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The American University in Cairo  
School of Global Affairs and Public Policy

Emancipatory Future:  
Women and Agitational Politics in Revolutionary Egypt  
A Thesis Submitted to  
the Cynthia Nelson Institute for Gender and Women's Studies

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for  
the degree of Master of Arts in Gender and Women's Studies  
in Middle East/ North Africa

Gendered Political Economies

by Shaza Abdel-lateef

under the supervision of Dr. Martina Rieker  
May 2013

The American University in Cairo  
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Gendered Political Economies

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For these three great women who changed my life, whom I will never forget... I love you from the bottom of my heart and soul.

## ABSTRACT

Emancipatory Future:  
Women and Agitational Politics in Revolutionary Egypt  
Shaza Abdel-lateef

The American University in Cairo  
under the supervision of Dr. Martina Rieker

This thesis investigates the gender dynamics in the Egyptian 25<sup>th</sup> of January 2011 revolution. It explores the centrality of gender relations in different configurations of the Egyptian revolution. It argues, that in order to provide satisfying analysis of the different events between January 2011 and April 2013, the period that the research focuses on, it is crucial to analyze gender relations that played a critical role in the toppling of the system "Iskat-El-Nizam".

The importance of this thesis stems from the fact that it maps most of the struggles, mobilization and terrains that woman activists chose or had to go through since the ousting of Mubarak until the moments of writings. It argues that the revolution was not concluded by the inauguration of a new president in June 2012, and that different paths are still being tested. After exploring the gender component during the 18 days of Tahrir, it turns its focus to the main camps and trajectories that women activists have taken, which includes their concerns about writing the new constitution of Egypt, in addition, to the struggle against the systemic violence and sexual assaults against female protesters.

It also provides a panoramic overview of many of the new women groups and movements that have emerged in the post-Mubarak period, by analyzing their approaches to engagement, mobilization, new tendencies, and strategies adopted to cope with struggles they face with respect to the gender discourse, with particular focus on the debates aimed to blame, victimize and marginalize women. It also paves the way for future research on key debates and landmarks that have been spotted in this thesis in order to investigate how women activism in Egypt will develop in the future.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Title .....	i
Thesis Submission.....	ii
Acknowledgments.....	iii
Abstract .....	iv
Chapter One: Occupy Tahrir, 25 <sup>th</sup> of January Revolution: Another World is Possible .....	1
Theoretical Framework.....	3
Power Beyond the State: A New World is Possible .....	3
Literature Review .....	9
Women and Revolutions .....	9
Egyptian Women Activism over the last Thirty Years (1980s-2012) .....	14
Methodology and Method.....	19
Chapter Two: Bread, Freedom and Social Justice: Women’s Participation in the 25 <sup>th</sup> of January Revolution and the Question of Gender .....	22
Gender, Power Relations and the Patrimonial State.....	24
Iskat el-Nizam: A Rupture in Gender Order.....	29
Negotiating a Space for Women Protestors: Shifts in Identities .....	36
Female Martyrs between Compromise and Oblivion.....	37
Chapter Three: Egyptian Women Activists’ Mobilization After 25 <sup>th</sup> of January.....	39
Redefining Politics: Ordinary Women of Tahrir as Activists.....	41
Mapping Women’s Activism Post-25 <sup>th</sup> of January 2011.....	44
Proliferation of Young Women’s Groups .....	44
Young Women Activists: Challenges and Obstacles in the Way .....	46
Pre-revolution NGOs and Post-25 <sup>th</sup> of January Survival Strategies .....	49
Main Concerns, Main Camps.....	52
The Council of Wise Men: Writing the New Constitution and Women Activists	52
The First Draft of the Proposed Constitution: A Shift in the Mechanism of Mobilization .....	57

They are not Suzan’s Laws.....	60
Chapter Four: Tahrir Square and Agitational Politics .....	63
Restoring the Order?.....	63
Sexual Assaults: Same Cause, New Tactics and Different Approaches .....	69
The Patrolling Technique .....	70
Human Chains, Slasel .....	72
Fighting Back: Activism Beyond Vulnerability .....	74
Women Assaulted between Social Acceptance, Police Absence and Government Blame .....	80
Chapter Five: Unfinished Revolution: Egyptian Women Activists between Perils and Possibilities .....	85
Gender Agenda of the Muslim Brotherhood.....	85
Gender Roles in Al-Banna’s, Quotb’s and Morsi’s Discourse.....	86
Anti-NGOization Tendency: Bahia Ya Masr, A Possible Women’s Movement.....	90
Concluding Remarks: Problem in Collective Action .....	97
References .....	vii

## CHAPTER ONE:

### OCCUPY TAHRIR. The 25<sup>TH</sup> OF JANUARY REVOLUTION:

#### ANOTHER WORLD IS POSSIBLE

The image of Tahrir Square has inspired the imagination of the world and defined an international and national perception of the 25 January revolution. The involvement of thousands of women in the first 18 days in the squares of freedom over Egypt was a scene that gave hope for a new start, a new world, and new hopes for women. The participation of Egyptian women was not a surprise to me, as I know the long history of Egyptian women struggles since Huda Sha'arawi. Egyptian women have always been known by their strength, courage and vital roles in their families and society. However, I was fascinated by the egalitarian, inclusive spirit, and harmony that prevailed the squares of freedom, especially Tahrir Square that became a symbol of the Egyptian revolution.

During the 18 days of the revolution, there was no distinction between women either by dress code or by any other social or religious status. Women who were face veiled, veiled, or non-veiled, with children or single, rich or poor, Muslim, Christian, or secular, all shared a moment of solidarity and equality. The spirit of equality manifested not only amongst women but also between men and women. This historical moment when all hierarchical structures and patriarchy "temporarily" disappeared is the starting point for this thesis.

Amid the various configurations of the revolution there are different changes and open ended possibilities for the future of Egypt and of women; however, alarming indicators regarding women in Egypt started to emerge immediately after the ousting of Mubarak. For example, the abuse some female protesters suffered by being subjected to virginity tests conducted by the



military, the disregard of women in the commission chosen by the military council to amend the constitution, and recently, the sweep of Islamists in the People's Council elections and again, in the presidential elections. These indicators and others should be read in the light of the analysis of the relationship between gender and revolutionary processes in an attempt to engender the configurations of the revolution. For this to be done I will add gender to political analysis. To look how gender is a critical component in this momentous event.

I begin the thesis by returning to the Tahrir days, the fascinating 18 days of the revolution where I felt safe, belonging, and powerful. I want to tell the story of our revolution. I want any person who reads my words to see and hear the voices of those who called for bread, freedom, and social justice in Tahrir Square and in all squares of freedom in Egypt. Since men usually write history, I decided to record the revolution by women's words. Through telling their stories I am also telling mine. I do not want the bravery, dream, pain, and blood of anyone in this revolution to be neglected or forgotten. I want them to be written and embedded in history.

This thesis is not only an account of women's stories or a personal quest, it is also an attempt to engage some research questions from a feminist perspective. It is about analyzing and understanding the ongoing events and to explore the gendered aspects of the configuration of the revolution processes. In Harding's (1987) depiction of feminist research, she explains how research aims are closely linked to the origin of the research questions. In my quest for answers, I aim to contextualize women's presence in Tahrir Square and highlight the continuity of their participation in the revolution with the years of struggle that preceded.

Harding (1987) describes the best feminist research as one that provides explanations for social phenomenon, "In the best feminist research, the purposes of research and analysis are not separable from the origins of research problems" (p. 8). She adds that the best feminist practice

requires the researcher to place herself under as much scrutiny as the subject under study. Harding (1987) even emphasizes that a little bit of “soul searching” from the part of the researcher is not bad (p. 9). In her view, the researcher should present themselves as a real individual with overt interests, debunking the idea that research is “objective” as a researcher's beliefs and experience will always influence her or his analysis.

I aim to gender the revolutionary process and examine how gender was navigated during the 18 days of Tahrir and in the post-Mubarak period by different political and social forces and also, to map the reaction of women's groups to these revolutionary processes. Thus, this thesis engages two different levels of analyses. First, I document the revolutionary processes and map the mobilization of women's group and second, I analyze the gender component in these processes during the 18 days and after the ousting of Mubarak.

## Theoretical Framework

### Power Beyond the State: A New World is Possible

I conceptualize the 25<sup>th</sup> of January Egyptian revolution from a social movement conceptual framework, whereby the process is a revolutionary one that aims at emancipation and radical change. From this perspective, I will draw on the theories of new social movements to guide me when I analyze the dynamics of the revolutionary process. I still remember a moment when the Square, which was an inclusive place where I felt accepted, became the same place where I was aggressively told to go home after only a month of the ousting of Mubarak. This instance represents a turning point in the way I imagined the revolution that would bring women equality and dignity. For the first time, I feel that my agenda as a feminist differs from the people who I chanted, "Down with regime" with. For this reason, I argue that if the revolution is about

change of power structures, the question of women will be an inherent part of the process, one that I pay particular attention to in this study.

The 18 days of Tahrir Square were an inspiration for the people who sought and seek emancipation all over the world. But, the toppling of a 30-year-old regime within 18 days was not the end of the revolution but as Marx would say, "Revolution is the midwife of history" (Zibechi, 2010). Marx's phrase suggests that revolutions are just a short step or the starting point of the long process of the creation of a new world. This vision is adopted throughout the thesis as I argue that the Egyptian revolution has not yet ended and as such, still has the potency for change, and resistance to create a new and different world.

As it appeared after the 11<sup>th</sup> of February 2011 that the fall of Mubarak was a tactic and a necessary sacrifice of the president by the military generals to maintain the system they belong to (Asad, 2012). It is clear that the system did not collapse and in this sense, I build my argument throughout the thesis on the assumption that the revolution is incomplete and that there will be new revolutionary waves until the real toppling of the system. The, so-called transitional period or the inauguration of a new president in June 2012 did not mean for most of the youth revolutionaries, the end of the revolution, instead, they adopt a strong slogan of "the revolution is continuous" –(al thawra mostamera), that became a very famous slogan of the period that followed the 11<sup>th</sup> of February 2011 until the moment of writing.

According to Foucault, in modern society there is no locus of power; rather, power functions in "capillary forms through decentered networks of institutions and apparatuses" (Hardt, 2010). This thesis, in contrast to many critical thinkers who argue that major and positive societal changes can come through taking state power, pays attention to the complex realities on the ground. It gives particular focus to informal networks and different apparatuses through

which power functions. It concentrates on this form of decentered power that manifests in insubordination acts, collective actions, and ongoing daily resistance that lead to social change instead of critiques of the State or its institutions as the locus of power.

In his historical analysis of the social struggle in Bolivia, Zibechi offers us new ways of doing politics beyond the state, highlighting the possibility of creating autonomous anti-state spaces, which I referred to earlier as informal networks, and asserting that the real forces of social change is not in the State institutions or the political parties, which Foucault defines as "strict conformity of life", as it may appear to be, but it is in the daily contact between people, by which, the daily contact, the ancient Cynic, the ancestors of the modern revolutionaries, as argued by Foucault, struggled for a "true life" that can only be achieved by creating another world out of this one (Hardt, 2010).

I pay attention to "imperceptible politics" as Sterphenson (2008) calls it, which does not refer to something that is invisible, but to social forces that are outside of existing regulation and policing. Social transformation is not about reason and belief; it is about perception and hope. It is not about the production of subjects, but about the making of life. It is not about subjectivity, it is about experience (Sterphenson, 2008, p. xxi). The main theoretical premise that this thesis is built around is the possibility of creating the other world we revolted for without going through the state; the social movement has the potency of doing politics beyond the state and it is possible to win without a formal structure wherein a social movement can depend on the existence of everyday life experiences of the oppressed (Zibechi, 2010). In line with this premise, this thesis sheds light on the ongoing grassroots resistance and street actions that, as Zibechi (2010) illustrates, delegitimize the party-based system of the electoral democracy. I break away from analyzing state institutions and policies as I argue that the state, as well as

institutionalized organizations, is not the appropriate tool to build this new world. By doing so, I follow Zibechi's (2010) argument that, "[f]or those of us who struggle for emancipation, the central and critical challenges are not from above but from below. There is no point in blaming the governments or issuing calls of betrayal" (p. 7). From this perspective, the thesis is built on caring for the people's power or in other words, the "sacred fire of the movement" (p. 7). I do this with special focus on women groups' mobilization and the everyday struggle as I argue that their resistance is a critical component to change the system that the Egyptian revolution has called for. In the following chapters I shed light on the internal dynamics of the revolutionary processes that occur "naturally", as argued by Marx (1992), which create new social relationships that manifest the emancipatory power that the revolution seeks.

Returning to Zibechi's (2010) argument, the force of social change exists in the weaving of the social relationships that form for him the basis of life. In line with this and building on Scott's (1986) argument that gender is "a constitutive element of social relationships" (p. 1067), I argue that there can be no sufficient study of how social change takes place without an examination of gender as borrowing from Scott (1986), gender is the primary signifier of power relationships in society as concepts of power may be built on gender but not necessarily about it. Zibechi (2010) makes it clear that "there are no societies or social spaces without the space: when we speak of non-states powers we are referring to their capacity to disperse or prevent the state from crystallizing" (p. 66). This logic guides me through my analysis of the dynamics of the Egyptian revolution and the ongoing resistance that is still unfolding until the moment of writing. Ali (2013) argues that after the Tahrir demonstrations, the imperial forces and the regional neighbors gained the upper hand in shaping the outcomes of the revolutions in the region. However, I argue that regardless of these political scenarios, the power that has the upper hand in

this equation is the people of Egypt when they continue to protest as one unifying force. The people have the ultimate power over any authority but they do not realize this power until it is unleashed.

Through this framework of thought, I argue that social relationships that were created in the Egyptian society and that have manifested during the 18 days of Tahrir embody the potency and tension that is synonymous to the power that is needed for change. A power that Zibechi (2010) asserts, the political scenario does not affect, but instead, it is one that is produced mainly by the suffering of people, a power that cannot be materialized, it is the unlimited power of emancipation that is always "the unfinished becoming" (p. 6). The potency of the emancipation power relates to the relationships that are created between people, between men and women (Zibechi, 2010, p. 6). Hence, I argue that gender relations are the fuel of the change machine, and it becomes essential to examine these relations in order to comprehend what has been occurring in the 25<sup>th</sup> of January revolution, as Peterson (1994) argues, a gender sensitive analysis helps us understand the power relations in societies. The study of women not only adds new subject matter but would also force a critical reexamination of the premises and standards of existing scholarly work. I stress that women do not have a separated history from men; it is also not about sex and family and it does not require separate examination from political and economic history (Scott, 1986).

In the following chapters, I trace the dynamics of the social resistance led by women in line with the rapid and continuous changes that have taken place during the past two years in the country. The analysis shows many aspects of this mobilization, it is power that is discontinuous, non-static, and non-stable as it appears and disappears. It is characterized by the "simultaneous withdrawal from the state and outpouring of social relationship that form the core of the new

society" (Zibechi, 2010, p. 65). These characteristics are clear in the women's groups that have been emerged after the ousting of Mubarak as will be illustrated in the following chapters. For example, Bahia Ya Masr (Cheerful Egypt) movement and the pre-revolution established Nazra NGO, that spoke about defying and working outside of the state, yet, in its strategies and for a variety of reasons, they maintained apparatuses of the state as their main addressee, e.g. elections, constitutional committees, and laws, which shows that instead of working outside of the state, they wanted to play but attempted to set their own terms and rules. This varied among groups and to various degrees of acquiescing of state structures, as discussions in Chapter 3 and 5 will show.

Zibechi (2010) argues that a certain type of analysis and a vision of a movement that is based on "a certain order of consistency and linearity... that dictates what should be included in history and what should be left out" (p. 84) is not able to go beyond the system of the state. He is also against what is defined as, in Guha Rana Jit's words, "the univocity of static discourse" that reflects the relationship of subject/object and that recognizes a set of contradictions that have been given priority to be solved than others, a kind of argument that has led to the marginalization of those of "low voices" such as women for centuries (Zibechi, 2010, p. 83). In Egypt, this type of discourse told women that it is not the time for their demands as other issues that emerged immediately after the toppling of the regime, should be given priority; however, as the following chapters will show, women continued to resist as they were being marginalized.

Through my research during the past two years on women's mobilization after the 25<sup>th</sup> of January 2011, I observed the crystallization of characteristics of a genuine social movement that Zibechi (2010) refers to in his analysis as being constituted by the dispersing of power and anti-institutionalization. According to Zibechi (2010), the dispersion of power has an important

element in the avoidance of creating hierarchical leadership structures. This is clearly manifested in the type of women activism that existed after the 25<sup>th</sup> of January 2011, where many of the structures of the women groups question older organizational structures such as Sawa, Bahia Ya Masr and Operation Anti Sexual Harassment , which will be further elaborated in Chapters 3 and 5. These fragmented, non-centralized, mobile organizational forms are the focus of this thesis. These observations are in line with what Hardt (2012) argues to be some of the common characteristics of the social movements of 2011 around the world, which include, the strategy of occupation of a central square, the organizational form that has no leader, and the multitude and non-centralized form that has horizontal structures.

Throughout this thesis I will represent the struggles of women's group and their reactions to the ongoing events and to the state agenda. It is important to clarify how the national and feminist agendas are conflicted in these moments. Working with social movement theories will help me explore the following questions: Does the strong participation of women in the revolution result in a more progressive agenda? If not, what strategies do these women groups adopt to engage nationalist agendas? And how is gender navigated in these revolutionary processes? Drawing on the work of Joan Scott (1986) this thesis conceives of gender as a system of relationships, social and cultural expressions of power that structure social relationships between people, and is a critical component in maintaining transforming the social order.

## Literature Review

### Women and Revolutions

While every context is different, regional examples from Iran and Algeria offer insight into the historical problems of women and revolutions. It can offer insight into Algerian women



played an integral role and actively participated in the anti-colonial struggle (1954-1961), yet this did not prevent their eventual exclusion in the building of the post-colonial Algerian state. (Lovett, 1980, Knauss 1987, Turshen 2002).

With independence in 1962 women found that the promises of the socialist revolution remained elusive (Cooke, 1989, p. 2). Women who had fought in the war for independence were poorly represented in discussions concerning the building of the new state. One of the combatants stated, "Our domestication didn't start in 1962, it happened before independence; even during war, the National Liberation Front (FLN) started eliminating women from the Maquis, sending us to the borders or abroad. That's when our role was defined, when we were excluded from public life" (Turshen, 2002, p. 893). Out of 194 members, only ten women were invited in the first post-war meeting of National Assembly. Despite their contributions in the Algerian liberation, women were immediately pushed to the background regarding the decision-making process and laws of personal status. The post-revolution state in Algeria showed an atavistic response to the legacy of colonialism. This began with the repression of women and the restoration of a social code founded on patriarchal principles (Knauss, 1987). Although the National Union of the Algerian Women (UNFA) became the women's auxiliary of the FLN in 1968, this did not increase women's political roles and participation in the political process.

