

“Focusing on North Africa, this impressive volume gathers a set of remarkable contributions to the analysis of the uprisings that shook the Arab-speaking region... It fits into a pattern that will likely become dominant in the future exploration of the great Arab upheaval. It is well fit to stand out as a useful and lasting contribution to the field, offering precious insights into various dimensions of the North African events.”

*Gilbert Achcar* (SOAS – London)

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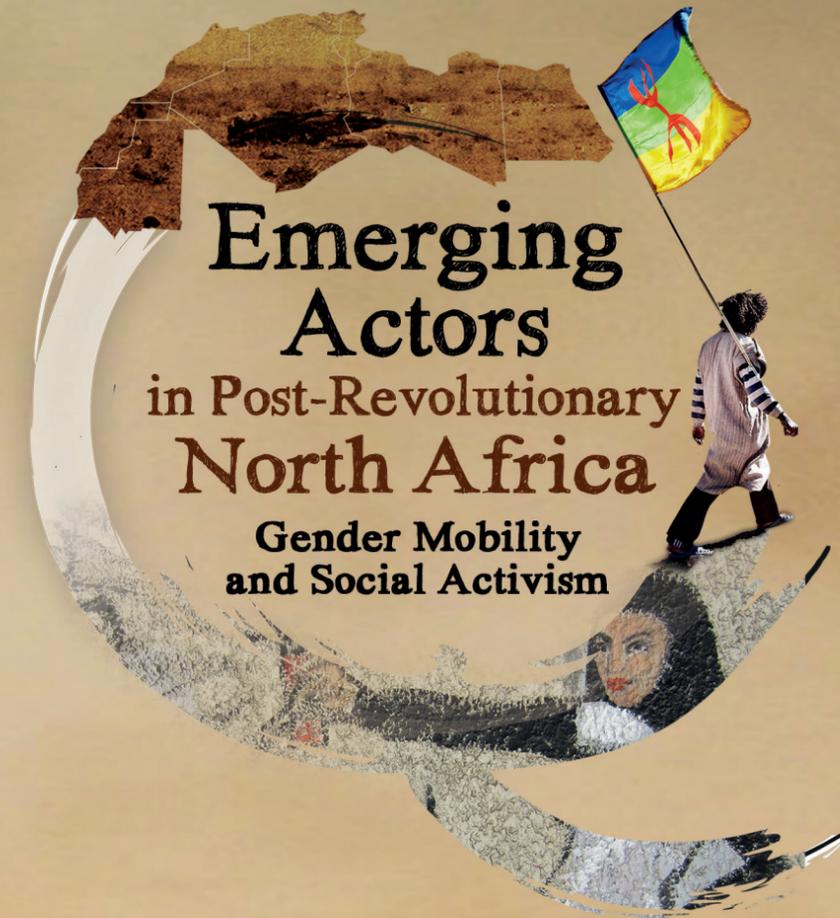
STUDI MAĞREBINI  
Emerging Actors in Post-Revolutionary North Africa  
Gender Mobility and Social Activism

Nuova  
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Vol. XIV - XV

Tomo I

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N.S. Volumi XIV-XV  
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Tomo I  
*Edited by*  
**ANNA MARIA DI TOLLA & ERSILIA FRANCESCA**

*Foreword by*  
**GILBERT ACHCAR**



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UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI DI NAPOLI "L'ORIENTALE"  
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In memory of our dear friend and colleague Agostino Cilaro (1947-2017)

*If you would indeed behold the spirit of death, open your heart wide unto the body of life.  
For life and death are one, even as the river and the sea are one.*

Kahlil Gibran

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The articles in this book have been peer-reviewed.

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## Preface

Focusing on North Africa, this impressive volume gathers a set of remarkable contributions to the analysis of the uprisings that shook the Arab-speaking region, starting from the well-known tragic episode that triggered the still ongoing chain of events – the self-immolation of the young Mohamed Bouazizi on 17 December 2010 in the Central Tunisian town of Sidi Bouzid.

The book's first part, less than one third of the whole, may lack homogeneity, but its eclectic character makes it all the more stimulating in opening various analytical perspectives. It offers an examination of some of the material parameters that partook in determining the 2011 regional shockwave with regard to social and economic issues as well as to water and food. Also assessed are how the upheaval affected key anthropological paradigms in the study of the region, its impact on European policy on migration, and the religious/secular tension with respect to the definition of citizenship.

This same tension is naturally at the heart of several entries in the second part of the volume, which is dedicated to gender-related issues in the Arab upheaval. This largest part of the book will certainly become prominent as a major contribution to its topic. It is very rich indeed, with several examinations of different aspects of feminist activism in North Africa, and often in the Middle East as well. Whether in comparing mainstream feminism with the Islamic variant, or in examining specific feminist expressions in art and literature, or in discussing sexual violence and the struggle over urban space, this second part constitutes an important and most interesting addition to the fields of both gender studies and Middle East and North Africa studies.

Reading the present volume, one could envy historians of medieval or earlier times, who must deal with a dearth of data and contemporary testimonies and assessments. In contrast, the exponential expansion of the number of scholars, and of scholarly

production therefore, over the last decades has concerned the Arab-speaking world to a very high degree. Due to the turmoil that has characterized it almost continuously since the end of the Second World War, this region has attracted a considerable amount of scholarly attention from all over the world, in addition to the scholars based in the region or originating from it.

The result is that, six years only after the beginning of the regional upheaval, making an inventory of the scholarly production on the 'Arab Spring' and its aftermath would already be a demanding endeavour. Future historians who will wish to work on those years will be confronted with such an amount of investigation and analyses that the task may appear daunting to them. The wealth of research that is contemporary of the events will certainly force a major part of future research into narrowing down its focus on singular countries or parts of countries and specific aspects of the historic revolutionary shockwave, instead of offering comprehensive assessments of the overall process. Collective works will probably tend to become the rule, whether collections of individual chapters or multi-volume undertakings of a greater magnitude.

In that sense, the present book edited by Ersilia Francesca and Anna Maria Di Tolla fits into a pattern that will likely become dominant in the future exploration of the great Arab upheaval. It is well fit to stand out as a useful and lasting contribution to the field, offering precious insights into various dimensions of the North African events.

Gilbert ACHCAR

*School of Oriental and African Studies, London*

## INTRODUCTION

### **Gender Mobility and Social Activism in Post-Revolutionary North Africa<sup>1</sup>**

Ersilia FRANCESCA - Anna Maria DI TOLLA

The political trajectory of the Arab world was shaken by the popular uprisings which burst forth in Tunisia in late 2010 and rapidly swept through the region in 2011. These uprisings produced a glimmer of hope for democratic change in the region, yet six years after their inception their outcome remains highly uncertain, the regional scenario being characterized more by violence, terrorism and civil war than by a democratic transition. In a previous work published in 2012 the editors of these volumes explored some of the economic, political, social and historic factors that led to the Arab uprisings which, at that point, were still optimistically designated as the ‘Arab Spring’ in the hope that the long-awaited ‘blossoming’ of democracy in the Arab region would soon happen.<sup>2</sup>

But the hopes for a peaceful ‘democratic transition’ in the region were soon dashed, turning the ‘Arab Spring’ into the ‘Arab Winter’ of authoritarianism, mounting instability, civil war and Islamist terror. Probably the most serious factors which brought to the failure of the uprisings lay in the elites’ incapacity to tackle effectively the severe turmoil and the economic crisis the region was experiencing, the absence of a clear political post-revolutionary agenda, and the slow

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<sup>1</sup> This introductory chapter has been written by A. M. Di Tolla and E. Francesca from p.1 to p. 16, and by E. Francesca from p. 16 to p. 27.

<sup>2</sup> A. M. Di Tolla - E. Francesca (eds.), *La rivoluzione ai tempi di internet. Il futuro della democrazia nel Maghreb e nel mondo arabo*, Università di Napoli “L’Orientale”, Napoli, 2012.

progress in terms of social and economic rights which continues to feed social tensions among the population.

