

#Egyptiangirl and #Tunisiangirl: The (Micro)Politics of Self-Presentation on Instagram

SOUMIA BARDHAN¹

University of Colorado Denver, USA

Using Goffman’s conceptualization of self-presentation in the context of the online world as theoretical scaffolding, I explore the political potential of women’s self-presentation through Instagram in post-Arab Spring countries. I draw on the accounts of 10 young women Instagrammers from Egypt and Tunisia. In this essay, political potential is understood as everyday activism. The analysis shows that the Instagrammers’ online self-presentation manifests (1) liberal-individualist citizenship and (2) rooted cosmopolitanism. This work is critical in assessing the role of Instagram in creating new political realities and identities for young women in contemporary Egypt and Tunisia, two countries that were on different sociopolitical trajectories for several years post-Arab Spring.

Keywords: Instagram, self-presentation/identity, Goffman, micropolitics, Middle Eastern women

The role of social networking sites (SNS) in engaging citizens during and following the Arab uprisings that took place almost a decade ago in multiple MENA (Middle East-North Africa) countries has been well documented (Allagui & Kuebler, 2011; McGarty, Thomas, Lala, Smith, & Bliuc, 2013; Miladi, 2016; Newsom & Lengel, 2012). Almost a decade later a question that becomes pertinent again is, what changes and developments have manifested in Arab societies post-Arab Spring in the context of citizens’ use of SNS? Specifically, given claims of prior use of SNS for engaging women in the Middle East (Gheytaichi & Moghadam, 2014; Landorf, 2014; Radsch & Khamis, 2013; Zlitni & Touati, 2012), this study provides a thematic analysis of how young women in the Arab world use the increasingly popular SNS and mobile photo-sharing application, Instagram, to negotiate self-presentation post-Arab Spring, and what might be the political potential of these self-presentations and identity dynamics.

Radcliffe’s (2016) report of social media use in the MENA region noted that while Facebook remained the most popular SNS used in many countries, Instagram was right behind with a 24% increase between 2013 and 2016. Numerous scholars (Abokhodair, Hodges, & Vieweg, 2017; Al-Kandari, Al-

Soumia Bardhan: soumia.bardhan@ucdenver.edu

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Hunaiyyan, & Al-Hajri, 2016) have focused on the dynamics of Instagram use in the region, a site that only a few years ago made its foray into the social media ring. Although not contained strictly within the MENA region, gender dynamics in the context of Instagram has also received much attention (Duguay, 2016; Geurin-Eagleman & Burch, 2016; Olszanowski, 2014). Together, most of these studies have shown that self-presentation is a significant aspect and affordance of Instagram use. Furthermore, while Instagram posts may not always be political in the sense that they may not directly relate to the government or public affairs of a country, their existence in the (online) public sphere can make the personal/private a public message, thus transforming the personal/private action and self-presentation to a form of political participation.

Using Goffman's (1956) idea of self-presentation in the context of the online world as theoretical scaffolding, in this essay I explore the political potential of women's self-representation through Instagram in post-Arab Spring countries. I do this by drawing on the accounts of 10 young women Instagrammers from Egypt and Tunisia. Political potential is understood as a type of everyday activism or micropolitics; specifically, I take from Bayat's (2010) conceptualization of the "political street" to define micropolitics for this study, which is "the collective sentiments, shared feelings, and public opinions of ordinary people in their day-to-day utterances and practices that are expressed broadly in public spaces—in taxis, buses, and shops, on street sidewalks, or in mass street demonstrations" (p. 10) and in new media spaces. These micropolitics or "everyday politics" . . . like Instagram self-representation, have the potential to . . . reclaim [women's] agency" (Caldeira, Bauwel, & De Ridder, 2018, p. 1). Mohanty (2003) argues that everyday feminist struggles and micropolitical practices are as important as organized politics, or macropolitics, as they have the potential for radical sociopolitical change.

With this as basis, I analyze the images posted by the 10 Instagrammers, alongside the text and hashtags that accompany them. Evaluating the juxtaposition of text and hashtags with image allows for the study of young Egyptian and Tunisian women's online self-presentation and identity dynamics, and what implications it may have for young women's role in post-Arab Spring Egypt and Tunisia; Egypt seen as one of the Arab Spring's many failures and Tunisia as one of its partial success stories (Brown, 2016).² The goal of this article is neither to engage with who the intended recipients of the Egyptian and Tunisian women's online self-presentation are nor how they have reacted to the Instagram posts. Rather, this work is critical in assessing the role of Instagram in creating new platforms, identities, and political realities for young women in Egypt and Tunisia, two countries that were on different sociopolitical trajectories for several years post-Arab Spring.

² Discussing the state of Egypt five years after the Arab Spring in Brown's (2016) *Foreign Affairs* piece, Allawala (2016) stated that "Egypt today is just as much of a police state as it was a decade ago" (para. 1). For Tunisia, Klaas (2016) claimed that "there's a slow but steady transition towards liberal democracy . . . even though the people are disappointed with the economic outcomes of the democratic government" (as cited in Brown, 2016, para. 9).