Just two months after the death of Boumedienn, the Ministry of Justice announced the creation of a commission to draft the Family Code. In fact, the post-Boumedienn period was marked by a conservative move at the expense of women's rights. This period witnessed the first organization of a women's group against the Family Code, which would legalize the inferior status of women in family matters. On 8 March 1979, approximately 200 university women convened an open meeting at the industrial workers' union headquarters in Algiers to demand the

disclosure of the identity of the members of the commission, and to express their concerns and demands. Significantly, they called themselves “the commission of women who work at the university” and defined themselves as workers rather than as professionals, partly as a homage to the waning socialist heritage and partly to underscore their identity as employed women (Moghadam, 2002, p. 136).

This could have marked the beginning of a women's movement in Algeria as they adopted a strategy of confrontation through public demonstrations and civil disobedience. They organized the largest national campaign against the Family Code and gathered a million signatures, which led to their success in 1982 when the adjustments to the Family Code were suspended. But, again in 1984, Benjedid's government implemented another Family Code that was more repressive of women's rights. One reason behind this, as Knauss (1987) argues, was to appease Islamic conservative groups in the wake of the political Islam after the Iranian revolution. The women's movement in Algeria basically remained an urban middle-class women's movement. It was not until 1987, when the government passed a law that authorized the establishment of women's NGOs did women start to systemically organize themselves in development organizations (Turshen, 2002).

During the civil war in the 1990s, Algerian women reached the top of their social annihilation. This epoch was described as "crimes against women" (Turshen, 2002). Women were used as targets in the war between the FLN government and Islamists. The Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) proposed two fatwas, one legalizing the killing of unveiled women, and the second legalizing kidnapping and temporary marriages; as a result, thousands of women became “war booty” (Turshen, 2002). Algerian women took to the streets several times against the FIS, marching in protest every 8<sup>th</sup> of March. In 1995, women were the first to vote in the

presidential elections despite the FIS call for boycott (Turshen, 2002). Similar to the war of independence, during the civil war, the courage of Algerian women at the forefront of demonstrations became a symbol of social resistance

Likewise in Iran women were major participants in the revolution against the Shah (1977-1979). Joining other opposition groups their reasons for opposing the Shah varied between economic deprivation, political repression, and identification with Islamism. Street demonstrations included large numbers of middle class and working class women wearing the veil as a symbol of opposition to Pahlavi bourgeois or westernized decadence. However, women who wore the veil as a protest symbol did not expect that it would later become mandatory for all Iranian women. The first call for the veil to be mandatory was in 1979 when Ayatollah Khomeini was quoted as saying that he preferred to see women in a modest Islamic dress (Hoodfar, 1999). Middle class leftist and liberal women organized protests and sits in and succeeded in temporarily rescinding mandatory veiling. Later, with the defeat of leftists and liberal political forces, the post-revolutionary Islamic state would make veiling compulsory and enforce it harshly (Moghadam, 2004).

The newly established Islamic Republic of Iran called for women to restore, what they considered women's primary role in society, that is, a domestic one. Women who helped in establishing the republic were at this stage requested to leave political and state affairs and to concentrate on their duties according to Islamic Shari'a. The veil during this period was linked to a woman's belief in the revolution; it became a symbol of patriotism and a rejection of western culture and imperialism (Hoodfar, 1999). Iranian women's groups attempted to organize, but the political divergences and ideological differences remained strong making it difficult for a women's movement to emerge. Furthermore, there were also many middle class and poor women

who welcomed the return of the hijab as a sign of cultural heritage and a way towards a new Islamic modernism (Nashat, 1983).<sup>1</sup>—The public presence of secular women articulating liberal demands helped Islamist women to express themselves within a well-accepted Islamic perspective, appearing as an authentic movement in the eyes of the political leaders of the Islamic Republic (Hoodfar, 1999).

In the years that followed, women faced challenges caused by the Islamic government's abolishment of legislation it considered to be in violation of Shari'a. As a result, women were treated unequally under family rights; for example, a woman's right to seek divorce and her rights to custody of her children were restricted. Additionally, the legal age for marriage was lowered from 16 to 9, and temporary marriages were legalized (Nashat, 1983). Women were also forbidden to work as judges, as in the case of Shirin Ebadi, the first female judge and recipient of the 2003 Nobel Prize, was forced to resign from her position immediately after the revolution (Aman, 2009).

On the other hand, as Bayat (2009) argues, Iranian women resisted discrimination through their everyday practices of life. They challenged the restrictions and contested the veil on a daily basis; they played sports and used education as a cultural weapon. They strongly increased their presence in universities and used print media to publicize gender issues. Despite the leaderless-ness nature of the Iranian women's movement, women succeeded in gaining a visible position in society and have engaged, in what Bayat (2009) has defined as "power presence" (p. 98).

Under the rule of Mohamed Khatami who called for greater social freedom, the conditions of Iranian women improved. In the local elections of 2003, the number of female candidates increased by 60 percent; during his presidency, women also started to hold deputy

minister positions and women's presence in both the educational and legal spheres were encouraged (Aman, 2009). The democratic opening of Khatami reinforced the women's movement and gave them self-esteem and the will to mobilize through NGOs and charities (Bayat, 2009). The number of women's NGOs also increased and their strength as social pressure groups in Iran became visible. Recently, the national movement against Ahmadinejad demonstrated to be more open and sympathetic to the cause of Iranian women, realizing that without an equally empowered female counterpart, no political success can be achieved (Ruta, 2012).

It is clear from reviewing the literature on women and revolutions that every revolutionary project attempts to break away from the former regime. One way to accomplish this is to promote a model of the "new woman" through the establishment of education, new family codes, or other measures that serve the political discourse. Such measures vary from attempts at modernization to promoting an image of the "Islamic woman" such as in Iran (Moghadam, 1994). Thus, nearly every revolution or national struggle presents women with a different set of obstacles and opportunities. I believe it is important to read the contemporary situation in Egypt in light of the vast body of literature on women and nationalist projects. Through this reading, I will be able to draw conclusions that highlight opportunities for political engagement to enhance women's situation in Egypt and to clarify some of the obstacles and predominant notions in relation to women's participation in the Egyptian revolution.

#### Egyptian Women's Activism Over the Last Thirty Years (1980s-2012)

Although the contexts may vary significantly between countries in the region, there are common concerns that can shed light on common issues and challenges for regional women's

activism. For instance, problems of state feminism and the professionalization of women's activism are crucial sites for critical engagement. In Egypt, the work of Guenena and Wassef (1999) argues that the feminist agenda has not changed much during the past few decades, instead it has merely expanded to cover more issues. Another key study on women's activism in Egypt is Abdelrahman's (2004), *Civil Society Exposed: The Politics of NGOs in Egypt*. She concludes that the structures, hegemonies and material possibilities make NGOs an apparatus of the state instead of being a tool of activism with a liberatory potential.

The 1994 International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) was one of the most important shifts for the discourse of women activism in Egypt. Although the conference focused exclusively on sexual and productive health, it was significant for Egyptian women activists. ICPD is acknowledged to have enabled woman-centered focus in local development work and linked between women's overall self-determination with women's reproductive rights. Hence, it gave women activists in Egypt a platform for advocacy on a different range of issues (Harcourt, 2004). Guenena and Wassef (1999) also argue that -institutionalization that followed the ICPD signaled a change in the nature of women organizations in Egypt in the sense that some organizations became "more vocal and refused to be extensions of the government and its policies" (p.52). Guenena and Wassef (1999) also show that the "1990s witnessed new structures emerge in the women's arena" (p.52), which included coalitions and more importantly, the proliferation of NGOs.

Similarly, the Egyptian government made a significant move by creating the National Council for Population and Development, which seemed to be a promising initiative. The Fourth World Conference for Women in Beijing offered another important leveraging tool for Egyptian women activists as Al-Ali (2000) argues, "What was generally appreciated was that the Beijing

showed that the West is not one thing as has always been argued by people whose main interest in not women's issues" (p. 157). The discourses produced by the ICPD and Beijing had positive effects on women activists in Egypt as they highlighted how global references can be an effective strategy in capturing the state's attention. During this period, the discourse directed women's activism at the state and forced a focus on the gender agenda even if it was done so by a threat of international embarrassment. The state's adoption of global gender mainstreaming discourses had positive and empowering effects on women's activists; it gave them and their work a sense of legitimacy and social acceptability. Activists could achieve state-level gains through these discourses, which also led to the configuration of power between the state, its women machineries, and global women's organization. However, the state's commitment to equality remained doubtful as its lack of commitment has always justified the basis of cultural diversity and "cultural values" as Suzanne Mubarak's statement at Beijing pointed out (Daly, 2009).

To shift from these initiatives that mark this historical moment in Egypt, and the discourses produced by it, I focus here on the counter discourses that emerged to limit the legitimacy and the potential of women's activists in this "golden era". As a result of the local and regional intersection through the international initiatives and conferences, what emerges are the debates on authenticity that deepen the local/global dichotomy, which simultaneously intersects with the practices of culture relativism (Daly, 2009). For example, in the issue of violence towards women such as female genital mutilation (FGM), the attempt by activists to leverage an international discourse on human rights is faced by a discourse that uses the duality of local/global in order to culturalize and to reframe the issue into religious and traditional discourses. This "Islamization, culturalization, and authenticating" of the issue usually

undermines the issue of violence itself and its legitimacy for public debate (Daly, 2009). Thus, these discourses function as a scapegoat and it distracts the activist's attention away from viewing cultural or traditional injustices as injustices. Moreover, the idea that women are the bearers of culture authenticity who safeguard "tradition" and "the authentic culture" burdens women activists with the continuous need to prove the legitimacy and authenticity of their causes, while those who seek to discredit them do not have to prove the same (Daly, 2009).

Another force that has functioned to limit the potentiality of women activists is the proliferation of NGOs that have blurred distinctions between "women's strategies of empowerment, and state and neo-liberal development ideologies" (Bagic, 2004). Bagic (2004) concludes that under the proliferation of NGOs, the "traditionally complex feminist agenda of emancipation and equality gets translated into specific single-issues with a state-oriented focus", and that, "feminist organization-building and institutionalization replace movement activism" (p. 20). Lebon (1997) also describes the situation where "collective work is no longer construed solely as a labor of love... but as a labor of love and bread (as cited in Daly, 2009, p. 65). Although these are global level analyses, they are very familiar to the MENA region and Egypt. On a regional level, Islah Jad (2004) negatively compares the NGO to the social movement arguing that we should not take for granted that NGOs are equivalent to healthy socio-political development.

In Egypt, Abdel-Rahman (2004) addresses the relation between NGOs and government in Egypt. She finds that the state's process of NGO co-option since Nasser's regime in the 1960s and 1970s "has dramatically shaped the image of NGO among local populations as well as among NGO members and has led to confusion about the identity and purpose of these organizations, leading many to associate them with government bureaucracy" (p. 128). The work



of Abdel-Rahman (2004) echoes Jad's (2004) emphasis that Arab women's professionalization in NGOs absorbed and destroyed previous women's movements. Jad clarifies too that with the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood, some of the NGOs took a political nature; thus, posing a threat on the political stability in the country. Consequently, the state began to implement a series of repressive laws to control NGOs. For example, Law 32 of 1964 morphed into Law 153 in 1999, and most recently has been overridden by Law 84 of 2002.

On 3<sup>rd</sup> of June 2002, Egypt's People's Assembly passed Law 84 of 2002, the NGO law. This law gives the government a number of political controls over the work of NGOs, among these controls is the restriction of NGO access to foreign funds and their ability to join international associations. This law is considered to be a reincarnation of Law 153 of 1999, which was found unconstitutional by the Egyptian Constitutional Court in June 2000 as it grants more power to the government over NGOs. Law 84 of 2002 gives the Ministry of Social Affairs extensive control over the operation of NGOs. For example, NGOs must be registered by the Ministry, which must also, approve nominees to the boards of directors of the directors of associations in advance of their appointment (Article 34), and NGOs may not be affiliated with any international organizations without prior approval of the Ministry (Article 16). Additionally, the Ministry has the right to liquidate any association including seizure of its property, confiscation of its papers and freezing its assets if it violates certain conditions (Article 42). Article 17 of the NGO's Law prohibits receipt of any funding from a foreign body whether it is based in or outside of Egypt, without the permission of the Ministry of Social affairs (El-Agati, 2013). This law also provides the Ministry of Social Affairs with the authority to determinate the political nature of an NGO work. For instance, Article 11 bans NGOs from practicing political and union activities that are restricted to political parties, trade unions, and professional

syndicates. In addition, NGO members who are not registered under the law of association may be subject to prosecution for carrying their work. Penalties include fines up to \$2000 and imprisonment for one year (El-Agati, 2013).

From the discussion above, one can conclude that through the NGO framework, women's activism has limited options feminist agenda. This analysis is supported by Jad's (2004) general assessment of regional trends in the Arab women's organization; she argues that,

"The Arab Women's NGOs in their actual forms and structures might be able to play a role in advocating Arab women's rights in the international arena, provide services for needy groups... and generate disseminate information. But, in order to affect a comprehensive, sustainable development and democratization, a different form of organization is needed with a different, locally grounded vision, and more sustainable power basis for social change" (p.16).

After Mubarak was unseated on 11 February 2011, with the hope of restructuring the state's institutions many activists were looking towards different frameworks raising questions and expectations regarding new modalities of women's activism .

## Methodology and Methods

The fieldwork for this thesis was conducted during May 2012 to March 2013. I relied primarily on interviewing women who participated in the revolution and on materials obtained from conferences. Additionally, flyers, brochures and booklets were also acquired from formal and informal meetings of women's groups, and observations from participants were recorded during my active participation in the revolution. I also observed and participated in two newly established women's groups during this period. This thesis furthermore relies on content and discourse analysis of secondary sources such as newspapers, books, press releases, statements, and petitions, prepared by women's groups, or obtained from YouTube videos, Facebook and blogs. I interviewed 30 women and one man who participated in the Egyptian revolution. I also

interviewed high profile women's rights 'professionals' who participated in the revolution and were engaged in the formulation of new women's groups and movements.

A postcolonial approach proves useful in studying gender and revolution as women's rights and gender projects are related to the larger economic and political configurations of power (Abu-Lughod, 1998). In the postcolonial world, women become powerful symbols of nations. This is especially relevant in revolutionary times when national identity is challenged and women become the markers of culture (Abu-lughod, 1998). Postcolonial theorists, such as Abu-Lughod (1998), emphasize how significant political moments and upheavals are characterized by a preoccupation with gender roles. In postcolonial nationalist projects, ideas about the 'authentic woman' are vital (Abu-Lughod, 1998, p. 18). In relation to this research, my use of postcolonial theory has less to do with the relation between the West and Egypt, and more to do with how these power relations influence national projects in Egypt and how women became central to the cultural demarcation against the West.

Research for this thesis draws on first hand experience as a member of many of the new emerging women groups. I am a co-founder of Sawa, the Nefsi Initiative Against Sexual Harassment, and the Bahia Ya Masr movement and a member of Itilaf Nes'aa Althawra Coalition. I have also served as an assistant to General Secretary of Women's Committee of the Social Democratic Party. Yet, most importantly, I am a participant of the 25<sup>th</sup> of January revolution. In my research I adopt an "imperceptible politics" which Stephenson (2008, p. X) defines as "the deployment of a new strategy of perception that traces disturbances rather than mirrors the existing conditions." From this perspective, materials such as YouTube videos, my own experiences of political activism, interviews, personal testimonies, legislations, and

ethnographic accounts, are all important sources for self-reflection and analytical engagement that focuses on disturbances within the system as opposed to the system itself.

CHAPTER TWO:  
BREAD, FREEDOM AND SOCIAL JUSTICE:  
WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN THE 25<sup>TH</sup> OF JANUARY REVOLUTION  
AND THE QUESTION OF GENDER

For most of history anonymous was a woman

Virginia Woolf

This chapter analyzes the participation of Egyptian women in the revolution of 25<sup>th</sup> of January 2011. I intend to explore how gender has been used during the revolution. I argue that gender plays a crucial role in the dynamics of the revolution in a way that determines the potential of its continuation. I am also interested in highlighting some individual narratives of women who participated in the protests during the 18 days of Tahrir. By doing so, I take into consideration what Rosen (1971) and others argue concerning the exclusion of women from general histories, and of women's history, in particular, has a serious problem that historians burdened it with stereotypes and prejudices of the present. It was the second wave feminism from the late 1960s that pointed to the lack of references to women in the standard text of history. Since then, feminists have contributed to the development of the field of social history or the history from below, by highlighting women experiences in different areas.

Stephenson (2008) argues that everyday experiences such as the development of informal networks are commonly neglected in accounts of social and political transformation, they do not constitute part of the grand narrative of social change. Likewise, Scott (1986) contends that the study of women forces a critical reexamination of the premises and standards

of existing scholarly work, and Hannam (2008) notes that the power relationships between women and men are just as important as that between social classes in understanding social change. In this chapter I present narratives of 28 Egyptian revolutionary women across different classes, ages and educational backgrounds. I argue that gender is a critical component of the Egyptian revolution by exploring how gender has been deployed by the revolution and counter-revolution. This chapter will focus on the “18 days of revolution” that took place in Tahrir Square and other squares of revolution in Egypt, which I call the first wave of revolution, whereas the second and third waves of revolution refer to the revolution against the Military Council and the ongoing revolution against the Muslim Brotherhood.

This chapter is based on in-depth interviews with women who participated during the 18 days of revolution from the period of May 2012 to March 2013. I also rely on information from the only two sources that aimed to document women's narratives on the 18 days revolution: the activist produced *Words of Women from the Egyptian Revolution* (YouTube) and *Women from the Square* (Bibars, 2011) in addition to my own experience as a participant in the revolution. At the time of writing, the situation in Egypt remains uncertain. Most Egyptian revolutionary youth and activists argue that revolutions are not one-shot events, rather, they are processes that may take years to unfold (Tadros, 2012) unlike the various constituencies that are invested in a clear beginning and end.

Many scholars such as Stacher (2001) argue that the configuration of an authoritarian political arrangement has generated an apathetic political culture in Egypt, others argue that there is a psychological readiness by Egyptians to accept de facto governments because of the long decades of oppression that Egyptian governments exercised over them (Dessouki, 1971).