The region's future is uncertain, racked by fragile democratic institutions, weak economic momentum, identity issues, and an insufficient level of maturity and/or democratic commitment on the part of some parties or leading politicians. The intertwined set of factors which had been at work before the uprisings are still operating in the aftermath, namely the socio-economic grievance and discontent of large segments of society, women's and youth unemployment or under-employment, the sense of marginalization and humiliation of the poorest strata of the population, and the quest, especially of the educated youth, for genuine political freedoms, social justice and economic security.<sup>3</sup> As Ibrahim Elbadawi and Samir Makdisi point out in their recent book *Democratic Transitions in the Arab World*, today's resistance in the Arab region against advancement into a democratic transition can be ascribed to the same elements which fostered different forms of autocracy in the region in the decades before the uprisings, namely oil, conflicts, neighbourhood effects and external interventions by both regional and international powers.<sup>4</sup>

The most resilient regimes are the 'rentier states' possessing oil wealth, which provides them with the resources necessary to cement ruling coalitions and to co-opt opponents. Also still very resilient are monarchies and other hereditary regimes, where the ruling family can count on long-term legitimacy but also on solid coercive apparatuses, making the political overturn of the sort observed in Egypt and Tunisia unlikely.

These elements are not unique to the Arab region but seem to be stronger here than elsewhere. They are considered to be the main causes for the emergence of what appears to be a region-wide authoritarian counter revolution in response to the uprisings. Further reasons are the lack of a broad-based socio-economic contract and of successful transitional economic and social policies. Nonetheless the process of change initiated by the uprisings of 2010-11 is far from extinguished.<sup>5</sup> According to Gilbert Achcar, the revolutionary

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<sup>3</sup> E. Alimi - A. Sela - M. Sznajder (eds.), *Popular Contention, Regime, and Transition: The Arab Revolts in Comparative Global Perspective*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2016, pp. 278-281.

<sup>4</sup> Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2017.

<sup>5</sup> I. Elbadawi - S. Makdisi (eds.), *Democratic Transitions in the Arab World*, pp. 307-312.

potential is still alive and the key to turning it into durable change lies in building a new progressive leadership which has thus far been lacking. This new leadership should be able to overcome the regimes' ability to draw on the structurally determined reserves of loyalty and repressive capacity used by them to fight back challenges or prevent them from consolidating.<sup>6</sup>

The three North African countries (Morocco, Tunisia and Egypt) on which the volumes mainly focus are at very different stages in their political transition relative to one another. Morocco and Tunisia have mostly succeeded in establishing more transparent, more efficient and more participative institutions; Tunisia, in particular, still represents an exemplar for revolutionary change in the region with the new Constitution strengthening citizens' political, social and economic rights.

The main challenges the country has to face are the turmoil of the educated youth confronted with limited economic opportunities, the rising levels of unemployment and growing regional disparities along with a large informal sector which offers low-quality jobs. These problems are generating growing pressures for reform and for the development of a more coherent and more inclusive socio-economic system.<sup>7</sup> In Morocco, the on-going regional protests prove the shortcomings of the government's performance and the need for further implementing the reform process. The new Constitution and the king's reform following the uprisings were welcomed as a peaceful alternative to the chaos spreading in the region, demonstrating Morocco's status as an exception among the authoritarian Arab regimes. Nonetheless, the Morocco 'model' shows several limits. The mechanisms of repression of opponents and co-optation of consensus continue to operate, proving that the feeling that the country was on the verge of a radical transformation, unprecedented since its independence in 1956, is not completely founded. The situation is rendered more complicated by a number of specific socio-political and economic features, such as patrimonialism and the strong control exercised on the country's resources by the

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<sup>6</sup> G. Achcar, *Morbid Symptoms. Relapse in the Arab Uprising*, Saqi Book, London, 2016, pp. 17-172.

<sup>7</sup> M. Boughzala - S. Ben Romdhane, 'Tunisia: The Prospects for Democratic Consolidation', in I. Elbadawi - S. Makdisi (eds.), *Democratic Transitions in the Arab World*, p. 111.

ruling elites.<sup>8</sup> In Egypt the spectre of counter revolution has emerged due also to the lack of the kind of pluralistic civil society and powerful labour associations which characterized Tunisia. Instead, Egyptian civil society was mainly mobilized by religious associations lead by the Islamist parties which were able to take advantage of Mubarak's ousting, though with dramatic and ephemeral results.<sup>9</sup> The neighbourhood effect has been largely unfavourable to Egypt. External illiberal forces favoured the rise of authoritarian regimes in the uprising's aftermath; in fact, both the supporters of the Muslim Brothers' rise to power (Turkey, Qatar and Iran), and the advocates of Sisi's restoration (Saudi Arabia, UAE and Kuwait) opposed any progressive liberal change in Egypt. The civil wars and turmoil which are plaguing Syria, Libya and Sudan accentuate the adverse neighbourhood effect in Egypt, legitimating the regime's interest in national security and war on terror campaign instead of addressing the revolutionary demands for freedom, liberties and social justice. The only positive outcome to date is the politicisation of the Egyptian population and its resilience in front of the regime's consolidated autocratic instruments of repression, violence and occasional concessions.<sup>10</sup>

Initially the Arab uprising was loaded with the promise of change being realised immediately. The mass enthusiasm was contagious and was further reinforced by the widespread belief that the united population could gain control of its destiny and overthrow the authoritarian regimes, as clearly synthetized in the revolutionary mantra "The People Want...". But the people's mobilization proved difficult to turn into a political project capable of succeeding over the political machinery controlled by the elite. Political failures,

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<sup>8</sup> J. Kalpakian, 'Between Reform and Reaction. The Syrian and Moroccan Responses to the Arab Spring', in *The Innovation Journal: The Public Sector Innovation Journal*, 18/1 (2013), p. 15; T. Belghazi - A. Moudden, 'Ihbat: Disillusionment and the Arab Spring in Morocco', in *The Journal of North African Studies*, 21/1 (2016); pp. 37-49.

<sup>9</sup> J. Brownlee - T. Masoud - A. Reynolds, *The Arab Spring: Pathways of Repression and Reform*, Oxford University Press, Oxford-New York, 2015, pp. 212-215.

<sup>10</sup> N. El Mikawy - M. Mohiedin - S. El Ashmaouy, 'Egypt: The Protracted Transition from Authoritarianism to Democracy and Social Justice', in I. Elbadawi - S. Makdisi (eds.), *Democratic Transitions in the Arab World*, p. 134, 178-180; R. Abou-El-Fadl, *Revolutionary Egypt: Connecting Domestic and International Struggles*, Routledge, London, 2015, pp. 3-5.

disillusionment and a cruel repression campaign led to demobilisation, but also to re-mobilisation in several local upheavals. People in Egypt seem to switch between opposite feelings of empowerment and frustration, but the energies which were unleashed during the uprising are still smouldering under the ashes of repression and disengagement. The 2010-2011 uprising demolished a longstanding barrier of fear: gathering in the streets, protesting, discussing politics are now part of a nationwide tradition in North Africa and they are hopefully signals of an enduring revolutionary process.<sup>11</sup>

A primary objective of these two volumes is to shed light on some of the dynamics of the post-revolutionary period in North Africa. In particular, the case studies taken up in these volumes tackle issues linked to gender mobility and women's political and social participation, social activism, Berber identity and Berber minority rights. The books seek to give space to insights that followed from discussion during the three-day-long international conference titled *North Africa Transition and Emerging Actors. Berber Movements, Gender Mobility and Social Activism*, convened at the University of Naples "L'Orientale" on 23<sup>rd</sup>-25<sup>th</sup> September 2014. The conference aimed at exploring the extent of challenges to implementing democratic reform in the years following the upheavals, taking as a starting assumption the fact that successful revolutions do not ensure successful democracies. On the contrary, the democratization process is often uneven and is not infrequently characterized by setbacks or backward steps. The North African uprisings exacerbated many of the region's underlying problems and tensions. The hectic schedule of political events set by the transition road map took place amid continuing and perhaps escalating security and economic problems. Nonetheless, in post-revolutionary North Africa new governance models emerged and existing social actors assumed a new and more effective role. In particular, the conference focused on associationism, gender mobility and Berber activism as crucial factors in the composition of the transition road map in North Africa.