Middle Eastern Women, Social Media, and Everyday Activism

Through the past decade, Middle Eastern women have been playing a critical role in the historic changes taking place in the MENA region. Scholars have turned their focus to analyzing the role of social media in aiding Middle Eastern women in these endeavors, specifically in the context of revolutions and activism. In her thesis, Landorf (2014) showed how female cyber activists from Tunisia, Egypt, and Morocco used social media to create a “new body politic online” (p. 5) and demand gender parity. Radsch and Khamis (2013) claimed that young female Arab citizen journalists, bloggers, and activists used social media during the Arab uprisings to challenge traditional parameters separating the public and private spheres. Zlitni and Touati (2012) showed that Facebook afforded Tunisian feminists to organize online to “fight for the preservation of our status in civil society, to exchange ideas and information that can help understand how the new democracy works, and to stay united to defend our interests” (p. 54). This was in the context of the Code of Personal Status—a series of laws to safeguard gender equality—being challenged by religious parties running for elections to the Constituent Assembly, after the fall of the Ben Ali regime.

Scholars such as Sreberny (2015) have elaborated on the possibilities of the digital environment for women in the region. First, with increased access to the Internet, women can communicate without being controlled by parents and relatives (usually male). Next, women’s online activity often features a national character and is conducted in their respective national languages; but the Internet has created transnational possibilities of networking for women in the Arab region. Also, in the online environment, individual voices of renowned female activists have amplified and led to significant sociopolitical change. Finally, women are challenging prevailing social attitudes about gender roles and sexual identities based in older patriarchal norms, and the “habitus and practices that limit not only women’s but also men’s sexuality” (Sreberny, 2015, p. 359). Reiterating what several scholars have claimed, Sreberny (2015) has noted that Middle Eastern women are challenging the often-policed separation between the private and public spheres, thus making the private public/political. Women’s online activity has put new issues into the public domain and extended the nature and content of what is thought of as “political.” Women are speaking about diverse issues “with or without clerical support and male rescuers, and challenging both state power and masculinist hegemony” and this in its own way is a “political change” (Sreberny, 2015, p. 360).

The move, to extend the definition and scope of what is political and include everyday activism within its purview, has been made by numerous scholars who have focused on women’s practices in either offline or online contexts (Caldeira et al., 2018; Mohanty, 2003). I add to this literature by exploring the political potential of young women’s self-representation and identity dynamics through Instagram within the geotemporal context of post-Arab Spring Egypt and Tunisia. This essay, thus, is a commentary on the developments that have manifested in these two countries post-Arab Spring, in the context of young Middle Eastern women’s everyday activism through Instagram.

Instagram Affordances: Motives, Cultural Dynamics, and Hashtags

As the most rapidly growing SNS across the globe, much attention has been devoted to studying the affordances of Instagram; for instance, motives for Instagram use, how the affordances can be context based, and the multimodal capabilities of Instagram, specifically, a focus on the use of hashtags.

Based on 239 surveys administered on college students, Sheldon and Bryant (2016) extended the literature on uses and gratifications theory by claiming that the main motives for Instagram use are surveillance and knowledge about others, documentation, popularity, and creativity. Marwick (2015) focused on the idea of Instafame, a means for users to attain microcelebrity by improving their online status, and argued that Instafame is facilitated by the open-ended nature of Instagram. Motives for the use of Instagram for propaganda in different cultural contexts have also been studied. Using Instagram photos posted on the official website of the Israel Defense Forces, Kohn (2015) examined how "the formal and emotional components, embedded in . . . Instagram, are utilized as a propaganda tool to cultivate solidarity with the agenda of official establishments [in Israel]" (p. 1). Avedissian (2015) argued that Instagram can be used for memory and identity production with the goal to normalize new ideologies. Using Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov's Instagram as a case, Avedissian showed how Instagram was used to promote national cohesion among Chechens through the deployment of discourses focusing on Islam, sports, and government public relations.

Motives for Instagram use as they relate to gender dynamics has also received attention. With Goffman's (1959) theory of self-presentation as basis, Geurin-Eagleman and Burch's (2016) study showed that female Olympic athletes were more likely to exhibit backstage performance by posting "photos of themselves" clicked in "private settings" (p. 133), whereas male athletes posted a wider variety of photos, such as photos of their business life, leading to greater follower engagement. Olszanowski (2014) claimed that women are finding creative tactics, such as "privatizing accounts, abstracting and/or obscuring the body, and timed removals of photos" (p. 83) to circumvent Instagram's censorship mechanisms. Using the LGBTQ community as context and focusing on the apps Instagram and Vine, Duguay (2016) made the case that social media platforms and mediators can influence the conversational capacity of selfies through "range, the variety of discourses addressed within a selfie; reach, circulation within and across publics; and salience, the strength and clarity of discourses" (p. 1). According to Duguay (2016), selfies can promote everyday activism that disrupt "normative gender/sexual discourses" (p. 1), thus bolstering counterpublic conversations.

Focusing on the dynamics of Instagram use in MENA, scholars have claimed that users have significant privacy concerns, which are reflected in how they choose to use Instagram. Abokhodair and colleagues (2017) considered the collective and autonomous self-expression of young adults (male and female) through photo-sharing apps, such as Instagram, in the Arab Gulf when exploring the concern for privacy. They focused on Arab Muslims in Saudi Arabia and Qatar and interviewed more than 42 young people between the two countries. The results showed a strong pull toward the collectivistic culture the interviewees grew up in, wherein things like posting pictures that are "too revealing" (aka, wearing shorts), or even of an unrelated male and a female together, would be viewed as unacceptable. Their research highlighted the tension users experience between collectivistic values and a desire to maintain an autonomous self. Similar research from Al-Kandari and colleagues (2016) explored cultural effects on Instagram use in Kuwait and reached the conclusion that women altered their social media habits to align with (traditional cultural) expectations of their country; for instance, sharing fewer pictures of themselves, having fewer public accounts, and keeping identifying information off their accounts in general.