Bayat's (2009) work challenges these frameworks that proclaim the Middle East to be politically passive and fail to recognize the internal social transformations caused by ordinary people. In an attempt to introduce alternative ways to understand the subjectivity of ordinary people unable to access collective politics, Bayat (2009) uses the notion of "quiet encroachment of the ordinary" (p. 45). His notion of quiet encroachment describes a grassroots non-movements as prolonged mobilization and collective action of non-collective actors without clear leadership or structured organization that can lead to social change. This constant challenge to power and authority, Bayat contends, makes not only social change but in some instances revolution possible. The level of Egyptian discontent prior to 2011 has been the subject of much recent reflection. Alexander (2011), for instance, refers to the 2003 protests against the US invasion of Iraq, the Kafeya (Enough) movement beginning in 2005, the 2006 revolt of the judges, and the 2006 and 2008 workers strikes and the 2010 demonstrations in Alexandria following the death of Khaled Said in police custody as "the holes in the wall of the dictatorship."

#### Gender, Power Relations and the Patrimonial State

On January 18, 2011, Asmaa Mahfouz, an Egyptian young woman activist was among the first voices that called for revolution through a recorded video that was publicized widely on YouTube and Facebook. Mahfouz is considered to be the young woman who began the first spark of the revolution in Egypt:

"I'm making this video to give you one simple message. We want to go down to Tahrir Square on January 25. If we still have honor and we want to live in dignity on this land, we have to go down on January 25. I, a girl, am going down to Tahrir Square, and I will stand-alone. And I'll hold up a banner. Whoever says it's not worth it because there will only be a handful of people, I want to tell him you are the reason behind this, and you are a traitor just like the president or any security cop who beats us in the streets. Your presence with us will make a difference, a big difference!

By stating that, “I, a girl, am going down to Tahrir Square, and I will stand alone. And I’ll hold up a banner,” Mahfouz (2011) intended to make use of the gender culture in Egypt and to challenge men's masculinity by conveying the message that it is shameful for a girl to go to the square while the men do not because they are afraid to join even if it is to "protect" the girls. Mahfouz used the culturally and socially constructed power relations between the sexes through gender relations to motivate people’s participation. This message shows how gender was a crucial element in the revolution from day one and how it is, as Scott (1986) argues, a primary signifying of the power relations in society and the field in which power is articulated.

The discourse that Mahfouz used relies on the notion of the fixed binary system of men and women; even though, they are "empty and overflowing" (Scott, 1986, p.1063-1064;Butler 1990) categories that are constructed by social interactions, and in consequence, are changeable. Women's position in social life is a product of how women's activities are perceived by society through social interaction, and by the meanings that are attached to them. Hence, it is important to understand how discourse we use as women, is effective in determining the position women have in society as a kind of social interaction. The discourse deployed by Mahfouz is based on a cultural understanding of the fixed male/female binary, which reinforces gender stereotypes of weak women who need to be protected (Scott 1986; Butler, 1990). Although this reductive discourse elides diverse everyday social realities and experiences that position women in diverse power dynamics, it was effective in motivating people to act. In the following chapter we will see how this discourse of protection changes when many women activists refuse it and defy the power relations that it was built upon. Additionally, I will also elaborate on how the participation of women provided a platform to defy this discourse, a platform that existed as a result of the social interactions that took place during the revolution, and how it has produced shifts in the



discourses while simultaneously, maintaining contradictions that never disappear. The investigation of the moment of the disrupt of the notion of fixity and duality, to what appears to be natural regarding gender relations in the social construction of society is a critical aspect of investigating how change occurs. It questions the social process of the creation of gender relationships and alters the male/female binary that threatens the entire system of power that social, political and economic paradigms are built on and thus promote change (Scott, 1986).

In the following section, I argue in detail, that in a certain historical moment there was a rupture in the power relations within society that include gender relations between women and men. This rupture caused by revolution, occurred also between the people and state leaders, or more specifically, between the younger generation and Mubarak who was for three decades, portrayed as the father of his people; a metaphor he himself used in his political discourse. The father metaphor is a clear example of a patrimonial conception of the state where autocratic oligarchs retain power and maintain order through "big man rule" or "personal rule" that legitimized the culturally framed exercise of power (Pitcher, Moran, & Jonston, 2009). Similarly, the references to "Mama Suzan" were used throughout the 1980s and 1990s. The generations that led the revolution grew up with the Mama Suzan metaphor used heavily in the media, for instance in the "Reading for All" summer projects.

The rhetoric of the patrimonial state remained powerful even as late as in Mubarak's abdication speech on February 1, 2011. Samah, a 26-year-old woman who works as a hairdresser to save money for her university education, decided to join the revolution on February 2, 2011 in response to "the Battle of the Camels" states:

"After the president's speech on Tuesday, I burst in tears and I could not sleep, I was saying to myself I had once forgiven my father for destroying my life, why we do not forgive Mubarak? He is the father of all of us. I decided in this night to go to the square when I wake up to speak with people and ask them to forgive him. I woke up on the news of Camel Battle. I saw the criminality that happened. I was screaming like insane and I just washed my face and went to the square and did not return home till Mubarak resigned" (Personal communication, July 8, 2011).

The patrimonial idiom of Mubarak as our father continued to be used even after he was toppled. It dominated the political discourse in Egypt, especially, as a strategy against the calls for Mubarak's trial. The "Sons of Mubarak" group founded in 2011 following his abdication accused the youth of the revolution of being ungrateful sons by saying, "He is like your father," and, "Consider him your father, brother!" Most of these debates occurred in the streets and on social media such as on Facebook pages, "We are sorry Mr. President" and "Mubarak's Sons".

This Mubarak/father dualism was prevalent in the political discourse during the months that followed his toppling and was revived every time his trial was being discussed. But the relation between Mubarak and the youth revolutionary shifted from "being their father" for 30 years to, "he is like..." and "consider" him your father in the political discourse and media. This shift marks a re-established relation between the Egyptian people and their leaders. It suggests that the political discourse may not be molded into a patriarchal frame again, as for the first time in their lives, the Egyptian youth feel that they have potential and are active persons who belong to their land. For example, Somaya Ibrahim, one of the women who I met in the square, is a 32-year-old mother from Aswan. Somaya married when she was 19 years old and later divorced. She explained that her participation in the revolution was motivated by her desire to provide a better future for her children, "I suffered from corruption, after my divorce my children and I get 125 pounds monthly as alimony although my ex-husband's income is in the thousands. Yet, he was able to get papers that state that his salary is very low" (Personal communication, June 10,

2011). After the ousting of Mubarak, Somaya stated, "My participation in the revolution changed me, I became stronger, now I can defend my rights and I will not relinquish them. I will sue my ex-husband again and I will fight for the rights of my children with appropriate alimony" (Personal communication, June 10, 2011). Somaya's participation in the revolution gave her the self-confidence and hope to continue in her struggle for alimony.

Egypt's economic, social and institutional crisis, and its disproportionate effects on youth and women, among others, accounted for their participation in the revolution. During the "18 days" it was common to see old people holding banners claiming the rights of their children. For example, in my interview with Magda Hashem, she observed the impressive participation of old people "An old man told me I am here for my son who graduated from university and cannot find a job". Another woman, Rasha Sayed Qenawi, pointed out the exacerbated situation and economic hardship of youth and women before the revolution,

"What provoked me most were Aisha Abdel-Hady's statements, the minister of manpower, who was sending Egyptian girls to work as maids in Gulf countries. We are not less than any other Arab countries, we were the first country who offers help to them but now we do not have dignity because of the regime" (personal communication, May 12, 2011).

Rania Ref'aat, a 34 year old lawyer who shares a flat with her sister in the working class neighborhood of Shubra, commented:

"I had to go to Tahrir, I did not have another choice, I was convinced that my life will not become better if the country's condition will not become better too, they are linked together, and this would not happen without a revolution" (personal communication, July 22, 2011).

Monalyza, who preferred not to use her real name as she is the daughter of one of the members of the previous regime, likewise stated that she participated in the revolution because "[she] heard from [her] friends that life in Egypt [became] very difficult" (Bibars, 2011).

The presence of women in the public sphere helped in the mobilization of women in the revolution. It is important to point out that by focusing on the participation of Egyptian women in the revolution, I do not wish to suggest that women were passive prior to 2011 or that they exhibited a surprising ability to participate. I draw attention to women's participation both for the historical record, but also to bring an emphasis to the fact that equal participation in the revolution entails (at least the expectation of) equal rights later.

The presence of Egyptian women in protests made international news headlines. The common western view of Egyptian women (and of Third World women in general), as Mohanty's (2003, p. 336) influential essay noted, was part and parcel of "a construction of Third World Women as a homogenous 'powerless' group often located as implicit victims of particular socio-economic systems." Yet, Egyptian women have played a central role in defying the regime -over the past 30 years until the day of the 2011 revolution. Irrespective of the shape and form of women's activism during the Mubarak regime, I argue that Egyptian women have contributed to the social mobilization needed for the revolution by their presence in public space and by fostering alternative discourses to challenge patriarchy through actions, although, they themselves did not necessarily recognize it as political.

#### Iskat el- Nizam: A Rupture in the Gender Order

Focusing on the 18 days of Tahrir Square does not mean that the Egyptian revolution was only 18 days long. As Elyachar (2012) argues, "the Egyptian revolution neither began nor ended in those 18 days before Mubarak stepped down". In fact, any researcher who intends to make

sense of what has happened during those 18 days has to draw on experiences she/he has had in the last few decades as the roots of revolution existed in the day-to-day struggles of citizens.

From the onset the “18 days” turned to be something unexpected. It is not the act of revolting that was unexpected but the mechanism, the process and the manifestation of the act itself. Zibechi (2010) argues that "the insurgency is a moment of rapture in which subjects display their capacities, their power as a capacity to do, and deploy them, revealing aspects hidden in moments of repose when there is little collective activity" (p. 11). This departure of the normativity and of status quo inspired me to write this thesis. What happened during the 18 days was the unleashing of the power of the popular sector, a power that people themselves never discovered before it was set free (Zibechi, 2010). I was fascinated by the spirit, values, and rules of Al-Midan (the square). In my imagination Al-Midan was the new Egypt I dreamt of, and even after changes were gradually imposed on it after the toppling of Mubarak, no one who participated in the the revolution in Tahrir can forget the moment, the space, the sociality.

Sabea (2012) describes this situation as “a ‘time out of time’”. It is about excising a slice of time out of the rhythm of the familiar (the ordinary and the known) and through that rupture (and an assumption of reconstitution), making it possible to imagine other modalities of being – in this case of the political and the social. This "time out of time” was articulated by the language of revolution as *Iskat-el nizam* that goes beyond the notion of toppling the president to the removal of the system of oppression regardless of its economic, social, or political roots. It is what Zibechi (2010) refers to as the born of a "different project [...] existing through the dispersion of state institutions" (p. 11). Similarly, Alexander (2011) argues that the dynamics of the revolution shows that the mobilization from below exerted a pressure that transformed and

deepened the relationship between the economic, political, and I add here, the "social" struggle too.

Many Egyptians who took to the streets on the National Police Day, on the 25<sup>th</sup> of January, revolted against the oppression of police that was entwined with various forms of injustice and repression that was exerted on citizens. In the heart of the system of oppression and injustice, women exist as one of the especially vulnerable groups in any society. Defying police oppression was one of the motivations behind the participation of many women in the revolution. Samya Abdel-lateef, a widow who lives with her three daughters, run sa small shop. Samya's daughters came from Alexandria to Tahrir Square to participate in the revolution as they saw it as a "symbol of freedom". Samya recalls

“I and my daughters were suffering from police officers and police secretaries; they used to harass us because we are women without a man. They arrested my daughter's husband more than ten times and they released him after we paid bribes they ask for. There was a thug who imposed on us to give him an amount of money every time he comes, and when I went to police to complain they close my shop and then I discovered that the thug works with them. We went to revolution because we are tired of this unjust life". (Bibars, 2011).

The significance of Iskat-el nizam lies in its challenge to the social and political system. It opens the door of new possibilities, modalities, and order. This exceptionalism of Tahrir or its "extra-ordinariness" was associated more with time than its spatial reality. Personally, it meant that I had the option of rebirth, to restart my life with a new potential. This extra-ordinariness of Tahrir was not in this modern or globalized-like-us revolution, but it was in the revival of everything that is truly genuine and authentic to Egyptian identity. It is constituted in the bases of its everydayness and in the making of midan life and in the "temporality" of its boundaries that is related to the disruption of the political and social ordinary frames (Sabea, 2012).

In the 18 days of the occupation of Tahrir, the square was divided into the following areas: the central part where tents existed, and cultural activities such as debates, singing, announcing statements are held, the checkpoints at the six entrances that territories the Square, the field clinics, and the front lines of fighting that were near the Egyptian museum and at the streets outside the checkpoints of the square. Occupiers of Tahrir Square formed what can be referred to as a community-like entity that performed autonomously. The state's authority over Tahrir Square was delegitimized. Zibechi (2010) argues that when the insurgency appears on the stage, acts such as in the blockades of roads, "fragmented the territory over which the state exercised its authority" (p. 12). This de-legitimization of the state's authority of the square was the articulation of a disruption of the system. This "disruption" of the 18 days opened the door to imagine a new socio-political order rather than rethink the already existing one. Bayat (2013) coins the term "Refolution" as an abstract political category to refer to something between revolution and reform. He states that "refolutionists" adopt a strategy of "refolution" that aim to compel the regime to reform itself rather than overthrow it (Ali, 2013). Ali (2013) argues that the terminology of "refolution" that Bayat uses to describe the 25<sup>th</sup> Revolution does not capture the essence of the process accurately. Ali points out that 'refolution' in Bayat's sense, does not tackle the cry of 2011 when the people wanted 'the downfall of the regime' not the 'reform' and that people used very clear slogans to call for the fall of the entire system, not just Mubarak. I argue, as one of the revolutionaries who took to streets in the revolution of 25<sup>th</sup> of January, that it was the first time when the Egyptian youth was occupied with the idea of change rather than on the idea of reform of the socio-political system. And I argue that at the heart of this system is the gender order.

Sholkamy (2012) agrees with Sabea (2012) that the revolution, or more specifically the 18 days of Tahrir, albeit temporary, represents a disconnect of the status quo. Sholkamy claims that the revolution was inclusive in the sense that everyone participated equally and not on a gendered basis. She even refers to the movement that included women and men who protested for democracy in Egypt as "gender neutral" (p. 3).

Magdy (2012) describes that the women who participated during the 18 days felt safe and joined young men in the sit-in staying for days away from their homes which is unusual in Egyptian society. The narrative of Samah, the divorced young woman referred to earlier, confirms this feeling of being safe in the square:

“In my first day in the square, I was very sad because I felt that I am alone and do not know any one because I did not participated since the first day and I do not have friends, but a woman came from Arish with nearly 15 guys called on me and asked who are you with? I told her I am alone, then she told me come you are not alone we all here one family. I stayed with her and used to go back home every two or three days to wash and change my clothes...When I was there my mother told me not to mention that I am a divorced woman or men will look at me lustfully; however, when I was telling them I am divorced they would only tell me tomorrow you will find a better man, I always felt that they were my brothers" (Personal communication, June 14, 2012).

Inclusiveness of Tahrir constituted Tahrir 's extra-ordinaries. During the 18 days of Tahrir one could encounter all spectra of Egyptian society. For women, dress code lost its significance among other forms of discrimination and stereotypes. In Tahrir you could meet niqabi, veiled, and unveiled women. Madeha Anwar Mohamed, a 20-year--old niqabi student at the Faculty of Commerce who participated in the revolution during the 18 days debunks the myths about face-veiled women "Some accuse leftists, seculars, and liberals of being heretics. No, they are not. I am one of them. I am a Muslim and I am a leftist" (Mortada, 2012). Nada Aziz recalls another example of this inclusiveness of Tahrir,



“As a Christian, the most important scenes of interest I saw in the vicinity of our tent were a group of ladies dressed in Niqab and a young man who might be belonging to the Muslim Brotherhood Group or Salafists. And one day that youth came to me and said, 'Take care of your sisters in the tent located behind you until I am back'. That was the moment when I actually felt the absence of religious racism" (Bibars, 2011).

Dina Abou El-Soud explains how she believed that the revolution has the potential to defy patriarchy as it defies the political regime

"I was sitting with people from outside the square to explain to them what our goals are and why we are here. I found a man yelling at me, telling me that, 'You are a girl and your place is home.' Then I found an old man telling him, 'After we had seen there is no difference between girls and boys, I do not want to hear you say this again, a girl like her is brave more than 100 men'. I never imagined that I would hear this from an Egyptian old man came from the countryside. I felt in this moment that the revolution is able to change the old worn traditions and to bring equality and nondiscrimination" (Personal communication, December 26, 2012).

The sentence "people from outside the square" in this narrative makes it clear that Tahrir or in the language of revolution the Midan, was considered by protestors as their home or as a new place that is disconnected from Mubarak's Egypt. The clash between the people of the Midan and the people outside it is an example of the tension between revolution and counter-revolution. The same logic is used and manifested later in the backlash on women and their rights.

In this temporal gender rupture or "gender-neutral" context, there was a suspension of what Butler (1990) refers to as "gender performativity". Butler argues that gender should be conceived as a fluid variable that changes and shifts according to different contexts and times and it is better to "understand gender as a relation among socially constituted subjects in specifiable contexts" (p. 7). I argue that in a "time out of time" gender performance of femininity and masculinity was put on hold. The boundary between the constituted genders was challenged during the 18 days to the point that it vanished. No specific act was defined to be that of women or of men as stated,

“I used to go to Tahrir with my sister every day till the unseated of Mubarak, we used to see girls and women with their children. Women were next to men all the time, I never felt that they are less than them, and there was a perfect atmosphere between women and men. They respected each other and they were speaking together without even knowing each other. I saw a new life being born in the eyes of people there” (Reem Mohamed Refa'at, personal communication, June 19, 2011).

As Butler (1990) argues, "we cannot assume that a stable subjectivity goes about performing various gender roles; but rather, it is the very act of performing gender that constitutes who we are" (Felluga, 2011). The role played by young women in the square, did not differ from that of men. Rania Refaat recollects, “In Tahrir, I was treated very well, we used to share everything among us, and the talk about girls and boys was nonsense. Tahrir was an example of the genuine Egyptian community” (Personal communication, June 19, 2011). In the square Rania formed a committee called, "The Popular Revolution Awareness Committee" as she explains, “there was a psychological war on people of the square” (Personal communication, June 19, 2011). Zibechi (2010) terms this a collective commonsense that is constructed in the heat of action.