These volumes have purposefully brought together papers by the scholars (both senior and young scholars) who took part in the conference, along with some invited papers in order to give insight into some crucial issues affecting contemporary North Africa, seeking

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<sup>11</sup> R. Abou-El-Fadl, *Revolutionary Egypt*, p. 9.

to contribute to a growing body of literature addressing the dynamics of transition from autocracy to sustained democracy in the aftermath of the Arab uprisings.

### **Gender Mobility and Social Activism**

The North African uprisings opened a new window of opportunity for the improvement of women's rights across the region, although women, along with other marginalized groups, such as ethnic and sexual minorities, and the economically disadvantaged and rural classes, continue to suffer various forms of discrimination and face the same dominant system of conservative and patriarchal ideologies and socio-economic inequalities as before.<sup>12</sup> The intersection of gender agency, power and activism is crucial in building new democratic and developmental policies within the North African countries. But not all governments have the capacity to institute a virtuous synergy with trade unions and civil society associations, including women's associations, in order to institute a fairer social welfare regime.

State capacity varies across the different countries of the region; Egypt, Morocco, and Tunisia are currently confronting severe restrictions on their ability to secure the social rights of citizens.<sup>13</sup> In these countries, young people and women, the driving forces of the revolutionary process, have been sidelined by the established political forces that have taken control of the political space. Nonetheless, they remain politically engaged in the democratic transition through their own associations and civil society initiatives. Their aspirations for freedom and social justice are connected with other urgent issues, such as democratic transition, independence of the judiciary, internal security, and economic uncertainty.

The new forms of activism which emerged from and at least in part lead the uprisings, represent one of the best achievements in the region. Social media were used to re-appropriate the public space and implement social changes. They generated an increase in knowledge regarding social reform issues and stimulated positive responses towards the reform goals by increasing the audience involved in their

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<sup>12</sup> G. Achcar, *Morbid Symptom*, p. 172. See also L. Touaf - S. Boutkhil - C. Nasri (eds.), *North African Women after the Arab Spring: In the Eye of the Storm*, Springer, New York, 2017, pp. 1-9.

<sup>13</sup> M. Karshenas - V. M. Moghadam - R. Alami, 'Social Policy after the Arab Spring: States and Social Rights in the MENA Region', in *World Development* 64 (2014), pp. 735-736.

development. Feminist activism took advantage of online social networks which helped to construct, essentialize, and render visible gendered messages and topics.

These and other questions are the main focus of this volume which takes Morocco, Tunisia and Egypt as paradigmatic examples for an analysis of women's status in North Africa in the aftermath of the uprisings.

Gender equality is crucial in processes of regime change and progressive transition to democracy. In particular, reduction of the gap in the literacy ratio, defined as the ratio between the share of educated women and that of educated man, has been found statistically to have a positive and significant effect on both the likelihood of transition and the likelihood of its success.<sup>14</sup> Overall, in North Africa and in the Middle East women have made significant progress in educational attainment, health care, and participation in the labour force over the past three decades. These achievements have had significant implications for the formation of human capital, for women's empowerment and women's participation in their countries' social and political life. Starting from the 1950s and the 1960s the MENA region made important steps in the fields of women's education, access to the labour market and political and social participation. Although these positive trends slowed down by the end of the 1980s, socio-economic indicators concerning women's empowerment have continued to improve.

In the 2000s the MENA region succeeded in raising the ratio of girls to boys in primary and secondary education up to 0.96, and in significantly increasing the ratio of young women attending universities. Female enrolment in the region's school systems has increased dramatically over the past decades to the point that the wide gender gap in educational attainment that was prevalent during the 1960s and 1970s has been bridged. By 2010, the average years of schooling for females in the region as a whole stood at nearly 14 years. In 11 MENA countries the share of women's enrolment in tertiary level education is now larger than that of men. Unlike the rest

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<sup>14</sup> C. Freund - M. Jaud, 'On the Determinants of Democratic Transitions', in *Middle East Development Journal* 5/1 (2013), p. 2, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1142/S1793812013500053>

of the world, there is a 'reverse' gender gap in the region with girls outperforming boys in school results at almost all educational levels.<sup>15</sup>

The last three decades have also seen a remarkable decline in fertility rates with the number of children born per woman decreasing from about seven children in the 1960s to three children in the 2000s. By 2010, in four countries (Iran, Lebanon, Tunisia, and Turkey) fertility rates were at or below the replacement level of about 2.1 children per woman. Lower fertility rates are associated with better health outcomes for women and children. Maternal mortality rates decreased dramatically over the last decades, thus meeting the objectives set by the UN Millennium Goals with regard to improving maternal health and reducing child mortality.<sup>16</sup>

However, these advancements have not translated to a more effective economic and political inclusion for women. In particular, they have not resulted in commensurate rates of increase in female labour force participation. The average rate of female participation in the region moved slowly upwards from 22% in 1980-1985 to about 28% in 2005-2010, in sharp contrast to rates and trends in other regions, irrespective of their development status. The evidence suggests that the gap between the North African and Middle Eastern countries and other developing countries has widened despite the region's remarkable convergence with the rest of the world in terms of female education and fertility decline.<sup>17</sup> In particular, the neoliberal economic policy turn of the 1990s – which entailed denationalization, privatization, and liberalization of industry and commerce – resulted in growing unemployment among the large population of educated young people and women.

The Middle East and North Africa region shows an increase in women's unemployment rates between 2012 and 2014, and a persistent gender gap with rates of young women's participation in the labour market much lower than those of young men. Women, particularly young women, are more exposed than their male counterparts to unemployment, underemployment or informal employment.

A key part of the call for change emanating from women and young people during the Arab uprising has been the request for access

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<sup>15</sup> N. Chamlou - M. Karshenas (eds.), *Women, Work and Welfare in the Middle East and North Africa*, Imperial College Press, London, 2016, pp. 4-6.

<sup>16</sup> *Ib.*, pp. 6-7.

<sup>17</sup> *Ib.*, pp. 7-16.

to greater economic opportunities. To date, on the socio-economic front, the governments of the region have responded to this call mainly by increasing state spending on subsidies and public sector wages and expenditures. However, addressing the aspirations and needs of these demographics will require more comprehensive reforms focusing on job creation strategies without further affecting the budget deficit.<sup>18</sup>

The revolutionary act constituted a political and cultural shock for the previously established political order as well as for the existent gender discourse. Women contributed to the elaboration of new resistance strategies through chants, banners, slogans and graffiti, and were able to turn physical violation and sexual harassment into a new culture of the body and into a re-positioning of the gender discourse. The revolutionary generation went 'beyond gender without abandoning gender', thus allowing women to exercise agency within a broader discourse centred on citizens' rights and democratic mobilization against authoritarian and corrupt regimes.<sup>19</sup>

In this new scenario, women presented themselves as active agents of change in the region and they succeeded in disrupting the strict public/private space dichotomy, which prioritizes their role within the household. Nonetheless, the current political and socio-economic context is not favorable to women's empowerment. Economic and political factors which have for decades characterized the region – such as economic stagnation, social insecurity, political instability, legal injustices – continue to have a negative impact on gender equality in the aftermath of the uprisings.

In 2004 the World Bank, under the supervision of Nobel Prize laureate Shirin Ebadi, published the seminal report titled *Gender and Development in the Middle East and North Africa*.<sup>20</sup> The report explores the situation of women in the region through two key concepts: the 'gender paradigm' and the 'gender paradox'. The first

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<sup>18</sup> The World Bank, *Opening Doors*, MENA Development Report 2013, pp. 115, 121, <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/338381468279877854/pdf/751810PUB0EPI002060130Opening0doors.pdf>.

<sup>19</sup> S. Abouelnaga, *Women in Revolutionary Egypt: Gender and the New Geographies of Identity*, The American University in Cairo Press, Cairo, 2016, pp. 6-7.

<sup>20</sup> The World Bank, *Gender and Development in the Middle East and North Africa: Women in the Public Sphere*, MENA Development Report 2004, <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/15036>.

refers to the asymmetrical relationships between men and women in the region, which create and sustain inequalities, such as the fact that the husband/father holds the role of breadwinner within the family, that a 'code of modesty' is imposed on women and that several forms of inequality are perpetrated in the law, giving privileged conditions to the men especially in family and hereditary law. Unlike other developing regions where improvements in female health and education have gone hand in hand with women's economic and political empowerment, in North Africa and the Middle East the 'gender paradigm' has been only challenged, but not demolished. This is what the report calls the 'gender paradox', namely the low female political empowerment and the low female labour force participation rates in the region despite women's significant achievements in terms of education, life expectancy, and fertility.<sup>21</sup> The outcomes of the 2004 report still hold true today, and it is still possible to make the point that the major obstacle to female employment and political participation in the region is the incapacity to translate women's achievements in term of education and healthcare into a significant improvement of women's political and economic role.