Finally, scholars have paid attention to the multimodal affordances of SNS, specifically the affordances of hashtags, a significant component of this study. In dealing with expression of emotions through tweets, Cislaru (2015) argued that there were topical discrepancies between the content and hashtags of tweets, with hashtags allowing better representation of emotional experience. According to Tamba (2008), this is usually due to the spontaneity and expressiveness of linguistic devices, such as interjections, that characterize hashtags. By focusing on trans advocacy, Jackson, Bailey, and Welles (2017) showcased the significance of #GirlsLikeUs for community building on Twitter. Moreno, Ton, Selkie, and Evans (2015) argued that nonsuicidal self-injury (NSSI) content is popular on Instagram, especially among adolescents, but is often veiled by ambiguous NSSI hashtags such as #blithe, #secretsociety123, #Addie. This poses a challenge for those outside the NSSI community to identify harmful content and provide protection for adolescents. Thus, while hashtags can create and build communities, they can also be used to keep outsiders at bay. Sheldon and Bryant (2016) have noted, because Instagram is a newer and growing form of social media, the use of hashtags is a means for users to portray being "cool" to peers (p. 95). Wang, Liu, and Gao (2016) found that the characteristics of hashtags and the context of tweets affected virality, "the capacity of individuals and organizations to share information and successfully mobilize collective attention, as well as the ability for messages to connect diverse networks" (p. 851).

Goffman, Self-Presentation, and Identity

Erving Goffman (1956) used theater imagery to present a theory of identity construction in the context of face-to-face interactions. Goffman defined interaction as "the reciprocal influence of individuals upon one another's actions when in one another's immediate physical presence" (p. 8). One of the primary premises of this theory is that individuals try to control the image others have of them, "especially their responsive treatment of him" (Goffman, 1956, p. 2); during face-to-face interactions, individuals (actors) "perform" to portray a desirable image (Bullingham & Vasconcelos, 2013).

As in the context of theater, individuals are in front of their audiences, in "front stage" or public eye, during a social interaction. Goffman (1956) defined front as "the expressive equipment of a standard kind intentionally [strategic] or unwittingly [unintended] employed by the individual during his performance" (p. 13). Sometimes individuals are calculating and wish to evoke specific responses; sometimes they perform a certain way to conform to tradition or the requirements of their social status, which might be motivated by vague acceptance. At other times, individuals are calculating but unaware of the same; that is, "the traditions of an individual's role will lead him to give a well-designed impression of a particular kind and yet he may be neither consciously nor unconsciously disposed to create such an impression" (Goffman, 1956, p. 3). Along with "front stage" there is also a "backstage," according to Goffman; this is the place where the front stage performance is knowingly contradicted by an individual (p. 69). In private, individuals act differently, set aside their front stage roles, and/or prepare for it (Ritzer, 2011).

Scholars have emphasized the applicability of Goffman's theory to online environments. Bullingham and Vasconcelos (2013) examined its applicability to self-presentation of bloggers and Second Life users; in their analysis, they focused on "expressions given; embellishment as a minor form of persona adoption; dividing the self; conforming and 'fitting in'; and masking, anonymity and pseudonymity" (p. 101). Their findings showed that participants were creating their offline selves online by bringing forth personal details

and using a voice that is true to their offline selves. This reiterated Goffman's "front stage" behavior; participants were deliberate about the portrayal of their online public selves, wherein they were trying to perform honesty and directness to portray "the belief that identity does not really change online" (p. 110). Miller and Arnold (2009) claimed that the front and back regions correspond to being online and offline, respectively. For instance, the time individuals spend considering a response to a text message or creating a message before hitting send can be similar to action by an individual when offline or in the back region. In fact, there are several studies featuring the use of Goffman's theory in specific online platforms: Twitter (Brems, Temmerman, Graham, & Broersma, 2016), Facebook (Papacharissi, 2009), Instagram (Sarita & Suleeman, 2017), to list a few. This overview suggests that Goffman's theory of identity construction is relevant to online environments, making it an apt theoretical foundation for this study.

Methods

This article relies on a thematic content analysis of the text, hashtags, and images of Instagram accounts of young women in Egypt and Tunisia ($N = 10$). Instagram is an ideal location for the study of visual and textual displays of self-representation and identity given its increasing prominence in the region (Radcliffe, 2016) and heavy use among young people, particularly women (Duggan, 2015; Laestadius, 2017). For this study, five women's accounts were selected each from Egypt and Tunisia and all of them engaged in the use of the hashtag "egyptiangirl" and "tunisiangirl," respectively, in their accounts; this use of #egyptiangirl and #tunisiangirl allowed for an initial access point for choice of accounts. The decision to rely on a smaller sample of five Instagrammers from each country for a qualitative, close analysis allowed for a richer analysis and discussion of the Instagram accounts in question. Laestadius (2017) suggests a smaller data set is critical for analyzing the account of a user comprehensively (i.e., images, texts, hashtags), compared with big data studies that focus on just one part.