Reem's sister comments on women's role in the square by stating, “There were women defending the borders of the square with men, other women used to break bricks, collect and distribute it on the ports of the square. I was between those who do this” (Personal communication, July 2, 2012). Magdy (2012) also comments on her participation in the revolution linking it to gender performance saying that before the revolution, "We are constantly aware of our gender and of being watched and judged because of it, so we end up ‘performing’” . But during the revolution Magdy (2012) points out that, “[I]n taking to the streets there are no performative acts and there is no audience”.

## Negotiating a Space for Women Protestors: Shifts in Identities

In Magdy's (2012) account on the 18 days, she describes Tahrir as a "gender bias free zone", where Egyptian women were just "Egyptians" and participated as citizens. Magda Soliman Hashem, is one of the thousands women who were in the square that I interviewed. She recalls the following angry exchange with her husband "I am not participating in the revolution as your wife; I am participating as a citizen" (Personal communication, August 7, 2012). In the end her husband not only agreed but also accompanied her to the square with their son. Magda is one of many women who were the cause behind the participation of complete families in the revolution; thus, women were effective in increasing the number of protestors that later guaranteed the success of revolution.

The same notion of citizenship is repeated in the narrative of Heba El Gammal "During the revolution days, Tahrir Square was based on the idea of citizenship, away from any gender distinctions, because we witnessed women contributing to each and every thing. I had a share in all activities taking place in the square" (Personal communication, August 19, 2012). Women's insistence on participating in the revolution as citizens evokes an interesting question about their identity in relation to time. I argue that within the conceptual framework of Tahrir as "time out of time," there was a continuous reconfiguration of women protestor's identities that related to time rather than space, as it is a stable variable. During the 18 days the only asserted identity among women protestors was as "Egyptian citizens". This identity has the potential to include women in the body of protestors. Subsequently , however, beginning with the March 8, 2011 international women's day a drastic shift slowly evolved. The attack on women on March 8 within the same space that was previously marked as a safe zone for women and as "gender neutral" brought back narratives of exclusion that the identity of women as women embodied.

Between inclusive and exclusive identities women protestors continued to negotiate their space for protests after the 18 days of Tahrir. With the rapid political events and changes, women protestors had to reinvent their identities in order to claim safer spaces for protests amid the increasingly brutal attacks on women protestors. Increasingly, women shifted the discourse from Egyptian female citizen to "mothers," such as the women that marched to protest the violence at the presidential palace set in . In response to the "Blue Bra" incident whereby a young woman was brutally beaten in women protestors used the language of "daughters of Egypt" in subsequent protests. Women protestors resorted to this discourse to assert that their honor is part of the nation's honor, a strategy that as Kandiyoti notes (1991) always already subsumes women's struggles within nationalist and familial projects.

#### Female Martyrs between Compromise and Oblivion

"Look what the Muslim Brothers have done! Those sons of dogs – they've wiped out her picture just because she isn't wearing a hijab." (quoted in Armbrust, 2013). These lines tell the story of Sally Zahran, the first woman martyr of January 25, 2011 revolution. Zahran was the only woman among the eleven martyrs in what remains the first and most well-known martyr poster first published in Al-Masry Al Youm newspaper on February 6, 2011. Zahran, a 23 year old woman was killed on January 28, 2011, also known as the Friday of Anger, by regime thugs. Zahran's unveiled image as center piece of the poster subsequently became a site of contestations over ownership of the revolution. In a subsequent television interview with her mother concerning the contradictory stories surrounding her death (alternative versions included her having jumped from her 9th floor balcony as her mother had prevented her from going to Tahrir), the mother was surrounded by Zahran's unveiled photos, which negated the previously

stated story of the veiled Zahran. The issue here is not about whether or not she was veiled, instead, it is to point out how this female martyr's story was compromised by different actors such as the Islamic groups and the late Mubarak regime. The image of Zahran has fueled a clash between liberal and Islamists as well as between revolution and anti-revolution groups. This controversy as to whether to consider Zahran as a martyr or not constitutes the only media or public engagement with the death of women martyr's. The implications of which shall become clearer in the following chapters.

## CHAPTER THREE:

### EGYPTIAN WOMEN ACTIVISTS MOBILIZATION AFTER 25<sup>TH</sup> OF JANUARY

In the literature prior to 2011 scholars and activists expressed their concern that young women in Egypt lack passion. Some attributed this to the professionalization of activism (Jad 2004), others to “a culture of exclusion” (Ibrahim 2007). Yet others focused more exclusively on the connections between youth and Islamic activism.

This type of activism targets student groups and encourages them to join Islamist activities through cultural events and gatherings that are sponsored by local mosques. These activities give room for youth to engage in society without the danger of government harassment that can result from political participation. It is also the nature of the authoritarian state in Egypt to restrict effective political participation as well as the effective role of NGOs in civil society (Bayat, 2000) .The process of Islamic activism includes the reordering of priorities or to a "transvaluation of values" for youth as Wickham describes,

This reordering or "transvaluation" of values indicates that the Islamic movement lessened graduate frustration not by providing the means to satisfy their aspirations for middle-class status, jobs, and lifestyles but by promoting goals more readily fulfilled within existing resources constraints. By redefining what was to be valued, the Islamists offered many young Egyptians a "solution" to the problems they faced in everyday life. (2004,240).

Through this "solution" of Islam, youth felt responsible to have some control over their situation of unemployment or underemployment. Hence, this form of Islamic voluntarism provides an alternative agency for youth, as well as an alternative "public pathway" as Ibrahim (2007) argues. This trend of activism has attracted a large number of young middle class women although its focus is not women's right (Daly, 2009).

The withdrawing of young women from feminism has been noticed not only in Egypt but also, globally. Harcourt (2006) argues that although young women are “a strong part of the mass revival of pro-peace, anti-globalization resistance and activism, [they] shy away from the women's movement” (p.21). In general, young women activism in Egypt over the last decades was caught between a lack of interest in feminism and an attraction to Islamist activism. This disinterest in feminism can be a result that many young women find being involved in the women's movement is exclusionary of many social issues that are priorities for them. Thus, they turned from women's issues towards broader claims (Daly, 2009).

However, in the years leading up to 2011 a number of initiatives emerged with the stated goal of building new and more critical kinds of feminist movements. Established in 2007, Nazra for Feminist Studies, articulated its vision as “thinking outside the box.” Critical of the inordinate focus on law and legal reform, the research-based organization thought to focus on gender in conventional and unconventional domains in all aspects of Egyptian public and private life. Their activities, including story-telling, were considered unconventional within the pre-2011 NGO infrastructure. The excessive focus on law, they argued, achieves short-term goals, demands engagement with the state, and hence reduces the women's movement to a mere checklist of issues to be negotiated with the regime. Prior to 2011 they regarded the NGO landscape inhabited by middle class liberal feminists that do not represent the majority of women in Egypt (Doaa Abdelaal, Personal communication, August 19, 2012). Interestingly in the aftermath of 2011, Nazra shifted their position arguing that at this very particular historical moment in which the constitution is a pressure point for advocacy and a reference for all laws and began work with coalitions to work towards a gender sensitive constitution (Salma Al-Naqash, Personal communication, June 25, 2013). In the following section I will give an overview of the shifts

that occurred in women activism, the nature of new women groups, as well as the new activities and strategies used by women activists in the post-2011 period. But before exploring the patterns of mobilization of women activists, I will revisit the notion of politics in order to include women political participation.

### Redefining Politics: Ordinary Women of Tahrir as Activists

In their work on informal political activities scholars such as Bayat (2000) and Singerman (1995) call for the expansion of the definition of politics. Bayat (2000) points out that although the poor are marginalized economically, politically and culturally, they establish their own "territorial social movement" (p. 539). Similarly, Singerman (1995) illustrated how ordinary Cairenes invent "avenues of political participation" (p. 4). Building on their arguments, I argue that every ordinary woman who participated in the revolution or in any public activity regarding women in the post-revolution period is an activist. According to Bayat's (2000) argument, the essence of activism is to give personal critical analyses, opinions, and motivations material power. I would argue that activism is also an engagement that seeks to offer a particular vision of change that goes beyond personal betterment, and challenges patriarchy by any means. This contributes to the broadening of the scope of women's participation in revolution to include all levels of participation by women in domestic spaces and in other governorates as Winegar (2012) and Abu-Lughod (2012) argue.

Thus, activism is not confined to certain activities. It encompasses all women who have struggles in their life to challenge the patriarchal structure in their societies including in the private realm. Thousands of women who actively participated in the revolution were subsequently perceived as inactive or passive when they returned home to their ordinary lives.



This (mis) reading equates the activist with a professional and hence becomes an exclusionary category.

During my research I observed that most women I interviewed who participated during the 18 days of the revolution and after, whether they went to Tahrir Square or joined the revolution in other governorates through different acts stated, they never had any political involvement before the revolution. However, as many elaborated on their daily activities before the revolution, I found a political essence in their activities, which they consider to be apolitical. In other words, their activities supported Skalli's (2006) argument that "women have been involved in shaping, impacting, and redefining the public sphere despite the often-institutionalized norms of exclusion and marginalization restricting their physical mobility and visibility" (p. 36). I argue that these acts helped the social mobilization that led to the revolution on the 25<sup>th</sup> of January as it created channels to challenge the system.

For example, Sara Sarhan, a 28 year-old Egyptian who spent the 18 days in the square explained that she had participated in the revolution simply because she wants to marry the guy she loves and not to be "sold" by her very conservative father "to the one who pays more" (Personal communication, August 23, 2012). She later added that if the revolution succeeds, youth would have a better life at finding a job and acquiring money, which would enable them to marry. After I had finished my research questions Sara and I continued to chat and she elaborated more on her personal experience. Sara works as an Arabic-language proofreader and theater actress. She is also a poetess, something that her father sees as a form of "atheism" so he used to prevent her from going to her work because he believes that her place should be at home. She later had to stop writing poetry, listening to music and acting on the stage. Sara used to challenge her father by insisting on going to work, by writing poetry on freedom and love, and

by acting in plays that criticize the social status quo under Mubarak. She sometimes had to go to her work very early in the day before her father awoke in order to avoid being held back. When I first met Sara she was veiled, but after few months of revolution, she unveiled. For me, this act of unveiling is another act of resistance as illustrated by Bayat (2000) when he states that on occasion both veiling and unveiling are considered symbols of resistance.

Sara was among those who told me that they had never been involved in anything political before the revolution even though she struggled with conservatism, patriarchy and authoritarianism. This phenomenon can be contributed to the prevalent definition of politics within the Egyptian context as "high politics", where politics is seen as being limited to the involvement in political parties or other formal institution (Sara Sarhan, Personal Communication, August 23, 2012). However, I argue that there were other channels through which Egyptians could and did challenge the regime and which were more effective than participating in the "cartoonist parties" – a term used to describe opposition parties that played the role of opposition only to legitimize the ruling party by adding a flavor of “healthy democratic political life.” Thus, an acknowledgment of the role of ordinary women in mobilizing the revolution should be highlighted and a redefinition of politics is required to include informal political activities to be able to highlight the political participation of women. In this thesis I use the term activist in its inclusionary sense to include all women and to highlight the informal political participation of women's groups that I am interested to focus on rather than high politics or institutionalized participation. In the following section I will elaborate on these informal politics of women's activists in an attempt to highlight the prominent shifts in the map of women's activism in post-Mubarak Egypt.

## Mapping Women's Activism Post 25<sup>th</sup> January 2011

### Proliferation of Young Women's Groups

In contrast to the dominant literature on young women's activism in Egypt pre-revolution and the anxieties of the retraction of young women from feminism, and their increased involvement in other forms of activism such as the Islamic activism (Daly, 2009), is the period after the revolution, namely in the few months that followed the unseating of Mubarak. Most of these groups are comprised of young middle and upper middle class women; many were never involved in activities related to women's issue nor did they volunteer or work in women's NGOs. For example, one of the first groups and perhaps, the first of all post January 2011 evolution women groups is Sawa (together), which was first known as Egyptian Women for Change (EW4C).

The core groups of Sawa, which I was a member of, was composed of seven young women, most of them were enrolled in a master's program in gender studies or political science at the American University in Cairo. They introduced themselves on their Facebook page, which was established on the 5<sup>th</sup> of February 2011, as "[...] a group of independent activists who really believe in the concepts of 25<sup>th</sup> January Revolution such as justice, equality and freedom, and would like to see it applied everywhere. Our main goal is working towards full equality of women and men in Egypt as part of this new change and as an implementation of those concepts that we all seek" (Sawa Movement, 2011)

Sawa's members stress that their main mission is, "Advocacy and activism for the inclusion and engagement of women in rebuilding the nation working towards full participation, equality, freedom and social justice for all". From my personal experience as a member of Sawa, what we really hoped for was to establish a women movement in Egypt. All members of the

group took part in the revolution and were filled with the revolution's enthusiasm, energy, and optimism. We believed in a promising future for Egypt and the main aim we hoped for was change. Change with its broad meaning that includes every aspect of everyday life for men and women. Dr.Hamdy Elhenawy, a lawyer and the only male member in the group, shares his vision about Sawa saying that, "This is a good first step towards restructuring. We need to build a movement on the ground after creating it on FB. This means being able to move fast within a revolution that is fast by its nature" (Sawa Movement, 2011).

Naiera Magdy, an M.A. candidate in political science at Cairo University and a member of the Sawa core group, explains that there were two main causes behind the establishment of Sawa. The first was their vision of the necessity to work on a constitution that would "guarantee full equality between men and women after Mubarak"; the second, was to form a network among women groups in order to create a grassroots women movement as a "simulation model of the Indian Women Union" (Personal Communication, August 9, 2012).

The mechanism that Sawa worked through was to divide themselves into three groups, a group who works on developing gender training for the public, a second group responsible for the media, and a third group to prepare a free newsletter on gender issues and the group's activities. Each group would have its own meetings and agenda and provide a feedback report on its activities during the general monthly meeting to the entire Sawa group. Sawa's first meeting was supposed to be on the February8, 2011 next to the irhal (leave) sign in Tahrir Square. On February 15, 2011, Sawa held its formal meeting in Heliopolis where they discussed their goals and the structure of the group. At the top on their agenda was their concern to shape the ideology of the group and to try find answers to core questions such as what inclusive mechanisms are needed to ensure that women's demands for social justice and change would heard as the

democratic process unfolds? How can women's capacity to participate in political processes such as the Constitution Commission, Legislative Assembly and other democratic institutions be strengthened? What should be done to support women's capacity for political leadership positions and positions in government? What structures, networks and institutions need to be developed so that women have strong advocacy grouping in order to negotiate their demands within the emerging political processes?

Another example of young women groups who share the same vision and orientation of Sawa is *itilaf nesa'a al tharwa* (the Coalition of Revolutionary Women). I have participated in some of their activities. Its founder Dina Abou Elsoud decided immediately after the unseating of Mubarak to establish the coalition, explaining that "the idea of establishing the coalition emerged after the deliberate marginalization of women that immediately follow the unseating, even youth of revolution told women, thank you, take aside, that is why we saw the importance of having such coalition" (Personal communication, December 20, 2012).

The mechanism of the *itilaf* was to work into two levels. First, through statements, conferences, and workshops to debate the current situation for women after onset of the revolution and second, to organize and participate in demonstrations and sits in. In fact, it is the only coalition of women that had a tent by its name in Tahrir Square during the sit-in of July 2011. At the day of this sit in, after being attacked by some protestors, Dina and I decided to write the demands we were protesting for on the tent. The protestors tore off the banner we wrote in spite of the fact that it included the same demands they were asking for, as we did not specify demands for women as women. These demands included economic rights, reform of the judiciary, and putting a stop to militant trails for civilians. The attack on the coalition's tent was

an indicator of the objection of the presence of women themselves more than of their demands. Something that is utterly different than the reality of the 18 days I discussed earlier.

### Young Women Activists: Challenges and Obstacles in the Way

Although these young women groups are promising and leading gender initiatives that appear to be independent and not under the umbrella of another NGO as with some other groups, which I will illustrate later on, they have faced challenges that not only limit their potentiality but also, have led some of them to stop their activities such as the case of Sawa. Although Sawa could have had a clearer vision, mission, and internal structure, it still would not have been able to continue its activities. In my point of view this may be happened because of the lack of adequacy in mobilizing people towards women's issue, the lack of experience in dealing with the street, and insufficient funds. As Naiera comments, the problem of dealing with people in the street was the first disappointment of the group,

"We had to change our way in dealing with people in the street because our first contact with them on 8<sup>th</sup> of March was terrible, the way we were dressed and our English made people in the street reject us, even our logic was too sophisticated and unacceptable for them" (Personal communication, August 9, 2012)

The same point of the technique they had to reinvent to reach people was stressed by Nada Rafik, another member of Sawa states,

"From the conversations I had yesterday with those in Tahrir, I can now understand that these people could not care less about women rights. We need to start thinking about convincing them through looking at the issue from a wider perspective: How will women rights benefit Egypt as a whole? I was thinking we can start researching about countries where women are actively participating, and gathering facts about the economic, political and social development that were a result of these women being in the lead." (Sawa Movement, 2011).

What is mentioned above was not the only and most important reason behind the stop of Sawa, Naiera argues that there were many causes that led them to stop their activity,

"There were other factors that prevented us from progress, it was the time and the atmosphere where we worked in. It was very unacceptable and inappropriate to talk about women's cause while people are dying in the streets, every day in Egypt we had people who are dying in protests and strikes, this had a great impact on our activities and succeeded to silence us. Then the final actor was the parliamentary election, which was a good strategy to distract people... However, we did not disappear we still have connections and the same active people of Sawa are now members of another groups and political parties. We did not disappear we are the seed of many new groups; for example, Bahia Ya Masr." (Personal communication, August 9, 2012).

These challenges were not only confined to the Sawa group, but for most women groups that have proliferated pre-revolution, there were nearly more than fifteen small groups. In addition to the problem of funding, Abou Elsoud points out that the atmosphere of women's activism itself is not comfortable as the relationship between new young women group and the already pre-revolution established NGOs is defined more by competition than cooperation. They are usually competing for funds and protecting their interests.

From personal experience, I can add to Abou Elsoud's statement that there has been a very strong tendency from these pre-revolution NGOs to control or to absorb new young women's groups into their organization. Sometimes they offer them logistical support such as headquarters, as in the case of Sawa, and other times, by inviting new groups to cooperate and campaign with them. However, when it came to the campaign, young women groups were treated as volunteers who received orders from older organization's leaders even though the young women groups brainstormed some of the ideas of the campaign. Additionally, I noticed an imbalance of power relations between pre-revolution women's organizations that is derived from their networks, relations, experience and finance resources and the new young women groups who just have creative ideas and enthusiasm. In most cases, young women groups refused to

work under the umbrella of old organizations. They feared they would have to compromise their independency and were wary of the legacy these young women have about the ineffectiveness and bureaucracy of women organizations before the revolution in addition, to the perception of these organizations as being part of the toppled regime.