The experience of women during the uprisings and in their aftermath varies from country to country. According to Valentine Moghadam the more women's empowerment was advanced before the upheavals, the greater the possibilities of a successful transition to democracy and of a significant raise in leadership roles for women in politics. In the decades before the uprisings, both Morocco and Tunisia experienced substantial legal reforms aimed at removing gender inequalities in their domestic law, especially in family and hereditary law, and at promoting women's political participation. In Morocco reform movements resulted in the constitutional amendments restricting the king's vast powers and institutionalizing the rights of women and of the Berber minority. The female share of total seats in parliament increased from 11% to 17% thanks to a fully implemented reserved seat system. In early 2014, after the suicide of a young woman, Amina Filali, who had been forced to marry her rapist, the Moroccan parliament voted unanimously to repeal rape marriage from the penal code, and in June 2014, Moroccan female activists vehemently protested against the prime minister's comments that the

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<sup>21</sup> G. Achcar, *The People Want: A Radical Exploration of the Arab Uprising*, Saqi Books, London, 2013, pp. 31-33.

role of women is to focus on the family. In Tunisia, the new Constitution, adopted in January 2014, enshrines the equality of women and men rather than their complementarity, as was instead initially requested by al-Nahḍa and other conservative forces. In the October 2014 legislative elections, 47% of all parliamentary candidates were women, and 12% of those who led the political party candidate lists were women as well. The liberal-left coalition party Nidā' Tūnis won the election, and the new parliament has a 31% female share of members.<sup>22</sup> Recently (July 26<sup>th</sup> 2017) Tunisia's parliament passed a bill aiming at promoting gender equality and at ensuring that any form of gender-based violence is brought to face justice. The new law, which will be officially introduced next year (2018), seeks to ensure that in daily life women's dignity and gender equality are respected as guaranteed by the Constitution.

In contrast to the freedom Moroccan and Tunisian women experienced during rallies and sit-ins, Egyptian female activists were subjected to humiliating sexual harassments by gangs of men, by police, and by the military during and after the Tahrir Square protests. This proves that Egypt was lagged behind compared to the other two North African countries with respect to reducing the gender gap and promoting gender equality.<sup>23</sup> Indeed one of the main constraints for gender equality in Egypt, namely the clause that the State shall guarantee the agreement between women's work in society and her duties to the family (1956 Constitution Article 19), was passed again in the 1971 Constitution, promulgated by Sadat, and was left almost unchanged in the 2012 (art. 10) and 2014 (art. 11) Constitutions. In particular the 1971 Constitution states that 'The State shall guarantee the agreement between the duties of a woman toward her family and her work in society, considering her equal status with man in the fields of political, social, cultural, and economic life, without contravening the laws of Islamic *sharī'a*' (Article 11). This clause seems to promote gender equality concerning public rights, but only a sort of gendered 'complementarity' in private family life, with Islamic religion playing a major role in distinguishing between the two fields.

Though the expansion of women's participation and the scope of their rights do not seem to be a priority for revolutionary forces,

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<sup>22</sup> V. M. Moghadam, 'Democratization and Women's Political Leadership in North Africa', in *Journal of International Affairs* 68/1 (Fall/Winter 2014), pp. 70-72.

<sup>23</sup> *Ib.*, pp. 69-70.

women have nonetheless made remarkable achievements.<sup>24</sup> Generally speaking, the uprising demolished the principle of homogeneity, marking the appearance of a real diversity on several levels: ideological, cultural, religious, educational, class-based and gender-oriented. The revolutionary act worked as a political and cultural shock that brought about a subversion of previously solid national gendered discourses.<sup>25</sup> Nonetheless, the revolutionary discourse, which centered on social justice and freedom, better job opportunities and demand for participation, was outstripped by the dominant discourses adopted by the political forces. These focused instead mainly on issues of Islamism versus secularism, modernism versus conservatism, national security and the war on terror. Women do not believe in the old political models but at the same time they have not yet been able to articulate a new one. They remain nonetheless politically engaged in the post-revolutionary transition through their own associations and civil society initiatives. They are convinced that the current system is not serving them, but continue to put pressure on the authorities through street protests, sit-ins, activities on social networks and independent associations.

Understanding the factors that are driving gender-based economic and social inequality is a crucial issue, not just for reasons of pursuing equality and economic inclusion, but also for political reasons. An inclusive and sustainable post-revolutionary development agenda should address gender equality in order to minimize women's vulnerability (especially for rural and underprivileged women) and maximize opportunities, to turn contradictions into balanced approaches addressing economic, social, and political dimensions.

### **Layout of the Book**

Taken collectively, the articles in this book tackle some of the abovementioned topics and by doing so open up a new range of questions for future research on social activism and the trajectory of women's participation, resistance and resilience transpiring in North Africa in the aftermath of the uprisings. The chapters are organized into two sections. Part one, titled **Economic and Social Issues**, engages with some elements of the puzzle raised by the Arab

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<sup>24</sup> M. Olimat (ed.), *Handbook of Arab Women and Arab Spring: Challenges and Opportunities*, Routledge, London -New York, 2014.

<sup>25</sup> S. Abouelnaga, *Women in Revolutionary Egypt*, p. 3.

uprisings and subsequent events by addressing issues such as migrations, water and food shortage, economic challenges, citizenship and transitional democracy. The articles of section one explore the contours of a rational framework through which we can understand the drivers of change which led to the uprisings, and the evolution of the socio-political forces in the aftermath. Some issues seem to be unrelated to the main content of the book but this is not truly the case. In particular, the articles by Giuseppe Cataldi, **Quelques observations sur les migrations dans la Méditerranée dans la perspective de l'Union Européenne** and by Eugenia Ferragina and Giovanni Canitano, **Crise hydrique, crise alimentaire et bouleversement politique au Maghreb** provide an invaluable set of insights concerning the causes, the emergence, and the unfolding dynamics and trajectories of the revolutionary movements in North Africa. The (apparently) unpredictable manner in which they emerged as well as the recurrence of social and political violence in the Middle East and North Africa are certainly connected to some major issues that are being faced by the whole Mediterranean region, namely the asymmetrical North-South dynamics, the inequalities generated by globalization, and the climate change and progressive desertification which are dramatically affecting several African regions. The dependence on basic foodstuffs imports makes North Africa particularly vulnerable to price fluctuations on the international markets, which along with environmental problems and water shortage, are negatively influencing the transition economies and social security of the region. On the other hand, the European incapacity to deal with the unstable situation in the countries of the South Mediterranean is paradigmatically exemplified by the lack of solidarity on the part of EU States when confronted with migrants fleeing from wars, extreme poverty and violence, in the face of the fundamental principles enshrined in the Lisbon Treaty and in particular in the Charter of Fundamental Rights. One of the major causes behind the uprisings is the failure of the neo-liberal and structural adjustments policies across the MENA region. The present situation calls for a more inclusive development approach and requires a new socio-political paradigm, more regional integration and more involvement from Europe and from other international actors in the reconstruction and development of North Africa. Six years after the uprisings, the perception of inequality has risen and the social and

political unrest sweeping the Arab world has further deteriorated the economic and social situation of average citizens. Focusing mainly on Tunisia and Egypt (two countries where the 2011 uprisings share many similarities), Ersilia Francesca's paper, titled **Economic Opportunities and Social Challenges in the North African Transition**, explores how the post-revolution political and economic situation is affecting the status of women and young people, who played a significant role in the revolutionary phase. The important issues of governance, democracy and citizenship receive attention in the last two articles of section one: **Challenging the Paradigms. Changing Theories in the Middle-Eastern Anthropology after the Tunisian Revolution** by Domenico Copertino and **Islam and Citizenship in Tunisia after the Yasmine Revolution. The Debate over the Law of *Awqāf*** by Pietro Longo. The former provides a theoretical framework for analyzing the concepts of freedom, dignity, social justice, and governmentality, with reference to both their explicit formulation and implicit understandings by the individuals and groups involved in the revolutionary process. The paper by P. Longo focuses on the rise of political Islam in Tunisia and the ensuing polarization of politics. It suggests that, during the first four years after the uprising, the Islamists of *al-Nahḍa* deliberately issued controversial draft laws in order to 'test' people's reaction, and modified their agenda accordingly. Under this light, restoring pious foundations for state law can be understood to form part of *al-Nahḍa*'s political strategy.