Procedures

Accounts were selected through an initial search of the primary hashtags #egyptiangirl and #tunisiangirl in the summer of 2017.³ These two initial hashtags yielded several different accounts on Instagram; for the purpose of study, the choice of accounts was narrowed down to five from each country, representing accounts of women who had identifying information that made it clear that they currently lived in the country hash tagged (Egypt or Tunisia), who used these initial hashtags in more than one post, and had a public account that could be easily accessed. Laestadius (2017) explains the affordance and value of hashtags on Instagram in writing: "[Instagram's] hashtags are . . . more likely to indicate participation in a community or provide context for an image" (p. 575). In this regard, using #egyptiangirl and #tunisiangirl as the starting point allowed selection of accounts of women Instagrammers who seemed to be anchored in their national contexts, a significant aspect of this study; also, this provided access to the broader identity

³ In 2017, almost seven years after the Arab uprisings, Tunisia seemed to be transitioning well into a democracy, whereas the militarization of politics in Egypt had hindered its transition from authoritarianism. This stark difference in the two countries' trajectories was discernible in 2017. Therefore, 2017 is the temporal context of this essay. Also, this study is not a longitudinal commentary on the sociopolitical trajectory of Egypt and Tunisia from the Arab uprisings (2010–11) to the present (2021).

display(s) of each Instagrammer and facilitated discussion of the implications of these self-presentations for young women's role in post-Arab Spring Egypt and Tunisia. After accounts were selected, the 50 most recent posts for each account were saved for further analysis, resulting in a total of 500 posts analyzed with 250 each from the Egyptian and Tunisian Instagrammers.

Data Analysis

A thematic analysis of the text, hashtags, and images was conducted using the constant-comparison method (Charmaz, 2006). The first participant account was analyzed to build a set of base codes to work with in coding the remaining accounts. While images were analyzed in conjunction with text and hashtags used, none will be provided as explicit examples in this article. The importance of the protection of participants remains tantamount. Laestadius (2017) succinctly explained the issue with researchers sharing images in published work by noting that "an Instagram user may have a public account but still anticipate that only their followers will view their posts" (p. 583). The decision to not reproduce images has been identified in past research on Instagram (Carah & Shaul, 2016). Given potential personal and political ramifications of the research question posed in this study, the need to protect these accounts is high. Thus, accounts and images are described as needed to discuss thematic findings and the names of users' accounts have been changed to protect the identity of the women (participant one will be referred to as E1, participant two as E2, and so on; E1 to E5 are from Egypt, and T6 to T10 are from Tunisia). To further protect participants, given the sensitive nature of the data, besides general hashtags, posts have been frequently paraphrased (Andalibi, Haimson, De Choudhury, & Forte, 2016). I provide a brief description of the accounts below, without divulging identifiable detail, to show the distinctiveness of each Instagrammer:

- E1: Most posts are selfies and there is an emphasis on global fashion
- E2: Most posts are about her numerous travels and scenic pictures
- E3: Uses both visuals and texts to showcase her feelings and beliefs
- E4: Significant use of Arabic, French, and English in her posts
- E5: Has a diverse variety of posts, unlike the other Instagrammers, and her account has a global quality
- T6: Uses filters and emojis extensively but rarely uses hashtags
- T7: Most posts are about graffiti and doors, and she overtly portrays her nonreligious stance
- T8: Likes wearing traditional clothes and promotes Tunisia through cultural hashtags and images
- T9: Posts pictures of her travels and almost all her posts feature #tunisiangirl
- T10: Uses Instagram lingo extensively and there is an emphasis on fashion and makeup

More than 50 codes were identified, including location, occasion/festival, mood/feelings, fashion, national identity, positive language, negative language, personal interests, and so on. Thereafter, these codes were analyzed through another level of organizing, synthesizing, and categorizing to interpret and identify patterns (Tracy, 2013). Two key themes emerged—Egyptian and Tunisian female Instagrammers' online self-presentation manifesting (1) liberal-individualist citizenship and (2) rooted cosmopolitanism. In the next section, I elaborate on these: For "Theme 1," I embark on a meta-analytical (Levitt, 2018) discussion of the selfies and hashtags used by the Egyptian and Tunisian female Instagrammers, and for

"Theme 2," I focus on language/s used in the form of hashtags and captions, and the occasions, locations, travels, and personal interests the Instagrammers emphasized in their posts.

Online Self-Presentation as Liberal-Individualist Citizenship

One of the primary ideas framing modern citizenship is liberal-individualism, which, according to Beiner (1995), emphasizes an individuals' economic rather than political nature and sees citizenship as a legal status and passive process. Liberal-individualist citizens are more motivated by an enlightened (and even capitalist) self-interest than democratic participation (Oldfield, 1994). They believe that the state has an obligation to protect citizens' rights, and it exists for their benefit (Heater, 2004), instead of actively participating in the political domain as a political agent. I argue, the Egyptian and Tunisian female Instagrammers' online self-presentation portrays aspects of liberal-individualist citizenship; they are politically passive and seemingly motivated by their individualist self-interests and private activities, with their political identity marginal to their sense of self. However, these private acts manifest their micropolitics. In this section, I present a meta-analytical discussion of the selfies and hashtags used by the Instagrammers and how, in the context of Egyptian and Tunisian sociopolitics, the selfies and hashtags reflect the Instagrammers' political potential.