#### Pre-revolution NGOs and Post-25<sup>th</sup> of January Survival Strategies

Amid this context of the proliferation of young women's groups and their attitude towards them as being ineffective and part of the legacy of the previous regime, pre-revolution NGOs were in a difficult position to mobilize and gain balance through two strategies. They began to establish their own young women groups that work under the umbrella of the mother organization, which I refer to as dependent groups. These dependent groups not only cooperated with other surviving independent new groups, but it could also attract active members of the other unsuccessful new groups. Examples of these dependent young women groups is Fouada Watch that is established by Appropriate Communication Techniques for Development NGO (ACT) and mn gher teh marbota elbalad msh mazbota (without the T'a the country is not balanced), the T'a in the alphabetical of the Arabic language is the feminization article, established by Alliance of Arab Women organization (AAW) on 2012.

The Fouada Watch group introduces itself as a human rights initiative that was established in July 2012 to monitor the performance of the elected president regarding women's issues and human rights. The name of the initiative is adopted from the name of a protagonist female character in the film She'a Mn el khouf (Something of Fear), one of the Egyptian cinema classics. It is a well-known symbol of the woman who stood in the face of tyranny and saved her village. Fouada Watch works via two mechanisms, a 24-hour hotline to receive complaints about



violations against women and through monitoring written, visual, and social media. For instance, they monitor official websites of political parties, ministries and feminist groups in order to issue a monthly report. Later on, Fouada Watch have broaden the scope of its activities to go beyond monitoring or preparing reports to engage in other activities regarding sexual harassment and political issues. Fouada Watch works as a young women's group with its own campaigns that are monitored by ACT.

Another example of the dependent young women group is the Teh Marbota initiative that was established late in 2012 by AAW as a youth initiative that aimed to challenge the stereotypes of women in society. However, when I interviewed Iman Darwish who is responsible of this initiative, she complained of an over control on the activities of the initiative from the leaders of AAW. Here, the gap between generations appears clearly as well as the tendency to dominant youth activities, which I mentioned above, seems to be a current theme in many of the cases. This strategy was effective as a form of structural renewal to incite flexibility and to increase their contact with street politics in order avoid marginalization by the revolutionary new women's groups who deem them as being un-revolutionary through criticizing their professionalization of activism.

The second strategy that women's NGOs used to strengthen their position and restore balance after the toppling of the regime, which was also a strong supporter to them was the constitution of coalitions. Women's NGOs used this strategy to confront the backlash on women rights that emerged pre-revolution. One of the first suggestions for unions and coalitions was in the first national women conference held in June 2011, The National Conference for Civic Society: Egyptian Women are partners in the Revolution. It was organized by Alliance for Arab Women (AAW) as a revival of the Egyptian Feminist Union founded by Huda Sh'arawi in 1923

and dissolved in the 1950s. The AAW succeeded in officially registering the Feminist Union (FU) on 22<sup>nd</sup> of November 2011. The founders of the FU include fifteen NGOs from different governorates. The FU has a clear and organized administrative structure that may be effective in facilitating its mission. It can be considered as a parallel civil society's entity to the governmental NCW. The message of the FU, which is currently undergoing preparation for publication at the time of writing this thesis, states,

"The FU works in collaboration with various other community agencies on the empowerment of all women categories for full exercise of their human rights and to be able to fulfill the needs of their community. It also works on their effective participation in policy-making, legislation and public decisions to achieve equality and democracy."  
(Egyptian Feminist Union, under publication)

The second example I refer to is the Coalition of Feminist Organizations (FO) known also as Coalition of Women NGOs. This coalition also consists of fifteen NGOs and is open to other organizations and public figures. FO seeks to provide an honorable female model for collective action that can inspire wider circles of the participants in the public work of those who are looking to establish a democratic civil state. One of the first activities FO has done was to send a request document in 2011 to Ali El Selmy and Deputy Prime Minister Essam Sharaf for Political Development and Democratization, who was in charge of preparing the documents for the constitutional principles that the government was working on when drafting the new constitution. The FO's document demands him to include the basic demands of women and men of Egypt without any form of discrimination, assert that constitutional principles should be inspired from the values of the revolution, freedom, social justice, human dignity, in the official document of the government. FO's document was a step taken with regards to the drafting of the new constitution. In 2012, most of the organizations joined the coalition worked diligently to prepare several studies and documents on the proposed constitutional principles for the drafting

of the new constitution. The final document they prepared on the proposed constitution, *Introduction on Women in Constitutions and the Documents of Constitutional Principles: The Standards of Constitutional Assembly and Women's Demands* was published in April 2012. This leads me to highlight the main concerns or causes that women's activists and organizations gathered around since the unseating of Mubarak while exploring their reaction.

### Main Concerns, Main Camps

In the following sections I will assemble women groups and their activities into two main camps: the first camp is focused on the resistance against the legal backlash on women especially in the constitution and family law, and the second camp that works mainly on the topic of sexual harassment. These two trajectories and topics are the undercurrent themes for most of the mobilization of women activists in the post-Mubarak period.

### The Council of Wise Men: Writing the New Constitution and Women Activists

Immediately after Mubarak left office Egyptian women were excluded. On the 14<sup>th</sup> of February, the Egyptian constitution was suspended and an all male committee of 8 members was appointed by SCAF to draft the amendments to the new constitution as a preparation for the upcoming parliamentary and presidential election. Women activists called the committee, "the council of wise men" because it did not include a single woman despite the fact that there are also qualified female Egyptian lawyers such as Egypt's first female judge Tahani El Gebali, who appointed to the Constitutional Court in 2003 (Power, 2011). The proposed constitutional changes made by this committee addressed articles 75, 76, 88, 93, 139, 148, and 189. As a reaction from women activists, a newly formed coalition of women's NGOs called, The

Egyptian Coalition for Civic Education and Women's Participation, led by the Egyptian Center for Women Rights (ECWR), submitted a petition to SCAF expressing their objection to the amendment of Article 75 and called for a rewording. Article 75 states that, "Egypt's President is born to two Egyptian parents and cannot be married to a non-Egyptian woman. Neither he nor his parents shall have another nationality except the Egyptian one. He shall practice his own civil and political rights".

According to the petition, Article 75 limits the presidency to men, as the translation states that the Egyptian president cannot be married to a non-Egyptian woman. In this way, the statement indicates that president can only be a man. The ECWR suggested the text be rephrased to "[...] cannot be married to a non Egyptian." When women NGOs protested, those in charge argued that the Arabic language allows masculine nouns to include women. But Nehad Abul Kumsan, chair of the ECWR and a lawyer expert in Islamic Shari'a, explained how the Arabic language does not have a noun as a reference to both men and women. Following this debate on whether the constitution amendments guarantee women the right to run for presidency election or not, a woman activist Bothina Kamel decided to run for election as an attempt to assert the right for women to be president. Even though she expected to lose in the election, she explains that,

"There has to be a practical example for women, especially because women have participated before, during, and after the revolution, whether in Tahrir Square, planning for the events, confronting bullets, and taking care of the injured people. By putting myself forward, I am making Egypt a real democratic country. When I first said that I was nominating myself, many were surprised and shocked by such a decision, but now they have begun to see me as a courageous candidate, as they know that I was among the protesters from the beginning." (Ruta, 2012).

Kamel was the only female candidate among the eleven candidates of the first presidency election after the 25<sup>th</sup> of January revolution. She is also the first woman in Egypt's history to run

for the presidency. Only once before in 2005, Nawal El Saadawi, an Egyptian feminist, tried to run for the presidency but later withdrew from the ballot (Ruta, 2012). Some women's groups and activists mobilized behind Kamel to support her in her electoral campaign and became advocates to the right of a woman to be president. Occasionally, they referred to the need for new reinterpretations of Islamic Shari'a, which in fact guarantees this right for Muslim woman.

This was not the first time that women activists resorted to Islamic Shari'a in their advocacy. A tendency to shift toward a more Islamic language has been noticed by NGOs as well as by some new groups in the post-Mubarak period. But later on, the liberal feminist framework became dominant, especially as a reaction to the strong presence of political Islam forces. I argue that the third phase of the Egyptian revolution against political Islam has more of a feminist agenda while most women activists struggled to cling to their secular identity. After the debates on constitutional amendments, women activists continued to struggle in hopes of obtaining a civic constitution that guarantees Egyptians full citizenship rights while simultaneously, reflecting the principles of the revolution, freedom, social justice, and human dignity. During the process of writing the new constitution, the Egyptian Parliament chose a Constitutional Assembly to draft it. One of the newly emerged women pressure groups, which I am a co-founder, Bahya Ya Masr (Cheerful Egypt), prepared a list of 100 names, followed by another list of 150 names of Egyptian women calibers and leaders from different fields such as legal experts, writers, journalists, scientists, activists and lawyers. Each of the names represented a woman who is qualified to effectively contribute to write the new constitution. The importance of the constitution for women's groups is clarified by Sally Zohney, one of Bahya's members who states that, “[the] constitution is a new social contract that can effectively guarantee full citizenship to

all, reinforce the rights of women and assure them a life of dignity” (Personal communication, June 28, 2012).

During the process of drafting a new constitution, some women activists prepared studies on articles that should be included. In a press conference on the 17<sup>th</sup> of July 2012, the Alliance for Arab Women, the Egyptian Feminist Union, and the coalition of Egyptian Feminist Organization announced the issuance of two documents pertaining to women in the Egyptian constitution. These documents are supposed to be submitted to the president after a press conference. The first document Equal Rights and Freedom For Women is a booklet prepared in May 2012 by the Egyptian Feminist Union and the Alliance for Arab Women as a part of the cooperation between the UN Women, Egyptian Feminist Union, and the Alliance for Arab Women's project outputs. The document reviews articles included in the human rights declaration in the UN Conventions as well as the new Arab and Islamic Constitutions. Inside the booklet it is written that the document is prepared to "advise that the Higher Constitution Committee should include in the new Egyptian constitution the already ratified articles from the United Nations conventions that are concerned with equal rights for all citizens and whatever is pertaining in the new constitutions of the region" (Equal Rights and Freedom for Women, 2012). The document affirms that Egypt should confirm its ratification on the UN Convention of the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). It is worth noting here that this demand is a reaction to Islamist voices that have demanded the elimination of CEDAW. The document also suggests the inclusion of 28 articles to the new Egyptian Constitution based on UN Conventions and some of the new Arab and Islamic constitutions such as Iraq, Tunisia, Libya, Algeria, Syria, and Afghanistan. The proposed articles focus on the following five areas: the fundamental principles, women's political rights, women's right to education, women's

economic rights, and women's legal rights (Equal Rights and Freedom for Women, 2012). The document was also accompanied with an appendix that includes the remarks of members of the Feminist Union from different governorates in an attempt cover a wide scope of debate on a certain fraction of women activists.

The second document that was announced during this press conference was the document prepared by the Coalition of Feminist Organizations titled, Introduction on Women in Constitutions and the Documents of constitutional Principles: The Standards of Constitutional Assembly and Women's Demands (The Women's Demand and Constitution Document). This document suggests 14 articles to be included in the new constitution. The suggested articles vary in wording but not content from the Feminist Union's version.

The Collation of Feminist Organizations' document was originally opened to discussion in an open conference on the 28<sup>th</sup> of April 2012, which I was invited to as an activist and a member of the Egyptian Social Democratic political party. The conference held under the title of Women's Demands and Constitution offered the opportunity of participation to a wide range of activists and women who are interested from all governorates to add their remarks to the document. This happened through workshops as a part of the conference before the announcement of the final draft of the document. The document also includes other organization's work papers that have been done on the constitution. Examples of these can be found in the submissions made by ACT NGO and New Woman organizations that are members of the coalition. The aim of this document was to unify the work on the constitution by combining work that was completed by 15 women's organizations into one inclusive document under the umbrella of this coalition. It is a part of the coalition's agenda to introduce a feminist

perception of the new constitution, a task that the Women and Memory Forum, a member of the coalition, has been working on since May 2011.

Both documents submitted by Equal Rights and Women's Demands were supported and represented in the press conference by the women's committees in Egyptian Social Democratic (ESDP) and Socialist Popular Alliance political parties. As a member of ESDP's women's committee, I point out that women's committee in the party adopted the first draft done by Women and Constitution group. The committee intensively worked on the draft for a month during March 2012 before presenting it in the open conference of the coalition in April 2012. The trend of cooperation between political parties and women NGOs that I have observed will be elaborated in the next section. Another example of the studies that women's activists have prepared during the process of drafting the new Egyptian constitution is a study prepared by Abu El-Kumsan (2012), the Chair of the Egyptian Center for Women's Rights (ECWR). Abu El-Kumsan (2012) prepared a booklet entitled, Ensure Equality between Women and Men in the Constitution, a fifteen paged booklet published by UN Women and ECWR that reviews women's rights in the constitutions of number of countries that underwent transitions. The booklet aims to serve as a guide to the constitution drafting committee. In the following section, I will represent a shift in the mechanism of mobilization different than preparing studies and drafts of proposed articles that women activist aspired to include in the new constitution of 2012.

#### The First Draft of the Proposed Constitution: A Shift in the Mechanism of Mobilization

It is important to clarify that women's organizations and activists did not mobilize only by preparing studies and documents or by suggesting the inclusion of articles in the new constitution through conferences and workshops. Instead, there was another level of mobilization



that took place after the issuing of the first draft of the proposed constitution in October 2012. At this stage, new women groups took the lead in mobilizing other political forces to protest against Article 36 in the first draft of the proposed constitution. This same article has been changed to be Article 68 in the second draft. To clarify, the post-Mubarak new independent women groups instead of NGOs have basically adopted this level of mobilization; however, NGOs and political parties participated and supported the mobilization. This shift in the mechanism of mobilization was done by a new independent women's group such as Bahya Ya Masr make it worthwhile to study, which will be done in the next section.

On the 2<sup>nd</sup> of October 2012 Bahya Ya Masr called for a stand to denounce the first draft of the proposed constitution. On this day I witnessed a large number of different political groups that staged a stand and held a press conference in front of the Shura Council while the constituent assembly that worked on drafting the constitution was convened there. The protesters affirmed that the proposed Article 36/68 threatens women rights and puts women's equality at risk. The controversial article states that the state will reinforce gender equality in all spheres but in accordance with the interpretation of Shari'a (Islamic law). The problem here is in the replacement of the word "principles" of Shari'a, which are defined by the word "its interpretations". This shifts the meaning of the sentence dramatically because the interpretation of Shari'a is undefined,, or is it a concrete set of rules or principles. In fact, the interpretations are opened to change according to a person's understanding. Activists and rights group argue that certain interpretations of Islamic texts may undermine women in all spheres because these interpretations can be easily used to suit the purposes of some Islamists to dominate women in the name of religion; thus it is a risky framework to view and discuss about women's rights.

The Shura stand was an effective pressure tool that has led to the replacement of Article 36 by 68 in the second draft. It also gained international attention as being the first, and possibly, the only political stand against the new constitution drafts in Egypt. On the 8<sup>th</sup> of October 2012, after the sixth day of the Shura stand, the Human Rights Watch (HRW) sent a letter to the Egyptian Constituent Assembly announcing that while the draft provides some basic political and economic rights it falls short, according to international law, to provide rights for women and children. In the section of women rights in the letter, HRW (2012) recommends that "the Constituent Assembly delete the term 'rulings of Shari'a' to ensure a clear commitment by the state to gender equality in draft of Article 36".

However, this replacement lost its meaning with the addition of Article 219 in the final draft. Article 219 is considered to be complementary to the already modified 2012 version of Article 2, which states, "Islam is the state religion, and Arabic language is its official language, and the principles of Islamic Shari'a are the primary source for legislation." Following Article 2 is the addition of Article 219, which states, "The principles of Islamic Shari'a include general evidence, foundational rules, rules of jurisprudence [fiqh], and credible sources accepted in Sunni doctrines and by the larger community" (Yaccoub, 2012). Thus, whatever rights are given to women in this constitution, are subjected to the interpretations of an undefined set of fiqh rules and faqeh (a man who studied fiqh) for purposes of comprehension and implementation. In this way the unaccepted content of the replaced Article 36, which was previously discusses, is still upheld but in an indirect form. That is why even after the success achieved by women activists to replace Article 36, women activists continued their struggle against the new constitution until the day of the national referendum poll.

On Wednesday the 19<sup>th</sup> of December 2012 and before the second phase of the national referendum poll that was scheduled on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of December 2012, Bahya Ya Masr organized another stand under the statue of Nahdet Masr in Giza, one of the largest squares in Cairo. All protestors held signs that read, "Void", in an indication of their rejection of the new constitution. Women raised the signs directing them to traffic to invite people to vote “No” against the constitution. This stand was a women-only stand; not in the sense that men are not allowed to participate but the stand was mainly to declare women's attitude regarding the constitution. In addition, the number of male participants was very limited. Only a few men participated at the end of the stand and kept cheering against the constitution, the Muslim Brotherhood, and Islamists as most of the members of the Constituent Assembly were affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood and Salafis, another religious conservative group. From one legal battle to another, woman activists had to fight against another legal framework. The next section will discuss the struggle they encountered with regards to family and personal laws during this period.

#### They are not Suzan's Laws

Since Mubarak's unseating, Salafi groups have denounced the legislative reforms passed between 2000-2009 that provided some increased protection for women's rights deeming them “illegitimate” and incompatible with Shari'a. They have called for the repeal of laws granting mothers' parental authority and custody of children. They also used the term "Suzan's Laws" to attack any legalizations that benefited women to stigmatize it as part of the previous regime's legacy that should be abolished. Abu El Kumsan, the head of ECW comments on this by saying, “Since the revolution, some groups have been attacking the existing family laws. They are trying

to take us back to square one. So right now instead of trying to move forward with reform we are just trying to save what we have” (Personal communication, October 6, 2012).