In part two, titled **Gender Dynamics**, the articles engage with the key themes of the book by addressing the ways female activists and feminists (both secular and Islamic) responded to the authoritarian regimes and to an increasingly perceived inequality of opportunities by creating new forms of reaction, resistance and resilience and developing a more active political consciousness. Women's ability to resort to the street and to social media in strategically smart ways represents a major challenge to traditional gender dynamics in the region, and will it make more difficult for the authoritarian and conservative forces to monopolize power in the future. The first article in the section, **Mapping the Forms of Women's Activism and Leadership in Post-Uprising Arab Countries** by Aitemad Muhanna Matar, based on empirical field research, outlines how newly emerged non-feminist women's leaders, especially those who represent Islamist

parties, are trying to implement a new model of feminist leadership within the moral framework of Islamic tradition. The heterogeneity within female activism in Tunisia as well as the emergence of new social actors following the 2011 uprising is highlighted also in the article by Marta Bellingreri, titled **Tunisian Women: A Polyphonic Choir in a Heterogeneous Society**. The fall of President Ben Ali in January 2011 marked a turning point in Tunisian history, opening up new horizons of freedom for the country's people after years of constant censorship. Gina Annunziata (**Le regard libéré. La militance féminine dans le cinéma tunisien postrévolutionnaire**) outlines the role of a number of Tunisian female filmmakers – such as Nadia El Fani, Sonia Chamkhi, Hinde Boujemaa – who have taken advantage of this space of freedom to describe reality through the stories of women engaged in various ways in a process of change. Cross-cutting issues in the following articles of section two are women's empowerment and strategies of resistance in Egypt. Rania Abdelrahman (**The Politics of Mourning: Mothers of the Martyrs' Narratives of Resistance and Empowerment**) analyses the narratives of a group of Egyptian mothers whose sons were killed during the demonstrations of 25<sup>th</sup> January 2011 in Egypt, arguing that their narratives are simultaneously narratives of resistance and empowerment. Roswitha Badry (**Increased Gender-Based Violence as a Result of the Greater Visibility of Women's Rights Defenders in the Public Sphere? Remarks on 'Anti-Harassment' Initiatives in Egypt**) discusses how women reacted to sexual harassment and gender based violence in the country facing off any attempt to push defenders of women's rights out of the public sphere back into the private sphere. Mounira Soliman, in her paper **Urban Space, Power Struggle, and the Remaking of the City**, also focuses on the re-appropriation of the urban space. Taking into account the youth movement of the January 25<sup>th</sup> revolution, she underlines the way in which the utilization of different forms of popular culture, including graffiti, street fairs, public concerts and popular performances, created a new city and sustained a platform for political engagement. Margherita Picchi (**Egypt in Transition: What future for Islamic Feminism?**) addresses the question of how the dramatic and on-going changes that Egypt has faced since the beginning of the 2011 uprising, are influencing 'Islamic feminism' which represents a dynamic and diversified phenomenon in the specific context of the country. Pervine

Elrefaei (**Intellectuals and Activists Writing under the Sign of Hope: Radwa Ashour and Ahdaf Soueif's Manifestos of the 2011 Revolution**) and Loubna A. Youssef (**The Victory of the Egyptian Vernacular in Egyptian Writings pre and post January 2011**) both explore the Egyptian revolutionary movement through the lens of literature. The contribution of P. Elrefaei focuses on Ahdaf Soueif's 2012 memoir *Cairo: My City, Our Revolution*, and Radwa Ashour's 2013 autobiography *Athqal min Radwā (Heavier than Radwa: Excerpts from an Autobiography)* arguing that the selected texts – depicting issues of identity, the self and nationalism as crucial points – can be regarded as acts of literary activism or textual spaces of resistance. On the other hand, L. Youssef examines the tension between standard and vernacular Arabic in pre- and post-January 2011 Egyptian literature, arguing that the Egyptian dialect, which is hailed as the real language of the people, entails a subversive function of overturning the logics and structures of power, thus giving voice to the revolutionary ideals.

The last two articles of the book, **Being Young and Post-Feminist in Morocco: The Emergence of a New Women's Activism** by Renata Pepicelli and **Égalité de genre au Maroc après 2011 ? Les droits sexuels et reproductifs au centre des récentes luttes de reconnaissance** by Sara Borrillo help to provide an understanding of how women in Morocco reconfigured gender roles and turned squares and streets into new gendered spaces. R. Pepicelli, on the basis of interviews with activists from different generations, investigates the forms and tools of social and political engagement of the young 'post-feminists' in Morocco, focusing mainly on the 20 February Movement. S. Borrillo explores the impact of urban female activism on the recognition of formal equality between women and men, and, in particular, she analyzes the emergence of sexual rights issues in the struggles for the 'rights to recognition'.

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<sup>26</sup> The research program has been directed by prof. Pierluigi Valsecchi of the University of Pavia. The principal investigator for the University of Naples "L'Orientale" has been prof. M. Cristina Ercolessi.

reviewing by anonymous readers to whom we are very much obliged for helping us in the difficult task of editing a book. The articles presented in this volume have been formally standardized as far as possible in order to facilitate the readers' comprehension of Arabic proper and place names. Some differences in the spelling of names have been maintained where it seemed important to respect the individual character of each contribution. Our thanks are also due to Sara Borrillo and Valentina Schiattarella, postdoctoral research fellows at the Department of Asian, African and Mediterranean Studies (DAAM), who helped us in the editing of the volume. Last but not least, we want to thank David Ginsborg, Barbara de Lutzinger and Sarah Pinto for their competence and patience in revising the English and French language throughout the volumes.



**Part 1**  
**Economic and Social Issues**



# **Quelques observations sur les migrations dans la Méditerranée dans la perspective de l'Union Européenne**

Giuseppe CATALDI

« Qu'est-ce que la Méditerranée ? Mille choses à la fois. Non pas un paysage, mais d'innombrables paysages. Non pas une mer, mais une succession de mers. Non pas une civilisation, mais des civilisations entassées les unes sur les autres. (...) Tout cela parce que la Méditerranée est un très vieux carrefour. Depuis des millénaires tout a conflué vers elle, brouillant, enrichissant son histoire ».

Fernand Braudel<sup>1</sup>

## **Abstract**

In this article the author deals with the question of migration through Mediterranean corridors in the framework of the relationship between European Union and States engaged in the so called 'Arab Spring'. The problem is that real solidarity is lacking on the part of European Union States, notwithstanding the fundamental principles enshrined in the Lisbon Treaty and in particular in the Charter of Fundamental Rights. The Asylum system adopted by the European Union is in crisis, it does not work due to the absence of any coordination among State Members, divided by different opinions on migration's needs. Temporary Protection has been introduced as a new form of assistance to migrants, but it is not sufficient and humanitarian corridors should be created. The case of the incident between Italy and France at the Ventimiglia border (April 2011), where these two States quarreled for the destiny of no more than five hundreds of Tunisian migrants is emblematic of the attitude of European Union Member States toward this issue. Is the European Union interested to the protection of Fundamental Rights or of European Rights? This is the main question. To be European Union or to become a 'Fortress Europe'.

## **Introduction. Printemps arabe et démocraties occidentales**

L'histoire de la Méditerranée est une histoire de civilisations, de projets, d'attentes et parfois d'illusions qui se rencontrent, se heurtent et se mélangent. Mais c'est aussi l'histoire d'une mer non pas

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<sup>1</sup> F. Braudel, *La Méditerranée - Espace et histoire*, Arts et métiers graphiques, 1977; rééd. en poche, Champs, Flammarion, Paris 1985, pp. 8-9.

enfermée dans des frontières rigides, mais entourée de frontières éphémères et changeantes, une mer qui est en relation avec d'autres mers et civilisations. Si l'on regarde la Méditerranée comme une mosaïque, on voit que ses tesselles sont toutes différentes, mais que chacune a une grande importance et, par conséquent, l'on accepte le fait qu'il n'existe pas une seule Méditerranée mais qu'il s'agit de plusieurs civilisations « entassées l'une sur l'autre ».<sup>2</sup> La diversité et la spécificité de la Méditerranée font de cette région un espace de réflexion critique pour la civilisation occidentale tout entière.