Most of the Instagram accounts feature selfies, where the Instagrammers present solely their own selves. E1 has 32 selfies, only one with another individual, her brother. E4 has 54 selfies, most without other people in the posts; several taken in mirrors with her iPhone on display. T6 has 72 selfies, most featuring only her and frequently in traditional Tunisian attire. The pattern is the same with T8, who has 105 selfies; interestingly, she comments regularly on the importance of friends, uses hashtags to explicate that—#bff, #mybestie—but hardly features them in her selfies. Following Henley (1964–1973), I argue that the nonverbal character of these selfies provides the micropolitical structure that underlies and supports the macropolitical; nonverbal influence takes place through the Instagrammers' private act of posting selfies, which becomes a commentary on the relationship between personal power and institutionalized power. The presence of their individual selves on Instagram, a public platform, emphasizes the nonverbal performance of "visibility." This exemplifies Goffman's front stage behavior and has micropolitical implications.

First, the absence of other bodies in the selfies challenges the expectation of collectivistic behavior (Wilkins, 1995), the perception that Middle Eastern women ought to be rescued and/or controlled by a male patriarch (Joseph, 1996), and masculinist hegemony (Sreberny, 2015); all of these being norms supported by authoritarian states. The absence of other individuals, especially males, might reiterate the argument made by some scholars (Abokhodair et al., 2017; Al-Kandari et al., 2016) that posting pictures on Instagram, especially with a male, is culturally unacceptable. So, the absence of other (usually male) bodies is a sign of alignment with traditional sociocultural expectations. However, in the case of these Instagrammers, when these selfies are accompanied with captions such as, "Turn your back on him" (E1), "A thought. EDUCATE yourself . . . don't let people and the powerful brainwash you with their opinions" (E4), and "Soo sick with patriarchy, but whatevrrrr" (T6), the act of posting selfies of only themselves challenges normative expectations. Second, despite avowing the importance of friends, hence the need for connectedness and friendship group identity (Barker & Rodriguez, 2019), which are aspects of collectivism, by rarely featuring their friends in the selfies the Instagrammers make yet another

micropolitical move. They make their individuality and their body central and visible while making their friendships and group identity backstage affairs. Finally, by presenting themselves in ways of their liking—with iPhones or a Mac lipstick or the Qur'an, while wearing shorts, a swimsuit, or a hijab—they portray the agency to choose technology and/or tradition, global and/or the local. This front stage behavior is a form of identity work through which the Instagrammers overtly enact their choice and portray an individuality without asking for consent.

For both the Egyptian and Tunisian Instagrammers, the nonverbal aspect of demeanor is also prominent in the selfies. Goffman (1956) defines demeanor as "that element of the individual's ceremonial behavior typically conveyed through deportment, dress [and accessories], and bearing" (p. 489). Aboulhassan and Brumley (2019) claim that "cultural narratives in the Arab world suggest that women are restricted to the role of housewife and mother and must maintain strong ties to families" (p. 638). They further state that Middle Eastern women are expected to "maintain honor by remaining *mastura* (hidden, maintaining a low profile), restricting their autonomy" (p. 638). In other words, there are cultural rules and behaviors that must be displayed by Middle Eastern women to be considered to have "proper" demeanor. However, the visibility of the individual and the centrality and presence of only the Instagrammers' bodies in the selfies challenges these normative codes. Furthermore, E1's selfies are mostly frontal and either medium-wide or close-up shots where she is predominantly attired in Western and revealing ("immodest") clothes. T3 features full-body frontal shots to show her "outfit of the day." T6 also features frontal close-up shots, revealing clothes, and a characteristic pout. E1 conspicuously flaunts her branded Zara turban, E4 her iPhone and MAC cosmetics, T2 her Volkswagen car, and T7 her Ray-Ban sunglasses. These highlight how the Instagrammers' demeanor portrays a choice to neither stay hidden and discrete nor maintain a low profile, further bolstering the aspect of visibility through performance of individuality and their material, capitalist (often global/Western) choices.

These micropolitics become pronounced when viewed in conjunction with hashtags that illustrate their choice to be distinctive and defiant. E1 uses #proudbrunettegirl, #fashionista; E2 uses #footballfan, #biker, #womenrider; E3 uses #dramaqueen, #proudmuslim; T3 uses #iambohemian, #iamatombay; T7 uses #nailpolishaddict, #teacher; T9 #natureaddict, #selfieaddict—and through these ascribed labels they manifest their individual identity and distinctiveness. Through labels such as #biker and #womenrider (often not seen or supported culturally as a woman's activity) or #iamatombay, many of the Instagrammers also challenge gender roles and a "heterosexual paradigm [of femininity and masculinity] that has infiltrated all aspects of life [in Middle Eastern societies] and has become a masculine domination" (Ghabra, 2015, p. 12). Furthermore, the use of #longhairdontcare by E1; #brunettesdoitbetterthanblondes, #allinwestisnotbest by #E5; #pinkhairdontcare, #notcoveringmyhair by T6; #selfloveismostimportant, #darkhairdontcare by T9; #myhonorchoice, #educationishonor by T10 are instances of defiance against patriarchal expectations of appearance and honor and an uncritical acceptance of Western cultural norms.