In March 2012, the Egyptian Social Democratic and the Socialist Popular Alliance political parties in cooperation with Incubator Mothers Organization launched a campaign called, Our Rights are not a Guarantee from Corruptors in order to convey a message that the rights that women already have are a result of a long struggle; they are not something that has been guaranteed to them by a previous regime or the first lady. The campaign aimed to fight against the attempts of Islamists to link between women's right and old regime in order to abolish them. What is interesting about this campaign is that it is an example of the new trend of cooperation between the liberal and left political parties and between new women groups and NGOs. This formula has become common in most, if not all, activities and mobilization associated with women's issues during this period. At this point, all the actors collaborated in hopes of reaching the same outcome. This networking and cooperation between political parties, women's NGOs, and women groups manifested when the same member of an NGO can be a member of a political party and also, a member of more than one women's groups at the same time. On this post-Mubarak period formula Nevine Ebeid, a member of the ESDP, the Feminist Organization's Coalition and the New Woman Organization affirms, "No, this formula did not exist before, the Co-operation between political parties and women's NGOs only emerged in the post-Mubarak period" (Personal interview, October 19, 2012). Actually, this new trend helped to narrow the gap between political parties, independent activists, and NGOs, in order to facilitate coordination

However, it is worth noting that this cooperation between political parties, those established in the post Mubarak period or those that existed pre-revolution, and women's groups does not necessarily indicate that these liberal parties are champions of women's issues. In fact,

some women activists and in specific women's committees in these parties have had long term struggles with their parties' leadership in order to push for women issues inside the parties' committees, the internal regulation and the electoral lists of these parties. Dr. Hoda Elsadda, a founding member of the Women and Memory forum and a member of the post-Mubarak Egyptian Social Democratic (SDP) Political Party reflects on this situation saying that unfortunately, “Political groups do not make women's rights a priority. This includes both liberal and Islamist parties. None of the political parties challenged the fact that no quota was imposed for women. Women's rights were compromised by all political groups” (Personal interview, April 2012). This indicates that a long unpaved road is waiting for women activists, a road that is filled with struggles that will shape the future of women movement for the few upcoming years.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### TAHRIR SQUARE AND AGITATIONAL POLITICS

Egyptian women have faced a serious problem with sexual assaults that dramatically increased in the post-Mubarak period. In this chapter, I focus on new tactics invented by women groups to resist the explosion of this recent phenomenon. Before addressing the reaction of the women's group against the sexual abuse, I will elaborate on the problem itself that led them to such mobilization. I use the word sexual abuse instead of assaults because the violence women have recently faced goes beyond the meaning of assaults and closer to the form of sexual crimes, which are sometimes organized, as I will discuss in following sections.

#### Restoring the Order?

As I have argued in previous chapters, that the first 18 days of revolution caused a “rupture” in the gender order that was in the heart of the calls for Iskat el Nizam. What has happened after those 18 days were repeated attempts to restore the balance and counter the calls for change via the social, economic and political system by restricting the revolution to the political, or in other words, to empty the revolution from its meaning. This process of repressing the revolution's possibilities has been driven by the remnants of the regime, the military council, and recently by the Muslim Brotherhood in order to gain domination. As Connell (2001) argues, one way to restore the gender order is to reassert domination as violence, which I argue is essential for the revolution to continue. Connell (2001) also clarifies that violence itself is a sign of a crisis in gender order because if hierarchy were legitimate, there would not be a need for violence to maintain it; thus, violence is a part of the system of domination, and violence ranges

from sexual assaults to rape to murder. Following Connell's (2001) argument, I argue that violence is in the heart of repressing the revolution.

Here I focus on the sexual violence against revolutionaries that has only targeted -women protestors because they are women , in other words, gender based violence as a tool used to end the revolution. To reiterate my argument in chapter one, the revolution of 25<sup>th</sup> of January is a national project where women are seen within this national framework as the bearer of honor for the nation and in this sense, the honor of the revolution. Although, I am against this discriminatory frame that renders women vulnerable to violence from multiple political formations, the framework applies to the dynamics of counter-revolution within Egypt. In fact, sexual torture existed as a pre-revolution mechanism used by the old regime towards women activists during waves of political protests. For example, in the period between 2003-2006 the security state intensified its policy to "harass, sexualize and torture" women activists to undermine their status as political agents and as citizens, meanwhile there was a process of "thugification" by the Egyptian police (Amar, 2011). I see a need to question the term "thugification" used by Amar (2011).

In Egypt, recent public debates excessive usage of the label thug or baltagi has been used by all actors to refer to anyone who has a different ideology, affiliation, or social class. In this context of what I call, 'we all baltagi now', there is a big question as to what exactly is meant by this classification? Another point that I would like to question in Amar's (2011) argument is that women were used in the revolution to defy the "baltagi effect", which the state tried to portray the protestors as a group of angry mob or rioters. Amar (2011) argues that having 'respectable' (i.e. upper-middle class) women in mass protests could have a symbolic effect to defy this baltagi effect. However, I argue that if we can have a concrete definition of who is considered a

baltagi, which is a fluid terminology, what then, is the definition of “respectable women”? Is respectability defined only by the social class? And why women are not considered to be thugs? Is it an exclusively masculine classification? And finally, do only middle and upper class women join the revolution? For the last question the answer is of course, “No” as I have previously clarified at the start of this thesis that the revolution has not been owned by a certain class or group but instead, the revolution has been inclusionary in a unique form where all women and men from all social classes and backgrounds have participated in.

Although sexual torture existed before the revolution, after the 18 days of Tahrir, Egypt witnessed an escalation in violence against women when they were targeted by security forces and their thugs and recently, by the Muslim Brotherhood militia. I argue that such violence needs to be understood in its political context. It was on the 8<sup>th</sup> of March 2011 that women activists first faced aggression, hostility, and harassment in Tahrir Square. According to Sholkamy (2012), there were more than just protests that day in Tahrir, but the women’s march was the only one that was attacked where women were told to go back to their kitchens. What strikes me about this march is not that women's demands were rejected or of noticeability of the gap between ordinary people and feminism, but it is the logic of the harassment to send women home. This logic has been adopted by security forces alongside the production of public discourses such as, "What took her there?", a discourse that blames the woman who is being harassed for being at the place of the harassment. Through such discourses, state violence against women is legitimized, and the defamation of women activists and protestors become acceptable. In fact, the first time this illogical discourse was produced in media was after a young woman was beaten, dragged, and her clothing stripped off by military soldiers. The blue bra woman was



a trigger for thousands of women who took to the street on the 20<sup>th</sup> of December 2012 to denounce the violence of the military council and to call for the end of military rule.

The discourse of "What took her there?" was also strongly supported by some societal forces such as the Muslim Brotherhood. For example, the General Security of Women Committee in Muslim Brotherhood Freedom and Justice Political Party, Manal Abu Al Hassan, declared that they did not participate in the march known as "Hara'er march" because the women who participated are funded by foreigners who have their own agendas. She also states that "it is offensive to women's dignity to go out to defend her right, does not she have a husband, a brother, a son to defend her?" (Shark Al Awsat, personal communication, January 24, 2012). I argue that forces such as the Muslim Brotherhood who participate in the revolution on the 28<sup>th</sup> of January 2011, three days after of its beginning, has participated with their own agenda, which differs from the broader calls of Iskat Al Nizam in which the political change and so-called democratic elections is just a part of. Although, the massive change of the system was in the heart of the revolution, it is only the cultural dimension that is witnessing great changes after he Muslim Brotherhood took authority, which was unfortunately accompanied by failure in economic and political dimensions. The problem is that this change in culture is recognized to be very hostile against women, one that incites anxiety in liberal women and pushes them to strategize and mobilize against it. Returning to the escalation of violence towards women from security forces and police during and after the 18 days as Rasha Azab, one of the founders of No to Military Trails for Civilians, says, "The torture was ugly, even during the 18 days... I got arrested, beaten and taken to the military zone on the 9<sup>th</sup> of March 2011. I saw with my eyes the torturing of people. Organized state violence is a crime" (Mortada, 2012). Another unforgettable day for women activists is the 9<sup>th</sup> of March 2011.

On 9 March 2011, when army officers violently cleared Tahrir Square of protesters, they took at least 18 women into the Egyptian museum, a place that witnessed the torture of many protesters. They moved them to a military detention where seventeen of those women were detained for four days. According to Samera Ibrahim, 25-years-old revolutionary woman and one of the detainees, "Soldiers beat us, gave us electric shocks and subjected us to strip searches. We were then forced to undergo "virginity tests", and threatened with prostitution charges" (Adel, 2012). Samera states that the military specifically targeted women who defied it and intended to break them emotionally, "When you break a woman, you break the entire society... A woman's body should not be used as a tool for intimidation, and nobody should have their dignity violated" (Adel, 2012). Before they were released, the women were brought before a military court and received one-year suspended sentences for a variety of fabricated charges. The case against the military doctor arose from two complaints filed by Samira Ibrahim, however, Ahmed Adel, the doctor who conducted the test, was cleared by the Egyptian military court based on "contradictory statements" from witnesses (Adel,2012). Samera comments on the verdict, "I vow to continue this struggle until the very end, and until Egypt's unfair laws are changed" (Adel, 2012). Other testimonies on what happened on March 9, 2012 includes the testimony of S.G., a 20-year-old woman, from Sharkeyya governorate,

"Soldiers surrounded me, one of them told me come talk to the officer. They took me from Tahrir into the street by the museum and that is where the beating began. We were 18 women. We remained there for 3 hours. A bus came and the officer asked: what is wrong. The soldiers told him, we caught her in prostitution in the tents. We arrived in C28, a military Jail, around 9 pm. In the morning they moved us to prison trucks and told us now you will know what humiliation really means. They took us into a room to be searched. We had to take off our clothes. The room was small and had two doors and one large window. Soldiers were peeping through the window. I asked the guard to close the window but she said if I did not shut up she will call the officer and he will electrocute you on your naked body. Then they told us those of you who said they are virgins will be examined." (El-Nadeem, 2011)

Another 20-year-old woman protestor describes how the military handcuffed her to a wall in the museum complex for nearly seven hours, and almost every five minutes she was electrocuted with a stun gun. They also splashed water on her body to make the shocks more painful. However, the most painful moment was when she was stripped and forcibly examined to determine whether or not she was virgin (El-Nadeem, 2011).

There have been countless accounts of violence recorded in the post 25<sup>th</sup> of January period, and it is still ongoing until the moment of this writing. For example, on the 16<sup>th</sup> March 2013, a Muslim Brotherhood man slapped a woman activist, Wafaa Mousa, causing her to fall, because she was drawing graffiti against the Muslim Brotherhood near their main headquarter. There are numerous names of women activists who become icons for being brutally tortured and violated by security forces under the rule of military council such as Azza Helal, Hend Nafaa, and Ghada Kamal. There have been even more cases of sexual assault and mob rape; however, there is no response from the government; I would even go as far as to argue that the government itself, is responsible for producing this kind of violence and fear in hopes of ending the revolution.

To counter sexual terrorism and organized violence against women, large mobilizations from women activists and a proliferation of groups emerged to fight against it. In the following section I will present some remarkable new groups who implement creative tactics and ideas to resist sexual assaults. These strategies are created by post-25<sup>th</sup> January individual young women groups and activists who are not under the umbrella of any organizations or political parties.

## Sexual Assaults: Same Cause, New Tactics and Different Approaches

This section will deal with mapping and analyzing the anti-sexual assaults initiatives and groups that have appeared post 25<sup>th</sup> of January. I will address the most recent tactics used by these groups and how they differ in their approaches to the sexual assault problem. It is worth noting that activism against sexual harassment did not start post-25<sup>th</sup> of January 2011, instead, there were efforts from women activists on addressing this topic. In 2010 and with an increased rate of sexual harassment incidents in Egypt, a group of volunteers established HarassMap, an initiative that works by map the occurrences of harassment via texts sent by women. The volunteer-run group was established by Rebecca Ciao and three other Egyptian women and has a community outreach program that aims to mobilize people to take action and fight against sexual harassment. Post 25<sup>th</sup> of January 2011, HarassMap continued to work by using Internet and mobile technology to map harassment. After receiving a grant in 2012 through an incubator organization, as they are not officially registered yet, the group set-up headquarters by acquiring an office and hiring staff members. Their research team works on a comparative study between the use of crowd source methodology, a methodology they depend on through collecting data via SMSs, and the use of other traditional methodologies to research on sexual harassment.

The period after the 25<sup>th</sup> of January witnessed an exacerbation in the rate and nature of sexual harassment and with the proliferation of many groups working to fight it. HarassMap has participated in many joint efforts, like being a member in OpAntiSH coalition, and has also cooperated with the Nefsi initiative. These examples of joint initiatives will be further elaborated in the following sections. The only challenge faced by HarassMap in working with other groups, as they argue, is the differing ideologies adopted by each group in spite of their shared aim to eliminate harassment. Although the message HarassMap adopts is based on human rights, they

found problems with the messages of other groups who also work on fighting sexual harassment because sometimes, as El-Khateeb, a volunteer before being promoted to as a full time staff, argues that the messages of these groups,

"[...] undermined women, but we, HarassMap, try to show that we are not doing chauvinistic approach. We only protect women because they should be protected from harassment because they are victimized by it not because they are women. The messages are wrong and give wrong expression like 'be a man and protect her', this is a wrong message, it destroys the core of the work and it is not a good message, other groups say we want to end harassment, we want to get harasser to caught or try to arrest harassment like Bassma, that is great, amazing, thank you. but HarassMap has a mission. Our mission is to end social credibility to harassment because we cannot catch harassment always, we do not have like troops to catch harassers and keep them in prisons legally." (El-Khateeb, personal communication, July 9, 2013)

### The Patrolling Technique

An example of the creative and effective tactics invented by young women group in post-Mubarak period to fight against sexual assaults is the patrol technique that is used by Bassma (imprint movement). Bassma is a movement comprised of young men and women who patrol the metro stations to prevent sexual assaults. The movement emerged after repeated reports were filed about the aggravation in the metro carriages, and of the abuse of women, which in some cases escalated to physical beatings. Bassma took the lead in the idea of patrolling and received media attention for its innovative way of fighting against sexual assaults. As stated by Said Nihal Sa'ad Zaghlol, one of the five founders of Bassma,

"We do patrols as a sort of protection for women and to help them apply the law in case they want file a report. We, in the metro for example, are divided in to a group that makes sure that the women's cabin is only full of women and doesn't have men inside and the another group watches the platform in case anyone is after a certain woman we stall him till the woman leaves" (Personal communication, October 13, 2012).

Although Bassma has yet to establish headquarters, their campaigns are individually funded. They are one of the most successful campaigns and have the highest number of male volunteers. What is unique about Bassma is that it is the only group that receives permission and cooperation from the police. This is the first time in Egypt where police forces cooperate and collaborate with a group of volunteers. Saad Zaghoul explains the nature of the movement that started in July 2012 and its future activities,

"We are five founders, about 30 members, a mix of men and women, we do mainly patrolling, we did two patrolling events and now we are planning to do awareness campaigns in universities. We will have a booth and distribute flyers about sexual assaults. The metro stations were only a start and we will be moving to patrol in Talaat Harb St. in Eid al Adha [during October 2012]. We also do collaborations with chains and stands if we find it beneficial but they are not our main focus. We are independent, we don't have headquarters and it's our own money and the money of people who believe in what we... that's so far, we will try to approach other organizations to get money" (Personal communication, October 13, 2012).

Few months later, on 15<sup>th</sup> of March 2013, Bassma produced its second video on YouTube, called, Imprint Movement. In the video they explain how the increase of sexual harassment is a problem in Egypt and that is why they have organized to fight it by conducting training and orientation sessions for their volunteers and awareness campaigns in the streets, metro stations and also at Cairo University. The video sheds light into the ideology of the group. They believe that dialogue is very effective to fight culture negativity and victim blaming. Additionally, it is important to talk to everyone with hers/his own language to deliver the message that sexual harassment affects society as a whole. Bassma again, stresses that their message is to change the reality, the same message it delivered in its first very short video titled, Why not? The video also articulates that once violence and oppression increases, the voice of resistance become louder stating, "From now on, we will never be passive again" (Bassma, 2013).

## Human Chains, Slasel

The first initiative to use human chains (slasel) took to the street with signs was Slasel Nefsi against Sexual Assaults. I aspire human chains. The preparation meeting of Slasel Nefsi against Sexual Assaults was held in April 2012. It was an informal meeting that I attended as a member of the core group. It was held informally at the UN Women's office in Cairo. The core group of the initiative is comprised of eight young women activists from different organizations, but agreed to participate on their own terms; thus they did not mention their affiliations or have their organization's logos represented on the banners used for the event.

The idea of slasel was originally derived from the Egyptian revolution, as this form of expression did not exist before. At the time of writing, Nefsi had a series of slasel with different themes; each contained its own messages. The first theme was nefsi (I aspire). It was an attempt to avoid clashes with the street through the usage of harsh and direct messages such as blaming or condemning harassers. It was a group of short, clear messages that began with the phrase, "I aspire" to express the basic rights of girls and women in the street. Examples of these messages are, "I aspire to walk in the street without hearing immoral words", "I aspire to feel safe in the street", and "I aspire you to know that the problem is not in my way of get dressed". In addition to other messages, the nefsi cliché continues to exist in the messages of the second Slasel. They use more direct and firm statements such as, "Whatever the girl dresses, you are the blamed.. I aspire you don't look at my body, I aspire you admit that you are a harasser; I aspire not to describe every part of my body". There were special banners for the young men who participated in an amazing way with large numbers of people in the human chain.

The initiative is one of the most successful, as the number of volunteers tends to increase and attract a large number of young male participants. The male volunteers use the same banners

of the initiative in addition to other banners that express their own concerns and messages such as, “I aspire not to deliver my sister to every place”. Nefsi chose to have its human chains in areas with the highest accounts of sexual assault occurrences, for example, the first chain was held at Game'at el Dowal Street, the second at Abbas El Akkad Street, and the third, was supposed to be in front of the Ministry of Interior Affairs to address the police for their deliberate negligence of duty to prevent sexual assaults, as the Nefsi group has argued, but also, because some of the police are harassers themselves. Nefsi also joined other women's groups in their stand against sexual assaults in front of President's Palace on the 4<sup>th</sup> of October in order to not distract and divide the effort of women groups between multiple events.

The agenda of Nefsi is cooperation with other groups who work on sexual assaults such as Bassma Imprint), ded el taharoush (Against Sexual Assaults), HarassMap, and ata'a edak (May your hand be cut off). It is noteworthy to notice that before the revolution, there were few groups that focus on sexual assaults, but in the post-Mubarak period, more than 22 new groups have emerged and both young women and men have established most of them. What is unique about Nefsi group is the technique it uses to fight against sexual assaults, slasel. It still however, works in the same framework of awareness that was possibly, the only framework used pre-revolution. But as I argue, after the escalation of brutal violence against women, what is happening in Egypt is not sexual assaults but organized sexual crimes that aim to scare women, often times, it is implemented without a sexual motivation. For example, attacking a woman and stabbing her in the vagina does not relate to any sexual desire. Within this context, awareness technique does not seem to work.