L'Ouest et l'Europe n'étaient pas préparés au printemps arabe. On peut le constater par l'action (ou l'échec!) des États occidentaux et des instances européennes et supranationales, l'ONU, l'OTAN et l'Union européenne en premier lieu. Le « séisme » qui a ébranlé jusque dans leurs fondements et dans une succession rapide, entre décembre 2010 et début 2011, la Tunisie, l'Égypte et la Libye, a irrémédiablement fait craquer l'ordre régional existant, marquant le début d'une transformation tous azimuts, similaire ou du moins comparable à celle qui a transformé l'Europe en 1989.

Au début, face aux troubles survenus dans le sud de la Méditerranée, - des événements à la fois inattendus et redoutés -, les États-Unis et l'Europe sont restés inertes. Ce n'est que lorsqu'on s'est aperçu que le vent du changement ne cesserait de souffler avec force que l'Occident a embrassé la cause de la liberté et soutenu les processus démocratiques, en exhortant les régimes à promouvoir la transition démocratique. Ce brusque changement de direction est peu crédible à cause de l'absence d'une stratégie commune minimale au niveau européen, mais aussi de la crainte évidente et mal dissimulée d'une invasion d'immigrants illégaux et d'une avancée du fondamentalisme et du terrorisme.

Depuis le début des années 90, la politique étrangère des États de l'Ouest et des organisations internationales qui sont leur expression, repose en fait sur deux domaines clés : les alliances géostratégiques et les relations économiques et commerciales avec les pays du sud de la Méditerranée. La région méditerranéenne et du Moyen-Orient a joué un rôle central dans l'agenda politique des États d'Europe occidentale, notamment ceux qui sont membres de l'OTAN et de l'UE. Toutefois, les actions menées n'ont pas été à la hauteur des attentes. Les politiques en question ont principalement tourné autour de l'idée que la coopération économique pourrait déclencher des dynamiques

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<sup>2</sup> Braudel, *La Méditerranée*, pp. 8-9.

politiques vertueuses, la démocratisation des régimes autoritaires et la croissance de la société civile, contribuant ainsi de manière décisive à la sécurité et à la stabilisation de la région. Il est bien connu que les accords de l'UE avec les pays tiers ont inclus, à partir des années 90, la clause dite de « conditionnalité démocratique », qui pose le respect de la primauté du droit et des libertés fondamentales comme fondement de ces accords, susceptibles de suspension en cas de violation desdits principes. On sait, toutefois, que l'UE a eu très rarement recours à la possibilité de résilier les accords avec les pays tiers pour sanctionner le non respect en termes de démocratie.

Un choix qui non seulement affecte la cohérence et la crédibilité de l'action extérieure de l'UE et de ses États membres dans le domaine des droits de l'homme, mais qui en plus ne s'est pas avéré gagnant. Face à un avenir plein d'inconnues, pour l'Occident et l'Europe le plus difficile est à venir. L'enjeu, c'est bien plus que le destin des révolutions arabes individuelles. Il s'agit, en fait, de la crédibilité même de l'Occident, et en particulier de l'UE. Il faut partant faire preuve de cohérence et de cohésion.

Le soutien à l'Afrique du Nord prend une valeur stratégique très élevée, dans l'immédiat comme dans un avenir proche, parce que la démocratisation de l'Afrique du Nord peut être un frein aux prétentions et à la violence des régimes autoritaires vis-à-vis d'autres pays arabes et de l'Afrique en général.

Le soutien de l'Occident aux processus de transition en Afrique du Nord doit être double : d'une part, un soutien politique qui repose sur un plan stratégique de l'Union européenne pour l'ensemble de l'Afrique du Nord, avec l'identification de lignes d'une action commune à l'ensemble de la région ; de l'autre, un soutien économique tout nouveau, qui puisse abandonner les vieilles recettes financières dont les populations locales ont très mal et très peu profité, en subordonnant l'aide économique au développement de la société civile et à la protection et promotion de la démocratie et de la primauté du droit. Or, tout cela nécessite un changement des valeurs et de l'idéologie de l'Ouest, qui devrait cesser de souligner uniquement les dangers qui se cachent derrière le printemps arabe et recommencer par les « racines communes » des peuples de la Méditerranée.

### **Printemps arabe et Union Européenne**

Celles que j'ai mentionnées, cependant, ne semblent pas être toujours les lignes directrices de la politique de l'Union Européenne

en la matière. Sur la base des principes généraux énoncés à l'art. 2 du Traité sur l'Union Européenne (TUE), il faut retenir le principe selon lequel l'Europe ne peut pas construire son espace de liberté, de sécurité et de justice aux frais des droits fondamentaux des ressortissants des Pays tiers ; en deuxième lieu, il faut tenir compte du fait que, en matière de droits fondamentaux, les États tiers ne sont pas toujours mus par les mêmes préoccupations que l'Union Européenne. Il ne faut pas que cela devienne pour nous, les Européens, un « alibi » politique pour faire moins, mais plutôt un point de départ pour prétendre plus lorsqu'il s'agit de s'accorder avec nos pays partenaires étrangers et les organisations internationales, notamment en matière de sécurité. L'Union devrait faire passer à ses interlocuteurs le message que notre coopération est subordonnée au respect d'un standard minimal. En termes plus clairs : les droits fondamentaux ne sont pas négociables dans un système politique se décrivant lui-même comme une démocratie. Il suffit de rappeler ici les arrêts bien connus *Yusuf* et *Kadi* de la Cour de Luxembourg, qui a démontré sans ambiguïté que l'acquis européen en la matière ne peut pas accepter le niveau de protection des droits fondamentaux pris en considération par le Comité des sanctions du Conseil de sécurité des Nations Unies au moment où celui-ci décide sur les mesures qui gèlent les avoirs des personnes figurant sur une liste des terroristes présumés.<sup>3</sup> Je me félicite de la tendance de la Cour de justice à proclamer l'identité constitutionnelle de l'Union, résistant ainsi à une mise en œuvre sans réserve du principe de primauté du droit international. La jurisprudence de la Cour européenne des droits de l'homme a aussi précisé que les États sont tenus de prendre en compte ces circonstances. Si nous rejetons cela, alors nous ne devrions plus parler de « droits fondamentaux » mais de « droits européens », ce qui correspond à l'idée d'une Europe « forteresse », fermée au monde extérieur. La prévention du terrorisme, en particulier, a montré récemment que l'UE ne peut pas s'isoler des contraintes des droits universels de l'homme et que la sécurité et les droits de l'homme ne sont pas des catégories nécessairement liées par une relation de conflit.

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<sup>3</sup> Cour de justice (grande chambre), Affaires jointes C-402/05 P et C-415/05 P, *Yassin Abdullah Kadi et Al Barakaat International Fondation Contre Conseil de l'Union européenne et Commission des Communautés européennes*, du 3/9/2008.