It must be stated though that the nature of the selfies and the hashtags used by the 10 Instagrammers might perpetuate "the stereotype of the independent and autonomous self as isolated media creator" (Losh, 2015, p. 1649). Their conformity to capitalism might also be viewed as another form of subjugation to a certain definition of freedom or aesthetic of self-expression. However, these interpretations can be simplistic and ignore, as Losh (2015) argues, "how people are embedded in complex . . . situations"

(p. 1649) and the sociopolitical implications of complex cultural experiences when combined with technology use. Additionally, when it comes to capitalism, it becomes important to ask, "what are the conditions of the present moment that encourage an exercise such as this" (CATO Institute, 2019)? For the Egyptian and Tunisian Instagrammers, the Arab Spring brought with it the hope for a democratic future. But the lack of experience with democracy, decades of existence under masculinist hegemony supported by authoritarian states, and the sustenance of the deep state, especially in Egypt, made Instagram a platform for female Instagrammers to conduct their everyday politics.⁴ Not through active political participation, activist discourses, and normative democratic means but front stage presentation of individualism, a breaking away from their collectivist identity, and portrayal of their economic and capitalist nature as a means of manifesting visibility, distinctiveness, and defiance.

Interestingly, considering these Instagrammers grew up in patriarchal and authoritarian contexts, a post-Arab Spring, technology-driven space also allowed the Instagrammers to portray their distinctiveness and defiance in a noncommittal way. The nonverbal aspect of the selfies and the Instagrammers' focus on seemingly apolitical aspects, such as fashion, appearance, travel, moods/feelings, afforded them the ability to challenge patriarchal norms and authoritarian power while being cautious about "detection . . . [as] it is subtle enough . . . for us to resist influence without making outright [active political] defiance" (Henley, 2002, p. 302), pointing also to a covert micropolitics. Thus, exemplifying El-Hibri's (2014) claim that a significant "dimension of the [Arab] uprisings is not just new contours of public visibility but rather strategies of remaining undetected" (p. 848), in this case, through the affordances provided by Instagram to female Instagrammers. Castells (2012) emphasized that mass self-communication provides the platform for citizens "to invent new programs for their lives with the materials of their suffering, fears, dream, and hopes" (p. 9). The mobilization of Instagram selfies and hashtags, then, becomes a means by which citizens make claims through front stage and backstage performances, their overt and covert micropolitics. In the case of the Egyptian and Tunisian Instagrammers, liberal-individualist citizens, their overt and covert self-presentation through Instagram becomes "a new techno-social practice . . . embedded not only in new forms of agency" (Kuntsman, 2017, p. 15) but also new forms of political participation.

Online Self-Presentation as Rooted Cosmopolitanism

Rooted cosmopolitanism denotes a paradox. As Freedman (2005) noted, "to have roots is to be embedded in a specific history, nation or people; to be a cosmopolitan is to declare oneself a citizen of the world" (para. 9). However, Appiah (1997) proposed the idea of rooted cosmopolitanism denoting the possibility for individuals to be "attached to a home of one's own, with its own cultural particularities, but taking pleasure from the presence of other, different places that are home to other, different people" (p. 618). Egyptian and Tunisian Instagrammers' self-presentation portrays them as rooted cosmopolitans; they can tread seamlessly between their national identity and global identity, take pleasure from their rooted/national values, and appreciate global values. Rather than understood merely in terms of geography, physical borders, and local and transnational movements and experiences, I claim, rooted cosmopolitanism

⁴ A deep state is "an alleged secret network of especially nonelected government officials and sometimes private entities (as in the financial services and defense industries) operating extralegally to influence and enact government policy" ("Deep State," n.d.).

is a mindset that functions as a human capital, an intercultural capability, which allows these women to tread two ways of thinking and being simultaneously.

Furthermore, rooted cosmopolitanism manifests the Instagrammers' micropolitics. It challenges reductive imperial/Oriental stereotypes of the supranational pan-Arab identity where "a potpourri of [Middle Eastern] cultures, languages, and identities, [are reduced] to a monolithic universe of Arabs" (Salameh, 2011, p. 237) and the perception of the Middle Eastern woman only as tradition-bound, backward-looking, and/or exotic (Ventura, 2017). In this section, I present a discussion of the Instagrammers' cosmopolitan performances and instances of rootedness. I also situate their rooted cosmopolitan identity within the sociopolitical contexts of Egypt and Tunisia.