## Fighting Back: Activism Beyond Vulnerability

"This is not a fight...there is a girl stuck inside this circle... This girl is being sexually assaulted. Right now there are 3-4 hands inside her pants, and 3-4 hands inside her shirt, there are 10 men pulling her from every body part...there is now a guy taking her shoes off so his partner can easily pull off her pants. There is a guy holding the girl saying he is protecting her, while in truth he is a harasser, and his hands are inside her underwear. There is another guy taking off his pants to give it to her, and there is another trying to give her his jacket, and another trying to cover her, and tens are trying to stop them with weapons like knives", these are few words from the video We Will Resist that was posted by Operation Anti Sexual Harassment on the first of February 2013. (2013, February 1)

The Operation Anti Sexual Harassment (OpAntiSH) is a campaign that was set up in November 2012 after significant increases of mob sexual assaults targeted women in Tahrir during the demonstrations. The group is founded by young women and men activists in coordination with many activists, initiatives, and NGOs such as Nefsi, Bahia ya Masr, the Bussy Project, shoft taharosh (I witnessed a harassment), HarassMap, the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights, and Nazra for Feminist Studies. The group formed as an emergency force whose tactics allow them to cut through the mob and find the girl. They create a human chain around her and start moving her out of the harassers' circle. Iba'a El Tamimi, a HarassMap and OpAntiSH member, describes the scenario by explaining there are usually mobs of 50, 100, 200, and up to 1000 men or more, who encircle women, assault them, stripe off their clothes, rape them themselves, or sometimes with sharp objects (Abaza, 2013).

The mechanism that OpAntiSH works through is that there are three main groups, the Intervention (ishtibak) group, the Safety group and the Control or Core group. The Intervention group is the group that is most vulnerable to danger because they are responsible of cutting through the mob to get the woman away from the attackers' circle and the bystanders who are watching. After removing the woman from these circles, the Intervention group passes her to the Safety group that works on delivering her to a safe place. They will dress her if needed and in

some cases, they will take her to the hospital, and follow up with any psychological or legal aid if required. This group also works on distributing flyers in the square to inform others of how they may be reached to report any sexual assaults attacks they may encounter. The Control group is the third main group that works on coordinating the tasks between the two other groups. When the Core group receives an SOS call, they mobilize the closest Intervention group to the place of the attack. The number of persons per Intervention group is approximately ten per group and there are generally five Intervention groups spread around the square (Panaga, personal communication, March 24, 2013). Although their numbers is not comparable to the number of the groups they clash with, OpAntiSH successfully retrieved 16 women on Friday, 25<sup>th</sup> of January 2013, one of the highest amounts of sexual assaults reported; all cases were severe, with the worst case being the usage of a blade against the private parts of an assaulted women (Kirolos, personal communication, March 28, 2013).

The OpAntiSH group is unique from other groups who are working on sexual assaults because it is the only group that works beyond the framework of awareness and it does not view women as victims. The ideology of the group stresses that women participation in the work force is not only expected but it is also a main part of the group's philosophy. They believe in full and equal participation of women without trying to impose protection or guardianship from men as they believe women have the ability to fight back; thus, they refuse the idea of viewing women as vulnerable and peaceful. From this perspective, they differ other groups who, as expressed by Mai Panaga, a founding member of the group,

"[I] do not like the idea of having girls with them during fight. In the first meeting they looked around and saw many girls in the room then they asked why girls were there? They believe that it is difficult for them to have the responsibility of protecting girls who are with them in the group while trying to rescue the victim. So, they prefer not to have girls with them and this is actually the approach of many other initiatives than OpAntiSH" (Personal communication, January 18, 2013).

What is interesting about this group also is the percentage of men is somehow equal to women. Panaga also clarifies that male participants usually prefer being in the intervention group because of their "nature as males", however this is not exclusive to them. The Core group also includes men and women and the organizational setup is anarchistic as the Control group is not reserved for the founders, rather, it is also opened to volunteers. This flexibility, anarchy and "welcoming" of women participation are the reasons as to why Panaga was attracted to join.

This particularity of the group which makes them unique is also the same cause behind some of their hindrances in the doing collective work with other anti-sexual assault forces that promote the safety of women protestors such as the Tahrir Bodyguard, a group of men and women who patrol Tahrir Square during demonstrations in bright neon vests and helmets to guarantee the safety of women protestors. Although Tahrir Bodyguard and OpAntiSH work to achieve the same agenda, they differ in ideology and methodology. For Tahrir Bodyguard, women are still seen in as vulnerable and weak victims who are in the need of the protection of hero men. The group has done a great job on the ground and has treated many cases successfully; however, it is still stuck in the same framework of viewing women as vulnerable and peaceful persons. This ideology somehow hints at a patriarchal line of thought that has recently witnessed a shift recently as I will argue later.

These different approaches between the anti-sexual assault groups sometimes lead to organizational problems, as Panaga stresses,

“[while] our approach is away from awareness and victimization, some groups refuse the presence of women in the group during the fight, but for me, I am fed up with the awareness approach, that is why I'm only in the OpAntiSH group. I stop believing that what we need in Egypt right now is awareness" (Personal communication, January 18, 2013).

Panaga believes that it is her right to practice this type of activism even if this method causes her group some problems when collaborating with other campaigns that are not persuaded by the idea of having girls among them while fighting. As expressed by a male participant from another campaign explained to Panaga, the presence of girls will shift their focus from helping the victim to "protecting" those girls (Personal communication, January 18, 2013).

Part of OpAntiSH philosophy is their position from violence. The group believes in the right of its members to defend themselves during attempts to rescue the woman but as Panaga stressed, their focus is not to punish the harasser at all. OpAntiSH group also sees that handing the group of harassers to police is left for the assaulted woman to decide. However, the group thinks that in the absence of a restructuring police force, and the lack of reform in the legal system concerning sexual violence, handing over harassers to police and the regime that is involved in the harassment is ineffective. The role of police and its restructuring will be elaborated on later in this section (Panaga, Personal communication, March 28, 2013).

For this position, OpAntiSH differs from other campaigns that hand harassers to the police or those that focus on punishing the harassers. For example, Be a Man and Protect Her campaign that founded by Mohamed Taimor in October 2012 during Eid Al Adha festival, a period that witnessed a high rate of sexual harassment. The main focus of the Be a Man and Protect Her campaign was to catch the harasser and to punish him by spray-painting, "I am a Harasser" on his clothes. This controversial tactic of spraying harassers was considered by other anti-harassment campaigns to be a violent tactic that they avoided; police also refused the tactics as it violates the law, as a result, some were arrested (Fitzsimons, 2012). Although this and other similar campaigns intended to support women, it emerged from a masculine logic that women are vulnerable and that a good man should protect and not harass her, vice versa, a harasser is not

a man. As such, an equally controversial definition of manhood arises as it is juxtaposed to a woman who is viewed as a victim and vulnerable.

More recently, another awareness campaign against sexual harassment surfaced on television, in March 2013 with the name, No One Harasses Egypt. The campaign is produced and introduced by Khaled El Nabawy, an Egyptian-international actor. The campaign is composed of a series of episodes that address the harassers. In one episode, there is a woman screaming for help as a harasser with a blade attacks her. Meanwhile, another man who is passing by stops to think whether not he should intervene and defend the woman, at this point the scene shifts to El Nabawy (2013), the commentator in all episodes. He addresses the man who is hesitant, saying, "Do you agree with what he is doing? Do something. Are you afraid? Tomorrow your sister may be being in this situation." After this, the man intervenes by beating the harasser and rescuing the woman. Again El Nabawy comments, "See, you are antar", an antar is a male name used as a popular allegory to celebrate manhood among Egyptians, it is derived from the historical story about the brave Arabic Knight Antar Ibn Shadad and his beloved Abbla. The camera then shifts to the harasser and El Nabawy comments saying, "You are Abbla. No, even Abbla is better than you." He concludes each episode by saying, "No one harasses Egypt" (El-Nabawy, 2013).

The comparison between Antar and Abbla, the man and woman, in this way is very abusive as it stresses women's inferiority as to men. Furthermore, symbolically speaking, the dialogue is also reserved between the men as it occurs between the commentator, harasser, and defender; the role of the woman is absent. She is again, only seen as the victim, vulnerable, inferior and helpless. The message is focused on men where harassment is something that a good man would not do, as if it is not her right but a gift that a kind man should grant her. Finally, the

video closes with a personification of Egypt as a woman who should not be harassed, a very repressive notion of the nation as the woman and the woman as the honor of the nation, which I had previously mentioned. Although the campaign is made with good intentions to fight sexual harassment, it unfortunately deals with the problem from a very radical patriarchal view that reinforces the stereotypes about men and women and supports the top-down logic of protecting women. It is also may be useful to mention here that some women activists also resort to the same logic of protection as a strategy to reach the majority of men they debate. In one of my discussions with a friend who works with UN Women, she commented on a title of one of the many anti-sexual harassment campaigns that appeared after the ousting of Mubarak that uses the statement, "Be a man and protect her" as the campaign theme. She argues that using such statements is still the most successful strategy that "men can accept" (Personal communication, May 14, 2012).

This logic of protecting women protestors has emerged after repeated attacks against women occurred in the demonstrations; it has been rejected from many women activists. On the 7<sup>th</sup> of June 2012 many of women groups, NGOs, and women's committees in political parties issued a statement that was widely publicized in newspapers and visual media, they condemned the calls for having "safe avenues" and "cordons" for women protestors in Tahrir. The statement explained that, "Safe Avenues" would lead to the marginalization of women and subsequently, enforce the image of women as powerless and weak. At this point I observed a shift in the discourse that was used by Mahfouz (2011) before the revolution called for men to go to Tahrir if not as protestors, then as protectors for women who will be there. This shift in discourse manifests in groups such as OpAntiSH and other groups and campaigns. For example, the spread of graffiti of a woman beating her harasser on the streets, the women's march on the 6<sup>th</sup> of

February 2013 with the title “Patience has limits”, words from a well-known song by Egyptian singer Om Kalthoum, depict women protesting with knives to send a message that they will cut off the hands of harassers and that they are angry and will no longer be peaceful.

More recently I have also observed a proliferation of other groups who adopt the same logic that women will not to be victimized or stereotyped as weak and peaceful such as, Take Your Right by Your Hand campaign, which was founded in March 2013 by Nada Abdallah under the umbrella of Heya NGO. The campaign aims to teach women self-defense techniques and simple tactics through five, three-month length, self-defense programs offered by specialized trainers that would enable women to defend themselves even against weapons if they are attacked. The main goal for this initiative is to build a women-centered intervene force that is well trained in case of dealing with gang-related sexual attacks. It focused on training activists involved in anti-sexual harassment campaigns as well as individuals. Furthermore, it will coordinate with other campaigns along with El-Naddem Center for Psychological Support for Assaulted Women (Nada Abdalla, personal communication, April 1, 2013). For my observation, all these initiatives mark a shift in the discourse of sexual assaults and take it beyond the frameworks of awareness, vulnerability, and stereotyping of women as weak, which were often used before the revolution.

#### Women Assaulted between Social Acceptance, Police Absence and Government Blame

While discussing the role adopted by these groups to prevent and fight against the sexual attacks on women protestors, it is important to ask where the role of police is in preventing these violations especially, the repeated sexual assaults by the mob. When asked, some of my interviewees replied that it is difficult for the police to prevent what is happening because it

happens amidst the clashes between protestors and as suggested by Panaga, “[the] police cannot see everything, it is only one time that an officer tried to rescue a girl by shooting in the air to horrify the harassers but he was one and they were hundreds” (Personal communication, January 18, 2013). On the other hand, others see police attitude as deliberate ignorance because the police view women protestors as enemies who should be at home if they seek safety. Other activists accuse the police of being responsible for these attacks. In March 2013, a conference held in Cairo by the SaferWorld organization about the safety and security barriers to women's political participation, Mariam Kirolos, a founding member of OpAntiSH and one of the participants said “it does not matter if Egypt has numerous laws for sexual assaults or not if there is no restructuring of police” (Personal communication, 2013). Kirolos’ main point is that the restructuring of police is the most important step that the government has to put in its agenda if it cares to end the problem since implementation must be guaranteed by the laws and enforced by the police.

Another member of the OpAntiSH who also attended the SaferWorld conference said that when they were attacked by a group of people with bladed weapons during a meeting on the 25<sup>th</sup> of January 2013, they escaped and when they went to the street police, they attacked them with tear gas. This young man asked, “Why police did not attack them with only one of the tear gas bombs if it needed to rescue us? What does this mean, and why these attacks are only in Tahrir Square?” The young man’s statement was meant to hint that police is behind the attack and that the sexual attacks is protected by police for political reasons. Similarly, Panaga added that “it is also important to recognize that police is a part of this society that accepts sexual assaults” (Personal communication, March 28, 2013). This leads us back to the previously mentioned circle of harassers who in the wider circle, are passive and keep watch at what is happening to



the woman being assaulted. Sometimes they themselves harass the woman by touching her body inappropriately while pretending to help her get out from the closed circle of harassers. As expressed by Tamimi, “It is really important to note “that while we think the attacks are partially organized (or triggered by an organized mob) the only reason the number of harassers becomes so big is unfortunately the social acceptability of sexual harassment in Egypt that results in bystanders joining in the crime that was originally triggered in a planned manner by a smaller number of people” (Abaza, 2013).

This makes it clear that sexual assault is a multidimensional problem that has political, social, and cultural facets. It also questions the absence of government and police in this severe problem especially after the statements made by the Human Rights Committee of the Shura Council in February 2013, that women should take responsibility if being harassed because they put themselves in these conditions by being in unsafe places. Major General Adel Afify, a member of the committee representing the Salafi Asala Party, criticized female protesters by saying, “ [They] know they are among thugs. They should protect themselves before requesting that the Interior Ministry does so. By getting herself involved in such circumstances, the woman has 100 percent responsibility" (Shura Council Committee Says Female Protesters should take Responsibility if Harassed, 2013).

On the 12<sup>th</sup> of February 2013, The Uprising of Women in the Arab World (UWAW) a Facebook initiative that was established in October 2011 by four young women from Egypt, Lebanon and Palestine after the uprisings that some Arab countries witnessed as a free and secular platform for constructive dialogue advocating human rights, freedom, and independence of women in the Arab world, called for a global stand against sexual terrorism, which they argue to be a technique that was recently used in Egypt to scare female protestors in Tahrir (Sally

Zohney, personal communication, Jan. 16, 2013). The UWAW event page called people all around the world to gather in front of the Egyptian Embassy in their city or country at 6:00 p.m. local time and declared that they hold the ruling party, police and governmental institution responsible and to prevent “organized thugs [from] attacking, stripping, raping, injuring and killing peaceful protesters” (The Uprising of Women in the Arab world , 2012).They also condemned the social acceptability of placing blame on assaulted woman and the media for its focus on personal and intimate, sensationalist details of the assaulted rather than denouncing the crime itself.

In Cairo and over 30 countries, protestors demonstrated against the mob attacks and gang rapes for protestors in Tahrir. In Cairo, part of the protest was comprised of hundreds of women who protest against the sexual terrorism and against the Shura statements that put the blame on women and rendered them responsible for their sexual assaults. Nada Rafik and Myriam Kirolos used the beats of two drums to lead women marches since December 2011, while Egyptian women chanted slogans against sexual harassers saying, “Harassment will not do you any good, try again and we will cut off your hand”, “We will not get scared, our voice is not shameful, our bodies are not cheap”, “A courageous woman in the Square and the harasser is a coward dog”. They also chanted against the Shura Council members who blamed women by saying, “A woman's voice is a revolution, Afify's presence in the Shura Council is the indecency”, "Shura Council, council of disgrace, we will set you on fire”, "I will not be insulted; yes, I will go to the Square”. Women also carried banners asking Shura members a rhetorical question in reply to the question they were asked when being blamed for the assault, “You Shura people, what took you there?”.



Image 1: From the Global Stand, “Patience has limits, From Lebanon to Egypt: Our bodies are one”. They replace Om Kalthoum's famous handkerchief with a knife. (12<sup>th</sup> of February, 2012)

## CHAPTER FIVE

### UNFINISHED REVOLUTION:

#### EGYPTIAN WOMEN ACTIVISTS BETWEEN PERILS AND POSSIBILITIES

In this concluding chapter I will resume mapping the mobilization of Egyptian women activists in post-25<sup>th</sup> of January 2011 to highlight the most important shifts in discourses and trends that appeared in women's activism in Egypt. It is also important to shed light on some of the perils that rendered the future of women's activism opaque and the hopes that have emerged amid these challenges as the torches along the way of an unfinished revolution. To begin, I will examine the perils and anxieties faced by liberal women's activism. I will also take a closer examination at the gender agenda adopted by the new government in Egypt in post-25<sup>th</sup> of January 2011; in other words the gender agenda of the Muslim Brotherhood as it is the political force of power to see why liberal women activists are so anxious about this agenda.

#### Gender Agenda of the Muslim Brotherhood

In accordance with the definition of moderate Islamist movements as those who “reject violence and endorse competition through pluralistic politics” (Hamzawy, 2005), the Muslim brotherhood is labeled as "moderate" and whose inclusion, according to several recent arguments, is important for achieving a viable democratization in the Middle East, for presenting a counterweight to the extremist Islamists by representing a version on “reformist Islam” (Hamzawy, 2005) for their potential progress within the Islamic movement because of their flexibility. The focus here is on examining, to what extent, the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) is flexible and reformist with regards to their contemporary engagement with gender agenda. To

find an answer, I will briefly analyze the contemporary MB's discourse regarding gender roles as a vital component of the culture dimension that I have argued to be the only aspect that has witnessed changed post-25<sup>th</sup> of January 2011. In the following section I will compare the positions of classic MB thinkers such as Hasan al-Bana and Qutb with Mohamed Morsi, the President of Egypt and a leader of the MB.