## **Le système d’asile commun dans l’Union Européenne**

Un premier point à soulever est la faiblesse du système commun d’asile européen, récemment révisé,<sup>4</sup> qui, à notre avis, n’a pas pleinement mis en œuvre le principe de solidarité requis par l’art. 80 du TFUE.<sup>5</sup>

Nous savons que cette situation est principalement due à la réticence de plusieurs États membres et qu’elle a été confirmée par les conclusions du Sommet du Conseil européen, qui a eu lieu les 24 et 25 octobre 2013, lesquelles sont, à notre avis, très frustrantes sur ces points.<sup>6</sup> Il est certes encourageant de lire une référence à la nécessité de faire preuve de solidarité et de partager le poids dans cette matière, mais aucune nouvelle mesure législative n’a été déclarée comme opportune, et la révision du règlement de Dublin n’a pas été prévue. Dans sa dernière formulation, adoptée en juin 2013, en conformité avec la

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<sup>4</sup> Le 26 juin 2013 les actes normatifs suivants ont été adoptés, destinés à s’ajouter à la directive 2011/95/UE du Parlement européen et du Conseil du 13/12/2011 concernant les normes relatives aux conditions que doivent remplir les ressortissants des pays tiers ou les apatrides pour pouvoir bénéficier d’une protection internationale, à un statut uniforme pour les réfugiés ou les personnes pouvant bénéficier de la protection subsidiaire, et au contenu de cette protection : 1) le règlement (UE) n° 603/2013 du Parlement européen et du Conseil du 26 juin 2013 relatif à la création d’Eurodac pour la comparaison des empreintes digitales aux fins de l’application efficace du règlement (UE) n° 604/2013 établissant les critères et mécanismes de détermination de l’État membre responsable de l’examen d’une demande de protection internationale introduite dans l’un des États membres par un ressortissant de pays tiers ou un apatride et relatif aux demandes de comparaison avec les données d’Eurodac présentées par les autorités répressives des États membres et Europol à des fins répressives, et modifiant le règlement (UE) n° 1077/2011 portant création d’une agence européenne pour la gestion opérationnelle des systèmes d’information à grande échelle au sein de l’espace de liberté, de sécurité et de justice (refonte) ; 2) le règlement (UE) n° 604/2013 du Parlement européen et du Conseil du 26 juin 2013 établissant les critères et mécanismes de détermination de l’État membre responsable de l’examen d’une demande de protection internationale introduite dans l’un des États membres par un ressortissant de pays tiers ou un apatride ; 3) la directive 2013/32/UE du Parlement européen et du Conseil du 26 juin 2013 relative à des procédures communes pour l’octroi et le retrait de la protection internationale ; 4) la directive 2013/33/UE du Parlement européen et du Conseil du 26 juin 2013 établissant des normes pour l’accueil des personnes demandant la protection internationale.

<sup>5</sup> Article 80 : « Les politiques de l’Union visées au présent chapitre et leur mise en œuvre sont régies par le principe de solidarité et de partage équitable de responsabilités entre les États membres, y compris sur le plan financier. Chaque fois que cela est nécessaire, les actes de l’Union adoptés en vertu du présent chapitre contiennent des mesures appropriées pour l’application de ce principe ».

<sup>6</sup> Voir le doc. EUCO 169/13 du 25 octobre 2013, par. 46 à 49.

formulation précédente du règlement n. 343/2013, le règlement de Dublin établit que le critère principal pour l'identification de l'État responsable du traitement des demandes d'asile est celui du pays membre de première entrée. Or, en appliquant ce critère, le risque est d'abord de surcharger les États membres (en particulier les États de la Méditerranée) qui sont géographiquement les plus exposés. Deuxièmement, ce système est un obstacle à une répartition efficace des réfugiés sur la base du marché national du travail ou du réseau familial. Il serait nécessaire, à notre avis, d'établir périodiquement le pourcentage de réfugiés que chaque État membre peut accueillir, en se basant principalement sur sa situation économique, avec un mécanisme de compensation dans le cas des États ayant un pourcentage plus élevé par rapport à leur capacité. D'où la nécessité d'un « partage du fardeau » au niveau européen, avec la création d'un bureau pour l'analyse des demandes d'asile qui puisse répartir les candidats.

Une autre question qui doit être, à notre avis, considérée avec attention est celle, soulignée plusieurs fois par le Conseil européen (également au sommet du 24 et du 25 octobre 2013), des avantages d'une politique de retour et de coopération avec les pays d'origine et de transit des migrants ainsi que des demandeurs d'asile. Il s'agit d'un point très sensible.

Tout d'abord, nous sommes convaincus qu'il est nécessaire de séparer la question des demandeurs d'asile de celle des migrants économiques. Le risque est qu'un système construit pour protéger les demandeurs d'asile puisse être démolé sous la pression (compréhensible) des personnes à la recherche d'un niveau de vie acceptable, mais qui ne sont pas en danger. Cela implique une révision complète des politiques nationales en matière d'immigration, avec l'introduction de canaux d'immigration légale pour les migrants en recherche d'emploi. Je suis conscient des difficultés, mais je suis convaincu que c'est l'occasion de commencer à imaginer ce changement. Le Pacte européen sur l'immigration et l'asile remonte à 2008 et le mettre à jour au début de la nouvelle législature devrait être le premier souci des législateurs européens. Dans cette perspective, je crois qu'une règle européenne interdisant la criminalisation de la migration irrégulière serait non seulement conforme au droit international (Convention de Palerme et ses protocoles),<sup>7</sup> mais elle

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<sup>7</sup> Convention des Nations Unies contre la criminalité transnationale organisée (15/11/2000), dite *Convention de Palerme*, y compris les trois protocoles

éviterait aussi un manque de cohérence des politiques nationales dans ce domaine.

Deuxième constat : la majorité des migrants qui, à l'heure actuelle, arrivent sur les côtes italiennes sont des migrants humanitaires, en provenance de la Syrie, de l'Érythrée, de la Somalie et de l'Afghanistan. Par conséquent, ils ne peuvent pas être renvoyés dans les pays qu'ils ont fuis. En ce qui concerne la coopération avec les pays de transit, il est difficile de comprendre comment la rendre compatible, dans la perspective du Conseil de l'Union Européenne, avec le respect dû aux droits fondamentaux. La majorité des pays de l'Afrique du Nord, à l'heure actuelle, n'offrent aucune garantie. Prenons le cas de la Libye. Dans ce pays, selon Amnesty International, la situation des migrants est actuellement plus grave encore que ce qu'elle n'était sous le régime de M. Kadhafi.<sup>8</sup> Par conséquent, les indications fournies par le Conseil européen semblent difficiles à suivre en termes pratiques. Il faut également ajouter que l'Italie (mais les autres États membres de la Convention européenne des droits de l'Homme aussi, pour ce qui concerne les mesures générales) est tenue à faire exécuter la décision de la Cour de Strasbourg du 23 février 2012 dans l'affaire *Hirsi c. Italie*. Dans cette affaire, la Grande Chambre a affirmé en termes explicites que la Libye n'était pas un lieu sûr pour les migrants, à cause du traitement qu'ils reçoivent pendant la détention, et aussi parce que ce pays n'a pas de dispositions normatives en matière d'asile et n'a pas ratifié la Convention de Genève sur les réfugiés.<sup>9</sup>

### **Le Code « Schengen » et la protection « temporaire »**

En ce qui concerne les problèmes récents de l'arrivée de groupes de migrants qui fuient des situations de crise politique dans leur pays, ou même simplement des situations de famine, l'objectif politique devrait être de gérer cette situation avec toute la puissance et la compétence

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additionnels: le Protocole visant à prévenir, réprimer et punir la traite des personnes, en particulier des femmes et des enfants (New York, 15/11/2000); le Protocole contre le trafic illicite de migrants par terre, air et mer (New York, 15/11/2000); le Protocole contre la fabrication et le trafic illicites d'armes à feu, de leurs pièces, éléments et munitions (New York, 31/5/2001).

<sup>8</sup> Voir le document du Conseil de l'Europe (Secrétariat du Comité des Ministres) DH-D(2012)744 du 24/8/2012.

<sup>9</sup> Convention du 28/7/1951 relative au statut des réfugiés, dite Convention de Genève.

de l'UE et non pas avec les moyens limités offerts par les États membres dans l'île de Lampedusa ou à Malte.

La possibilité d'une protection temporaire est offerte, comme nous le savons, par la directive 2001/55/CE. À notre avis, cette concession devrait être complétée par la création de corridors humanitaires, c'est-à-dire des mesures visant à aider et surveiller l'évacuation des personnes qui peuvent bénéficier de la protection prévue par la directive. Ce serait une aide à la lutte contre la traite des personnes. Actuellement, la demande de protection temporaire, quand elle est admise, ne peut être faite qu'une fois que la personne est arrivée sur le territoire d'un État membre. Pouvons-nous tolérer encore que la limitation des demandes soit régie par des barrières physiques et politiques, tels que le désert, la mer, ou des États tiers hostiles aux réfugiés ?

