

## **Call for papers vol 4 issue 1 (May 2012)** **The season of revolution: the Arab Spring**

**Issue editors:**

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In December of 2010, a man in small town in Tunisia set his body ablaze. Muhammad Bouaziz's act of self-immolation, and the subsequent tireless efforts of people in SidiBouazid to bring this revolutionary act of self-sacrifice to national attention, set the spark ablaze for what has been described as the Arab Spring of Revolutions in 2011, unleashing uprisings that spread from Tunisia to Egypt, Libya, Bahrain, Syria, and Jordan and have reverberated globally. Bouaziz's sacrifice was the spark for an incredible new phase in contemporary Arab history. From the fall of the regimes in Tunisia and Egypt to the unprecedented challenges by popular movements to regimes in Morocco and across the Arab world to the Gulf, these revolts clearly show that a new century has begun.

A great deal has already been written about these "Arab uprisings" as they continue to unfold and touch regions well beyond the Arab world. This new phase in local history is the product of long-term political activity with roots in the region and beyond. Our goal in this special issue is to address questions inspired by these revolutions and to offer a critical intervention in debates generated by them as well as to address the issues that have been obfuscated by much of the current analysis. The broad themes to be covered will include the role of class, gender, popular culture, "youth" culture and politics, the Palestine question, internationalization (in terms of neo-colonialism, imperialism and anti-imperial movements), the role of solidarity movements and fronts and the evolving discourse of liberation.

*Interface: a journal for and about social movements* is dedicated to popular mobilizations at every level from the micro to the revolutionary. Written, edited and refereed by activists and social movement researchers, it promotes engaged intellectual activity which seeks to support movements' own self-reflection and development of their own practice. *Interface* is multi-lingual and globally organised, aiming to develop dialogues between movements in different countries, people organising in different political traditions, and research in different academic disciplines. It is free and open-access.

Much of the initial attention to the Arab uprisings concentrated on new forms of social connectivity and media as new kinds of organizational tools for the protests. This sort of analysis has also paid an extraordinary amount of attention to the role of youth. However, we need to question if this focus on youth, helps us fully understand the Arab Revolution. Does an uncomplicated reading of youth fall into the trap of overemphasizing generational conflict and

discontinuity? Are there more nuanced ways of seeing the participation of youth in the revolution that would take into account issues of class, nationalism, imperialism, or other ignored factors?

Given that the university is a primary site of political action (and repression) among a younger generation, how can we use our understanding of the space and place of the university to further our analysis of the revolutions? What role do students, as well as academics and institutions, play in these movements? The Arab world is often overlooked in the historic analysis of the global movements that were defined by student protests in 1968, so perhaps we can now read the university sphere in the Arab world in a different way and one that complicates this generational analysis. Can a more inclusive and complicated historical reading of political participation in these uprisings provide a useful intervention in traditional readings of revolutions?

The paradigm of violence and non-violence has also been a point of great interest among analysts/commentators in the early months of these revolutions. Compared to movements in both Latin America and Eastern Europe, critics initially focused a great deal of attention on the role of non-violent strategies. Moreover, some observers from imperial metropolises claimed to have guided and supported the uprisings. What can the Arab revolutions teach us about the non-violence/violence paradigm? Are there clear demarcations between the two strategies? What role(s) does this narrative about virtuous non-violence play, especially for states with imperial interests like the US? How has this paradigm affected our understanding of the role of state violence?

The incredibly important geo-strategic position of the Arab world has historically meant it has been subjected to a great deal of direct and indirect imperial intervention in the modern era. In this Arab Spring, the question of internal and external factors that have plagued regional history and politics continues. Are these uprisings a response to colonialism and the failure of decolonization projects as well as neo-liberal agendas? Is this the local and regional response to their "stolen moment of modernity"? How does the Arab Spring relate to other "revolutionary waves" such as those of 1989 or the Latin American "pink tide"? And where are its boundaries - the Arab-speaking world or the Muslim world as a whole? Are events elsewhere in Africa linked more than rhetorically?

More specifically, how did the United States and Europe initially respond to the revolutions and how important is this response to the "progress" of the revolutions? Has this intervention become an effective counter-revolution? What tactics have been used by regional and international powers in the making of the counter-revolution and how have people on the ground responded? What are the forces and sources of the counter-revolution and have they been effective? For example, did the US and European-led military intervention in Libya help the uprising or undermine it?

Has the lively debate among progressives brought the international left to a watershed moment in our understanding of the paradigms of revolution and

how has this debate changed our understanding of imperialism, if at all? How has this moment of auto-critique among Arab activists as well as progressives and leftists globally changed the nature of the uprisings on the ground as well as the ongoing revolutionary movements in terms of political frameworks and grassroots activity? What are the present and future dangers of the counter-revolution and how can they be understood in local, regional, and global terms?