### Gender Roles in Al-Banna's, Qutb's and Morsi's Discourse

In his article *resalet al mar'a al muslima* (The Message of Muslim Women), Al-Banna (1940) argues that Islam elevated the status of women and made her partner to men in rights and duties, and the differences between men and women in rights is attributed to the difference of the roles assigned to each of them according to their sex. This strict view of gender roles based on biological difference is emphasized throughout the rest of the article with a justification that the division of roles serves to preserve a particular order between men and women that benefits the building of Muslim society. Al-Banna (1940) rejected the exit of women in the public arena saying that, “This fascistic mingling of sexes among us in schools, institutes and public gatherings, and their going out to places of entertainment, restaurants, parks... all of this is foreign goods which have absolutely no relation to Islam and has had the worst effects in our social life” (Tadros, 2011). After al-Banna, Sayyid Qutb, another key figure of the MB whose writing shaped a large part of the organization's ideology as discussed above, and whose views appear progressive and liberal in political and religious fields but “ultra conservative” and “regressive” regarding women (Shehada, 2000). This paradox makes Qutb, in my point of view, a model of the MB's general framework of thought. According to Shehada (2000), “We find that at the heart of Qutb's debate is the limitation of a woman's duties in society to that of wife and

mother. This is not only her role but also her sole identity, for marriage in Islam is seen as a central institution around which is built society and civilization. A Muslim girl should, therefore, be brought up and educated to meet this role" (p. 45). More recently, I observed a similarity between Qutb's discourse regarding women and Mohamed Morsi the MB Presidential candidate by this time. On Tuesday 5<sup>th</sup> of June 2012 as a part of his campaign, Morsi arranged a meeting with some of the women's symbols under the title of, An Invitation to a Dialogue. The basis in which women attendees were chosen and labeled as symbols of women of Egypt is vague. There were no attendees from liberal or feminist figures as most of the attendees were affiliated with the MB or other Islamist groups.

Morsi began his speech by repeating that women are citizens as men, and to prove this idea as if it is need to be proved, he gave different examples and statistics on the existence of women in universities, the work force, and so forth. However, he later declared that a woman has her own problems only because she is a woman. Listing the woman-only problems, Morsi did not go beyond the circle of woman's role in home and her relationship with husband, father and neighbors. This was an indicator of his vision to woman's primary role in home, a premise that he later asserts in the speech explaining that women have a more important role than men, which is the preparation and caretaking of the next generation. This notion of women as mothers and wives in the first class permeated the rest of the speech and served as the basis of Morsi's gender discourse, as well as Al-Bana and Qutb who argue that this position reflects Islamic and Egyptian values.

What was striking and disappointing for many women who participated in the revolution was Morsi's vision that women's participation in the resistance of the former regime was by raising their children to be against injustice, a mother who went out to the square to give soldiers

sandwiches to tell them “not to beat your brothers my sons”. Or a woman who went to the square to pour water on men for ablution or to help the injured at the field hospital, or the mother who woke her son up to go to the square, and above all, the role of being the mother of a martyr. This vision was inconsistent with the reality of Egyptian women's participation in the revolution as discussed in chapter two. However, this is an expected speech on gender roles within the framework of the MB's ideology, as Morsi echoes the positions of Al-Bana and Qutb in asserting that marriage is the central institution around which society should be built and girls should be brought up to fit this role. Morsi's speech can be summarized into a few main points. First, women as a citizen are equal to men; however, they have different obligations attached to them on the basis of their biological difference, and thus they have different rights too. Second, the main role of women is to be a mother and a wife, namely, a caretaker of the family, in consequence, it is impossible to detach women's rights from the family's well-being. Finally, women can go out to work but without violating the "social and cultural permissions" or "the Egyptian custom"(Morsi, 2012).

The aim of the above analysis of Morsi's speech is to show a recent model of the MB's thinking with regards to women, and to argue that the MB's gender agenda has not been reformed over the past years. Instead, it has only been "reframed" in terms of "a human rights discourse; women's rights to enjoy the benefits of men's Quammah; women's rights to protection from assuming roles incompatible with their biological nature, which is also simultaneously framed in a paternalistic discourse of protecting women" (Tadros, 2012, p. 155) in order to convey a progressive image about the MB to the West.

It is not only Morsi's speeches that prove this argument but there are numerous practices and statements from the Freedom and Justice political party (FJ) members, the Muslim

Brotherhood party, from MB politicians and members in the Shura and the absolved people's councils. As the focus of this thesis is to analyze women activists' mobilization rather than the gender policy of the Muslim Brotherhood, I will give only a few examples of the MB's practices that turned liberal women anxious and subsequently caused their mobilization.

In March 2013 the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), the 57<sup>th</sup> session held in New York with a focus on the topic of violence against women, Pakinam Sharkawi, a MB member and the head of the Egyptian delegation to UN, argued that Egypt has a cultural specificity that prevents it from accepting the UN Convention on Elimination of Violence Against Women (CEDAW), and in an interview with New York Times she also denied that martial rape is a problem in Egypt (Women, 2013). In line with this, the MB issued a statement on the 13<sup>th</sup> of March that attacked CEDAW as an anti-Islamic declaration. Similarly, in Sharkawi's speech about the 2012 constitution of Egypt, she states that it prohibits all forms of oppression and exploitation of women and underlines their rights, which is an inaccurate as discussed in Chapter Three where I highlighted the rejection of women activists to this constitution and the argument that it exacerbates women's conditions and does not guarantees any rights to them and also does not respect any international treaties. During the CSW57, the angry voices of women activists in Egypt loudly criticized Sharkawi's statements, and there were many articles that discussed the controversial news of the withdrawal of the Egyptian delegation. May be this pressure by women activists is what led Egypt to sign the final draft of the CEDAW declaration in spite of MB backlash on it.

In a response to this national and international unrest regarding women's status in Egypt, Morsi announced an initiative to support Egyptian women's rights and called for a conference on the 24<sup>th</sup> of March 2013. However, Morsi's speech was mainly focused on threatening the



opposition and to those who he claimed to be the cause of the exacerbation of the political condition in Egypt rather than address the initiative that he called for. These practices among others by politicians in Egypt left an unpredictable future for Egyptian women under the rule of the MB. On the other hand, there is a vital and strong mobilization from women activists on ground, which has not been witnessed before, thus, allowing hope. In the next section I will shed light on the positive implications before I give my concluding remarks.

#### Anti-NGOization Tendency: Bahia Ya Masr, A Possible Women's Movement

In February 2012, a year after the establishment of the Sawa group, the first post-Mubarak independent women's group, another women's organization emerged and imposed itself strongly on the scene of post-Mubarak women activism, Bahia Ya Masr. In Arabic, bahia means gorgeous and glorious. In Egyptian folklore the name Bahia is usually used to refer to Egypt in poetry and songs. The name reflects one of the group's main messages that is frequently being expressed in their slogans, banners and campaigns, the vision of Egypt to be bahia.

In the beginning, Bahia Ya Masr describes itself as a popular open Egyptian movement that reflected all social, cultural, economic, intellectual and political backgrounds in the Egyptian society with respect to these differences and each person's choices, and more recently, as a popular pressure group. Bahia's core group includes ten women, myself included. Most of the women in the group are young with different political ideologies and most are independent activists who actively participated in the 25<sup>th</sup> of January revolution. There are also young men that cooperate with Bahia especially in the graffiti designs and documentaries. The decision to establish Bahia was made by Inas Mekawy, who stated,

“On the day of the Port-said football massacre on the 1<sup>st</sup> of February 2012 where at least 73 young men were killed, women and mothers of the martyrs organized a march to the parliament as the first institution that was elected in post-Mubarak period. When an MP went out and asked us what your demands are, women kept looking to each other asking why we have come here, some women asked the parliament to take authority from SCAF other women objected and feared the Islamists, at this point I felt the need of something like Bahia” (Personal communication, March 12, 2013).

What is interesting about Bahia Ya Masr is that it challenges the classical stereotypes of women's groups and NGOs we used to see in pre-revolution Egypt. As Dina Wahba (2012), a young woman activist and a master's degree holder in gender studies, describes that they are not a group of angry middle aged or older elite ladies who meet to discuss issues usually separated from what is happening on the ground. On the contrary, most, if not all of Bahia Ya Masr members are progressive young men and women who believe that woman's issues cannot be detached from what is happening in Egypt on the political, economic, and social level (Wahba, 2012). What attracted me in Bahia ya Masr is that it is an independent youth led movement that refuses NGOization and emphasizes inclusion. It is open to all men and women and uses different public tools of expression such as graffiti and documentaries.

In the time of writing, one year has passed since the establishment of Bahia. In my second interview with Bahia's team, it is clear that they have developed their vision and their techniques as they define themselves now as *magmae't daght* (pressure group) rather than a citizenship movement. They stress their refusal of the NGOs structure and in an attempt to make themselves distinct from other institutionalized structures; most of their activities make it clear that they are a social movement rather than a pressure group that works to influence public policy. Mekawy states, “We did not know that we would be a pressure group in this sense that almost our activities are on the ground, in the beginning we kept working through statements like most women groups then we shifted towards activities on ground” (Personal communication,

March 12, 2013).. While reviewing Bahia's recent campaigns and activities it can be inferred that they have learned more on how to strategize and use techniques of rallying, to mobilize and take initiatives to lead. One thing that distinguishes Bahia from most women groups is its ability to mobilize. This ability maybe resulted from its continuous presence in most if not all activities that have taken place in the street during the last two years, such as stands and protests. These street activities are not necessary focused on women's issues but it deals with any broad political or social issue. The broad scope of Bahia's activities makes it more inclusive and accepted among ordinary people who sometimes feel that they are excluded from the scope of feminist groups that only mobilize to address women-related issues. On the contrary, Bahia ya Masr have chosen to focus on women's issues by integrating it into the larger question of citizenship and the broader vision of the future of the country. It does not, for example, focus only on family laws or sexual harassment; instead, it prefers to deal with women's issues through the larger framework of the goals of the Egyptian revolution. This vision is implied in Mekawy's comment that "Bahia is a part of revolution not a part of women" (Personal communication, March 12, 2013).

Through this framework, common ground was established with other political and civil forces, and women's issues were addressed as a part of the national project of rebuilding the country. This helped in the reintegration of women issues into the broader social and political issues in Egypt and at the same time allowed some of the feminist and women groups to be more open and inclusive of other issues. At this point, I argue that Bahia catalyzes a new wave of women movement building in Egypt.

Bahia Ya Masr started its activities by focusing on the process of drafting the new constitution as discussed above. Bahia's first public campaign was, "Women's right is up to 50% of the constitution drafting committee". Something that is interesting about this campaign

occurred when I pasted the stickers of the campaign in my town, Mansoura city in the Delta, people used to scratch only the word women from the sticker and leave the rest of it intact. This shows that ordinary people are somehow hostile against women-only issues and that people felt excluded from such a campaign. In the second campaign, “It is our right to write our constitution, we all will write it”, Bahia aimed to mobilize public opinion against the exclusionary machinery that had been used by some political forces during the writing of the constitution. In the second campaign, no hostile reactions were witnessed. However, the statements and the stickers of the campaigns did not seem to have much impact. Thus, Bahia moved to on-the-ground activities such as the Shura and Nahdet Masr stands. During the process of evolvement, Bahia developed its ways of expression by using different tools such as graffiti. Bahia's first graffiti campaign was, "I am Egyptian, do not categorize me". The aim of the campaign was to break molds and stereotypes about various issues in society and to convey a message of equality among all Egyptians. It also stresses the Egyptian identity as being inclusive, one that is able to transcend differences. This campaign marks a shift in the approach of Bahia to be more open of the social, as well as the political, which was further manifested in its next campaign, "It is My Right".

It is My Right campaign sought to raise awareness of people about the social and political rights that they can call for them. This campaign was an umbrella of many smaller campaigns that addressed a specific right under the same theme. For example, the campaign of “it is my right to be happy” was originally directed to unprivileged people and children where Bahia visited some poor areas in Cairo and celebrated iftar (Breakfast) during Ramadan and Eid. These visits allowed Bahia to get closer to people's problems, cares, hopes, and needs. The umbrella campaign would also include the “It is my right not to be harassed”, “It is my right to have a

good healthcare”, and “It is my right to have a good education” campaigns. But in the midst of the political reality in Egypt new issues continued to change and unfold everyday, which sometimes caused a shift in the people’s attention. In line with these political shifts, the focus of Bahia also shifted to other areas and governorates in Egypt. For example, Bahia was the first and possibly the only women’s group who visited Dahshour on Friday, 3<sup>rd</sup> of August 2012, in order to develop an objective understanding of the events, separate from the media depiction as an effort to find a viable solution to help the Christian community and families return to their homes (Bahia-ya-Masr, 2012).

Similar to Bahia's agenda to be an organizer and to have a network all over Egypt, Bahia has broadened the scope of its activities to reach areas outside of Cairo. For example, Bahia visited the Minya governorate in Upper Egypt as a part of its campaign for promoting "No" in the national referendum of the constitution. It also has visited Port-Said twice. The first time was to deliver a medical convoy during the violent acts in February 2013, and the second time was to celebrate International Women's Day with the Port-Said women as a kind of support. It also aligned with Bahia's campaign, “We are all Port-Said”, which was in support of the people who suffered the violence and brutality from police as the result calling for civil disobedience by the people.

It is also important to clarify that one of the reasons for Bahia's uniqueness is its creative ideas and innovative ways of expression, which never existed in pre-revolution Egypt. For example, one of the most well known marches organized by Bahia was the Coffin's march to the Itihadya Palace. This march took place in December 2012 during the Itihadya events where some of the Muslim Brotherhood persons attacked the peaceful protestors sit-in, and targeted women who were protesting against Morsi's constitutional declaration. Women in the march were

dressed in black and carried their coffins as a symbolic message that they are not afraid to be attacked and that they are ready to be killed for the sake of rejecting the constitution (Mekawy, Personal communication, March 12, 2013). This march was the first mass protest with coffins in Egypt that attracted a large number of protestors as well as media attention. Similarly, another march against the sudden increase of prices where Bahia called and protestors used metal cooking pots and kitchen tools to denounce the expensive price of food.

Another march that was organized by Bahia is the Men of Egypt not to be stripped off that took place on the 5<sup>th</sup> of February 2013. This march was shocking to the public because it was unusual and unprecedented that women march to denounce the stripped off of a man by police. It was also an embarrassing message for men who did not react when a woman was stripped off by military forces in December 2011. What is interesting about this march is when the Bahia's group created a hash tag on Twitter by the name of the march to call for people to participate, some men attacked the name of the march because they felt that it insulted the dignity of an Egyptian man. The name was chose as an intent to make fun of them as they do not see their dignity as being hurt when this man was stripped off in front of Itihadya Palace. In fact, this march helped in bringing down the barrier of fear used and produced by the to prevent people from protesting. It paved the way for another large march organized by many political forces under the name of, "Street is for us" on the 6<sup>th</sup> of February 2013 to claim the rights of citizens to protest and to assert that people will not be discouraged by these brutal acts by police.

Through my engagement with Bahia, and in line with Batliwala's (2011) argument about the essential elements that constitute a movement, I argue that after a year of its establishment, Bahia is a good example of a possible women's movement and has the characteristics that enable it to be a movement. For example, the continuity over time is proved, the number of membership

and supporters has increased, the political agenda becomes clearer, the use of variety of actions and strategies is articulated, and the involvement in collective activities is evident. Building on this I argue that Bahia has the ability to create a women's movement in Egypt with the help of other factors, some already previously mentioned. These factors include the vital presence of young women activists, the emergence of post-Mubarak formula of cooperation between political parties, NGOs and women groups, the creative tactics that are inspired by revolution such as graffiti and public displays of documentaries, the flexibility that the anti-NGOization framework offers to Bahia, and finally, the spirit of the revolution and voluntarism, and the breaking of fear.

In addition to this possibility of the birth of a women's movement in Egypt, there is also another possibility of a regional platform of cooperation between secular feminists, especially, in the Arab countries that witnessed revolutions to exchange experiences. This presents an opportunity to build a regional secular feminist network to strengthen solidarity between activists. One example of this cooperation is the Uprising of Women in the Arab World group (UWAW), which has successfully reached more than 100,000 members on their Facebook page. However, these possibilities and others are threatened by problems in the collective work between activists, which I will discuss in the next section.



Image 2: The logo of UAWAW. It shows the Map of the Arab World as a head of a female to indicate the solidarity between women activists in the region.

#### Concluding Remarks: Problem in Collective Action

September 2012 witnessed the announcement of three women's fronts in two consecutive weeks, the front of Egyptian Women led by the Tagamo'a political party, the Front of Women's Movement led by activist Azza Kamel, and the National Front for the Defense of Egyptian Women led by Bahia Ya Masr. The configuration of a women's front was initially introduced by the Bahia Ya Masr movement in July 2012, however after introducing the initial perception of the front in a preliminary meeting at Bahia's headquarter in the presence of representatives of women NGOs, political parties, activists, and feminist groups began conflicting on who would brainstorm the idea. When the initiative was announced by the political party of Tagamo'a under the name of The Front of Egyptian Women, two other groups also announced fronts with different names despite the fact that in the initial objective of the Front to unite. The vision, mechanism, and the structure of the National Front for the Defense of Egyptian Women,



discussed in the preliminary meeting in July 2012, indicates that this would have been a very promising project, one that is independent from all institutions and parties and would work towards joining the civil forces in the state. However, the mutual accusations between feminist groups and the atmosphere of conspiracy led to fragmentation.

After this, in March 2013, the National Salvation Front (NSF) in Egypt announced the formation of a permanent women rights committee to defend women rights. NSF is the coalition comprised mostly of liberal opposition political parties and groups in Egypt that aims to unite the voice of opposition. In this way, having a women's committee within this structure could serve as a step to uniting the voices of women activists to achieve the main goal behind the women's front initiative. Although this step was important, it unfortunately, took the initiative away from its main goal to be a united platform of women groups and individual activists and away from political parties to form a nucleus of a feminist social movement not an institutionalizes structure as NGOs or political parties. The same problem of collective work and lack of support among activists was also faced by the young activists of UWAW who said that they, in the beginning of their initiative, did not receive the support from any of the women activists and NGOs. Even though they had asked for it. It was only after the success of their initiative did they receive support and acknowledgment from other activists. They were also invited to conferences and asked to introduce themselves for others to learn (Sally Zoheny, Personal Communication, January 16, 2013).

The problem of collective work does not exist only in the older generation of women activists, it is also clear among young activists groups, but with at a lesser degree. For example, in spite of the organizational or ideological differences among young activists, as I highlighted in the previous chapter, they could sometimes work together on the same goal, but still be unable to

unite as one entity. If all or many of the new groups who tackled on anti-sexual assault could unite in one force, it would be more effective.

Collective work problem reaches its peak when it comes to the cooperation between young and old generations. In this case, a real problem occurred as it emerged from the refusal of youth to be controlled by the old generation, from their anxiety of being absorbed by these organizations and from their loss of independence. For the older generation, most of them believe that they have more experiences, more powerful relations and networks, and better resources. The lack of trust between women activists and the love of personal benefit more than the cause itself, is the most threatening problem to the women's movement in Egypt. This problem needs to be more seriously addressed by activists.

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