Both Egyptian and Tunisian Instagrammers use universal Instagram lingo, often in the form of hashtags—a marker of their front stage cosmopolitan performance. E1 uses #friyay and #ootd extensively; E3 uses #bitmoji; E4 posts throwback pictures with #tbt and popular hashtags #picoftheday and #follow4follow; T7 uses #like4like, #igers (Instagrammers); and T9 and T10 use #instamood, #instalove, and #instamorning frequently. The Instagrammers' choice to use this universal language and participate in and network with global Instagram-facilitated communities (Jackson et al., 2017; Wang et al., 2016) is an overt illustration of a cosmopolitan mindset. Furthermore, the Instagrammers' comments and hashtags portray a sense of carpe diem. According to the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* ("Carpe Diem," 2019), this phrase was employed by Horace, a Roman poet, to convey that all individuals should focus on the present and enjoy while they can. The manifestation of carpe diem, a non-Egyptian/Tunisian philosophy, in the Instagrammers' posts is another exemplar of their global mindset. E1's use of #sunnydays, #exploretheworld with images of travel; E2's "relax your soul and body," #summerfun, "I love Saturday Noon coffee in Starbucks"; E3's #staycool, #livinglife, #laugh; E5's #goodvibes, #happygirl; T7's frequent use of #fun and literally #carpediem; and T9's #enjoythemoment, #enjoylife, #live manifest positivity and a sense of "seize-the-day." The expression of carpe diem portrays the Instagrammers as agentic beings, challenging the image of the Middle Eastern woman as meek and powerless. Finally, when E1 mentions #bardotdress, #pocahontas; E2 uses #pepsi, #loreale; E3 writes "As Wimbledon approaches I am beyond excited" and uses #avengers, #captainamerica, #realmadrid; T6 uses #bobmarley; T8 #cokegirl; T9 #bershka, #burberry; and T10 #orangeisthenewblack, they display an awareness of, overt appreciation for, and interest in global brands, events, and popular culture.

At the same time, the Instagrammers' posts feature overt indicators of rootedness in their national identity; from frequent mention of their respective countries to promoting their roots and traditions through references to occasions/festivals, locations, and personal interests. The first indicator is the use of #egyptiangirl and #tunisiangirl by the Egyptian and Tunisian Instagrammers, respectively, in almost every post analyzed. By using this hashtag, they not only construct a sense of rootedness and belonging to their respective countries but also circulate this identity across geographies into shared diasporic communities (Anderson, 1983). The Instagrammers also use captions and hashtags to portray affiliation with, appreciation for, and promote their nations and traditions. E1's captions "from the land of Cleopatra," "beautiful Alexandria" (Egyptian city), and #visitegypt and E2's "Ramadan Kareem" (generous Ramadan)

for posts created during this holy month are cases in point.⁵ E3 claims, "I do love this . . . country . . . It's home and I would do everything in my power to protect it," while all E5's posts feature #madeinegypt and "do it the #egyptianstyle." Many of the Tunisian Instagrammers, like their Egyptian counterparts, promote Tunisian cities by posting travel pictures accompanied by hashtags #hammamet, #monastir, and #sidibousid. They promote traditions through images of Tunisian attire and food and hashtags for rituals and festivals such as #aidmabrouk and #ramadanvibes.⁶

The simultaneous existence of and flexibility between cosmopolitanism and their rootedness is best exemplified in the way the Instagrammers use diverse languages—English, French, Spanish, and Arabic—in their posts. This fluidity and skill to move between languages, featured in the hashtags and comments, is characteristic of almost all the Instagrammers. While discussing the city of Alexandria's weather, E2 notes, in Arabic, "شاطيء السرايا سيدي بشر استعدادا للصيف. نفس المكان منذ شهرين كان له شكل آخر.. ولكن لا شيء يبقى على حاله ودانما لابد من نهاية" ("the Saraya beach, Sidi Bishr, in preparation for the summer . . . the same place two months ago, it had another shape . . . but nothing remains the same and there must always be an end"). She starts with a French salutation in another post: "Bonjour [Hello]. That's how I start my Summer day." Evidently a fan of Real Madrid Club de Futbol, E3 writes "Hala Madrid y Nada mas!! [Go Madrid and nothing more] The kings of Europe." In a caption, E5 asserts "Couper les grattes ciels s'ils sont plus hauts que les palmiers" ("cut skyscrapers if they are taller than palm trees"). T6 wishes a bride with "عروستنا ربي يهنئك" ("our bride, may God bless you"). T7 writes #haveفن, which after translation means "have art"; here, she uses this hashtag as a pun intending the translated meaning as well as the transliterated one "have fun." During the month of Ramadan, many of T8's posts feature #soiréeramadanesque (evening of Ramadan).

In sum, the front stage performance of rooted cosmopolitanism illustrates a bottom-up micropolitical practice through SNS; user-generated content that challenges imperial/Oriental stereotypes of Middle Eastern individuals and their identities. Specifically, this analysis reveals that in the post-Arab Spring context, female Instagrammers from Egypt and Tunisia emphasize the prominence of and fluidity between their national and global identities and their affinity for both national and universal values. Thus, challenging the reductive image of the Middle Eastern woman as parochial, oppressed, and exotic, often bolstered by the norms and narratives perpetuated by patriarchal systems and authoritarian regimes. Also, their rooted cosmopolitanism confronts the assumption of Middle Eastern individuals' dominant pan-Arab identity (Khosravini & Sarkhoh, 2017), which reduces all Middle Easterners to Arabs and is often considered to be more salient than their national identity. In fact, in the context of the Arab uprisings, Ellison (2015) noted, "When there is political upheaval and regime rupture, if a country is a nation-state . . . the country stays together" (p. 2), bolstering citizens' nationalistic sentiments and strengthening their national identity.

The Instagrammers' self-presentation as rooted cosmopolitanism holds the micropolitical potential for a complex transnational dialogue about young Egyptian and Tunisian women, who "reconstruct their identities, and refute cultural misconceptions on a transnational level" (Yadlin-Segal, 2017, p. 2760) through Instagram. Al-Sharekh (2020) argued that social media affords women from Middle Eastern countries to

⁵ The ninth month of the Islamic calendar, Ramadan, is observed by Muslims as one of community, reflection, prayer, and fasting.

