *American Ethnologist*. 39-1, 37-42.
- Mahmood, S. (2012). *Politics of piety: The Islamic revival and the feminist subject*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- Massad, J. (2012, 29 Aug). The 'Arab Spring' and other American seasons. *Al Jazeera*. Retrieved from <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2012/08/201282972539153865.html>.
- Megahed, N., & Lack, S. (2011) Colonial legacy, women's rights and gender-educational inequality in the Arab World with particular reference to Egypt and Tunisia. *International Review of Education* 57:3-4, 397-418.
- Mendes, K. (2011) Framing feminism: news coverage of the women's movement in British and American newspapers, 1968-1982. *Social Movement Studies*, 10-1, 81-98.
- Messaris, P., & Abraham, L. (2003). The role of images in framing news stories. In S.D. Reese, O.H. Gandy, & A.E. Grant (Eds.), *Framing public life: Perspectives on media and our understanding of the social world*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Najmabadi, A. (2000). (Un)Veiling Feminism. *Social Text*, 64, 29-45.
- Najmabadi, A. (2005). *Women with mustaches and men without beards: Gender and sexual anxieties of Iranian modernity*. Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Pollard, L. (2005). *Nurturing the nation: The family politics of modernizing, colonizing, and liberating Egypt, 1805-1923*. Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Poniatowska, E. (1999) *Las Soldaderas*. Ediciones Era.

- Price, V., Tewksbury, D., & Powers, E. (1997). Switching trains of thought: The impact of news frames on readers' cognitive responses. *Communication Research*, 24, 481-506.
- Said, E. (1978) *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage.
- Said, E. (1981) *Covering Islam: how the media and the experts decide how we see the rest of the world*. New York: Pantheon.
- Scheufele, D.A. (1999). Framing as a theory of media effects. *Journal of Communication*, 49-1, 103-122.
- Shakry, O. (1998). Schooled mothers and structured play: Child rearing in turn-of-the-century Egypt. In L. Abu-Lughod (Ed.), *Remaking women: Feminism and modernity in the middle east* (126-170). New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- Shen, F. (2004). Effects of news frames and schemas on individuals' issue interpretations and attitudes. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 81, 400-416.
- Tewksbury D., & Scheufele D.A. (2008). News framing theory and research. In Bryant J. & Oliver MB (Eds.). *Media effects: Advances in theory and research* (17-33). New Jersey: Erlbaum.
- Rodriguez L., & Dimitrova D.V. (2011). The levels of visual framing. *Journal of Visual Literacy*, 30:1, 48-65.
- Woodhull, W. (1991). Unveiling Algeria. In R. Lewis & S. Mills (Eds.), *Feminist postcolonial theory: A reader* (567-585). New York: Routledge.
- Wimmer, D., & Dominick, J. R. (2006) *Mass media research: an introduction*. Boston, MA: Wadsworth.