In spite of, and because of, the incredible level of foreign interest and intervention in the Arab world, these revolutions have proved that organic (grassroots) movements have thrived in terribly repressive environments in these Arab countries. The involvement of professional associations as well as labor unions have challenged our traditional understanding of vanguard movements and changed the way we read revolutionary struggle. How can we look at these unions and associations as a new way of understanding the failures of capitalist focused neo-liberal "economic reform"? Do the cross-class alliances of the revolutionaries in Egypt and Tunisia defy narrowly defined revolutionary theoretical understandings of the role of labor in revolution? How did the unions survive in the region in light of decades of infiltration and repression? How do we understand their role in the political uprisings and their role in the state structure –before, during, and after regime changes?

Women in the movements and on the streets have also played an interesting and important role in the revolutions - or the media has at the very least obsessed about the "role of women" on the streets in these Muslim countries. How can we offer an analysis of these gendered tactics and how can we think about how to frame this in more complex ways that challenges colonial feminism? How can we complicate familiar tropes of agency and submissiveness and still grapple with the deliberate involvement - strategic or otherwise - of women's primary and public roles in the revolutions? Do these uprisings provide us with an opportunity to try to explore the idea of liberation through secular politics? Again, as with the youth paradigm, how does the emphasis on women's participation contribute to representations of the revolutions both inside and outside their own societies?

Some have claimed that these revolutions have distanced themselves from the core political issue of the Arab world – the question of Palestine. Is this a fair depiction and from where does this kind of analysis derive its legitimacy? What role does the question of Palestine play in political and social goals of the revolutions? How has the occupation and continued oppression of Palestine – in political, cultural, and social terms – affected politics and political action in various ways in each of the uprisings? Is solidarity with Palestine a litmus test for the fate of the regimes in the Arab world? Because the question of Palestine has been manipulated in varying degrees by the totalitarian regimes of the Arab world, is this a moment of reckoning regarding action about Palestine?

Finally, a great deal of attention has been given to popular culture in relation to the revolutions, ranging from the use of Facebook and social media to the role of music and art. How has popular culture affected/recorded/moved these revolutions? Where do movements end and culture begins? Is this an

appropriate discursive division, or have these revolutions necessarily changed our reading of "culture" and "politics"?

We welcome submissions that address these and other related questions and themes. Papers are welcome from different disciplines and fields using various methodologies (such as media analysis, historical critique, empirical research, etc). We also welcome perspectives from movement people and those who are a part of the revolutions and uprisings. In general submissions should aim to speak to an international audience and focus on the understanding and practice of the movements and uprisings themselves rather than the general analysis of Arab societies, international geo-politics etc.

### **General submissions**

Lastly, as in all issues of *Interface*, we will accept submissions on topics that are not related to the special theme of the issue, but that emerge from or focus on other movements around the world and the immense amount of knowledge that they generate. Such general submissions should contribute to the journal's mission as a tool to help our movements learn from each other's struggles, by developing analyses from specific movement processes and experiences that can be translated into a form useful for other movements. In this context, we welcome contributions by movement participants and academics who are developing movement-relevant theory and research.

Our goal is to include material that can be used in a range of ways by movements – in terms of its content, its language, its purpose and its form. We thus seek work in a range of different formats, such as conventional articles, review essays, facilitated discussions and interviews, action notes, teaching notes, key documents and analysis, book reviews – and beyond. Both activist and academic peers review research contributions, and other material is sympathetically edited by peers. The editorial process generally is geared towards assisting authors to find ways of expressing their understanding, so that we all can be heard across geographical, social and political distances.

### **Deadline and contact details**

The deadline for initial submissions to this issue (Volume 4 Issue 1, to be published May 2012) is November 1st 2011.

Our online guidelines for contributors explain more about what *Interface* is trying to do, who reads it and what different kinds of articles we publish, as well as the usual details on format, wordcount, referencing etc.

Manuscripts for the special theme of "The season of revolution: the Arab Spring" can be sent in Arabic or English to Rana Barakat (barakat.rana AT

gmail.com) or Abdul-Rahim al-Shaikh (aalshaikh AT birzeit.edu); or in Arabic, English, German or Hebrew to Magid Shihade (mshihade AT gmail.com). For submissions in other languages, please see our list of editors and languages.

Similarly, manuscripts for general articles can be sent to the appropriate regional editor.

More information on submissions (including guidelines for contributors, lists of editors and languages, and book reviews) can be found via <http://www.interfacejournal.net/submissions/>.