⁶ Eid Mubarak (blessed feast) is a greeting used by Muslims on the festivals of Eid al-Adha and Eid al-Fitr.

perform their identities in revolutionary ways and has “transformed the rules of the narrative-building game, initially controlled by [authoritarian] states” (p. 3) and shaped by patriarchy. The Egyptian and Tunisian Instagrammers’ self-presentation, post-Arab Spring, offers an oppositional narrative to imperial/Oriental stereotypes and patriarchal and state-controlled narratives, affording them the opportunity to reclaim autonomy over their identity/ies, nationally and transnationally, thus manifesting the micropolitics of self-presentation through Instagram.

Egyptian and Tunisian Women Instagrammers: Comparison and Implications

Almost a decade after the Arab uprisings, and despite the recent political turmoil in Tunisia, it has been heralded as the sole, though partial, success story of the Arab uprisings, and Tunisia’s trajectory has looked very different from Egypt’s.⁷ Furthermore, the temporal context of this study, 2017, is the year when the Egyptian and Tunisian sociopolitical environments were starkly divergent. This provides the larger context within which a comparison between the self-presentation and identity dynamics of the Egyptian and Tunisian Instagrammers must be undertaken. Focusing on descriptive parameters, the Tunisian women posted more selfies, used more Instagram lingo, and shared about their relationships and feelings more than the Egyptian women. The Tunisians used #tunisiangirl more than the Egyptian women used #egyptiangirl—226 and 92, respectively. As for the selfies and hashtags coded under the categories avowed labels, fashion, occasion, location, travel, and personal interests, the numbers were almost equal for both. Every Instagrammer focused on appearance, another coded category, at least once in every post analyzed. The number of hashtags and captions used to portray *carpe diem* were comparable. Interestingly, by early 2020, most of the Egyptian accounts were no longer in existence, whereas most of the Tunisian Instagrammers were active.⁸

Based on these comparative descriptions and the thematic analysis of the 10 Instagram accounts, I claim that post-Arab Spring both Egyptian and Tunisian Instagrammers exhibited individuality, emphasized their economic and capitalist tendencies, negotiated the paradox of rooted cosmopolitanism, complicated the expectation of an Arab supranational identity, and performed defiance against reductive imperial/Oriental perceptions and patriarchal normative expectations through Instagram. In other words, within the post-Arab Spring geotemporal context, young Egyptian and Tunisian female Instagrammers’ everyday activism was manifested through their online self-presentation of liberal-individualist citizenship and rooted cosmopolitanism. However, the positive trajectory of democratic institution building, as seen until 2017, allowed the Tunisian Instagrammers to continue their micropolitics rather consistently, unlike their Egyptian counterparts. In fact, in 2017 the Tunisian females’ micropolitical performances were more pronounced in comparison, evidenced in the greater number of selfies posted, extensive Instagram lingo featured in hashtags, and in the overt expression of their moods/feelings. And the Egyptian Instagrammers’

⁷ On July 25, 2021, following demonstrations about corruption, government dysfunction, and a failed response to COVID-19, Tunisian President Kais Saied suspended parliament, sacked Prime Minister Hichem Mechichi, and withdrew immunity of parliament members. Many within Tunisia and in the international community are viewing this as a coup and await what comes next.

⁸ The submission of this essay is deliberately timed a few years since data collection; although this longitudinal aspect is not the focus of the essay, this observation has significant implications for the claims made.

fewer use of #egyptiangirl when compared with #tunisiangirl—a hashtag denoting national identity and belonging—might have been an insinuation of despair regarding the future of Egypt and a portrayal of mistrust in Egypt’s sociopolitical trajectory. This was further evidenced in the deletion of many of the Egyptian Instagrammers’ accounts after 2017. So, as the years have progressed since the Arab uprisings, with Egypt turning into a military regime in 2013 after a brief tryst with democracy, the affordances provided by Instagram may not have been unreservedly promising for Egypt’s female Instagrammers.

In a talk on Arab public opinion, Pollock and Robbins (2020) shared that since the Arab uprisings there has been a steep decline in the public’s faith in government “due to increasing public perception of state corruption as well as dissatisfaction with the repressive government measures” (para. 12), with progressive erosion of citizens’ rights and freedoms in general. Robbins further underlined that although “there was broad support for democracy . . . [it] is not necessarily seen as participatory free elections; rather, it is often connected to the idea of an efficient and beneficial state that took care of its people’s needs” (para. 12), where youth participation in politics is often less active and more informal. Thus, based on the 10 women Instagrammers’ posts from the year 2017, I conclude, although there is cause for optimism as regards the micropolitical potential of Instagram for young women in Middle Eastern societies, this cannot be viewed from a deterministic perspective. Especially in the context of dynamic authoritarian and military regimes and transitioning democracies in MENA, the sociopolitical vicissitudes of countries are uncertain with government and deep state actors continually looking for measures to control and counter the micropolitical impact of SNS use by citizens. Under such circumstances, it is realistic for Middle Eastern women to continue exploring creative ways to use SNS for their everyday micropolitics rather than approaching platforms such as Instagram as inherently democratizing technologies.

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