Sans doute, après les catastrophes humanitaires qui se sont produites au cours des derniers mois, de nouvelles mesures sont nécessaires afin de renforcer la recherche et le sauvetage dans la mer Méditerranée. Mais, à notre avis, cela ne peut être considéré comme une priorité absolue, car les institutions de l'Union et les États membres pourraient s'en servir facilement comme alibi pour montrer leur bonne volonté dans la lutte contre ce problème. Autrement dit, nous maintenons que des mesures structurelles (dont certaines ont été décrites ci-dessus) sont avant tout nécessaires. Par exemple, mettre pleinement en œuvre l'art. 80 du TFUE sur le principe de solidarité et de partage équitable des responsabilités entre les États membres aussi en matière de questions financières.

Malheureusement, jusqu'à présent il y a une proposition de règlement uniquement sur les questions de recherche et sauvetage : (voir doc 14753/13 du Conseil, du 17 octobre 2013 établissant des règles pour la surveillance des frontières extérieures maritimes). Par conséquent, il n'est pas du tout étonnant que six délégations (celles de la Méditerranée : Italie, France, Grèce, Malte, Chypre, Espagne) aient exprimé leur opposition à ces mesures, faisant valoir que dans cette matière les États membres maintiennent encore leur propre compétence. Il est clair que ces six États membres sont préoccupés par le fardeau que les clauses sur la recherche et le sauvetage pourraient faire peser sur eux en l'absence d'un plan de solidarité significatif visant à partager les responsabilités avec les autres États membres. Le problème est que le contrôle des frontières est une question qui est encore entre les mains des États membres, bien que les frontières

extérieures soient celles de l'ensemble de l'Union. Ce constat est également confirmé par le règlement 1168/2011 instituant l'Agence pour le contrôle des frontières extérieures de l'UE (Frontex). Son art. 1 affirme que « la responsabilité du contrôle et de la surveillance des frontières extérieures incombe aux États membres ». Avec le règlement nouveau les fonctions de l'Agence ont été élargies pour englober la possibilité de lancer des opérations conjointes *proprio motu*, de mettre fin à celles qui ont été lancées (en cas de violations graves des droits de l'homme) et de conclure des accords pour des opérations conjointes avec des pays tiers. Il est donc surprenant que le règlement confère la responsabilité du contrôle des frontières aux seuls États membres.<sup>10</sup> Par ailleurs, le directeur de l'agence Frontex a rejeté la requête du Médiateur européen visant à prévoir un mécanisme de recours contre l'Agence même par les personnes qui subissent des violations de leurs droits.

Il convient également de rappeler que la décision de 2010/252/EU, en cours de révision, prévoit que, s'il n'est pas possible de débarquer les personnes secourues en mer dans le pays tiers d'où elles sont parties, la responsabilité pour l'accueil appartient à l'État membre de l'UE dans les eaux duquel le sauvetage a eu lieu.<sup>11</sup> Cela suggère que, l'impossibilité d'amener les migrants secourus dans des pays comme la Libye ou l'Égypte étant reconnue, le débarquement engagera les États membres qui se trouvent aux frontières méridionales de l'Europe, qui seront également chargés d'examiner les demandes asile et de l'accueil matériel des personnes secourues en mer.

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<sup>10</sup> Cf. A. Liguori - N. Ricciuti, 'Frontex ed il rispetto dei diritti umani nelle operazioni congiunte alle frontiere esterne dell'Unione europea', in *Diritti umani e diritto internazionale* (2012), pp. 539-567.

<sup>11</sup> Décision du Conseil du 26 avril 2010 visant à compléter le code frontières Schengen en ce qui concerne la surveillance des frontières extérieures maritimes dans le cadre de la coopération opérationnelle coordonnée par l'Agence européenne pour la gestion de la coopération opérationnelle aux frontières extérieures des États membres de l'Union européenne pour la gestion de la coopération opérationnelle aux frontières extérieures des États membres de l'Union européenne, ligne no. 2.1. Cf. A. Del Guercio, 'Controllo delle frontiere marittime nel rispetto dei diritti umani: prime osservazioni sulla decisione che integra il Codice delle frontiere Schengen', in *Diritti umani e diritto internazionale* (2011), pp. 193 e ss.

Pas de surprise donc que dans certains commentaires, en provenance des pays de l'Europe du Nord, l'attitude des « six » soit perçue comme choquante.<sup>12</sup>

La solidarité entre les États membres de l'UE en matière d'asile reste limitée, avec les États-Unis qui réinstallent plus de réfugiés en provenance de Malte que tous les États européens réunis.

Il est bien connu que le règlement n. 562 de 2006 (dit « code des frontières Schengen »), adopté en vue de réglementer les contrôles aux frontières extérieures des États membres de l'Union Européenne, a supprimé les contrôles de frontière « intérieures ». Dans un arrêt récent, toutefois, la Cour de Luxembourg considère légitimes les contrôles dans une zone géographique de 20 kilomètres à partir de la frontière interne visant à vérifier si les personnes appréhendées pour l'identification répondent aux exigences de la résidence légale applicable dans l'État membre concerné, pourvu que ces contrôles soient basés sur l'information et l'expérience de données dans le domaine de la résidence des personnes dans les lieux de contrôles, et si son exercice est soumis à certaines limitations, en particulier, leur intensité et leur fréquence.<sup>13</sup> Il semble donc possible de déduire que ces mesures de contrôle peuvent intervenir même dans une zone plutôt étendue géographiquement, à condition qu'il ne s'agisse pas de contrôles systématiques.

L'art. 3 du règlement prévoit que toute personne franchissant les frontières extérieures d'un État membre doit être soumise aux contrôles prévus par le même code. Ces contrôles visent à empêcher le franchissement non autorisé de la frontière et à lutter contre la criminalité transfrontalière (article 12.1). Si pour les citoyens de l'UE une vérification minimale est prévue, quand il s'agit, au contraire, de ressortissants de pays tiers (ci-après, PT), le test doit être analytique (article 7) et doit assurer la conformité aux conditions prévues à l'art. 5. La non-conformité à une condition autorise le rejet du citoyen d'un PT par le garde-frontière (art. 13). Il convient de souligner, toutefois, que le « code Schengen » soumet le rejet à un certain nombre de garanties et de procédures afin de soustraire cette mesure à l'arbitraire des gardes-frontières. Le champ d'application de ces garanties est

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<sup>12</sup> Voir l'article de S. Peers, 'EU Rules on Maritime Rescue: Member States Quibble while Migrants Drown', 22/10/2013, in <http://www.statewatch.org/analyses/no-243-eu-search-and-rescue.pdf> (accès 9/9/2016).

<sup>13</sup> Arrêt de la Cour (deuxième chambre) C-278/12 du 19 juillet 2012, *Atiqullah Adil contre Minister voor Immigratie, Integratie en Asiel*.

toutefois partiellement réduit par la clarification ultérieure selon laquelle l'appel « n'a pas d'effet suspensif sur le refoulement ». À notre avis, l'effet suspensif de l'appel devrait être prévu au moins dans les cas où une personne est menacée de risques de dommages irréversibles dans le pays de destination ou de transit, conformément aux dispositions de la jurisprudence de la Cour européenne des droits de l'homme relative à l'art. 3 de la CEDH.<sup>14</sup>

En revenant à l'examen des garanties prévues à l'art. 13 du « code Schengen », il est important de souligner l'affirmation de l'al. 1, selon laquelle le refoulement des personnes qui ne répondent pas aux exigences de l'art. 5 est sans préjudice de l'application des dispositions particulières relatives au droit d'asile et à la protection internationale. Les contrôles aux frontières ne devraient donc pas empêcher l'entrée de ceux d'entre les citoyens de PT qui fuient la persécution, le risque de torture et de traitements inhumains et dégradants et, plus généralement, de graves dommages. Ce principe est repris dans les différentes parties du règlement 562/2006, peut-être par souci d'en souligner l'importance : outre le préambule (considérant 20), l'art. 3 indique aussi que l'application des dispositions contenues dans le Code ne doit pas porter atteinte aux droits des réfugiés et des demandeurs de protection internationale, en particulier en ce qui concerne le non-refoulement. En outre, le code se réfère expressément au respect des droits fondamentaux, en particulier ceux qui sont consacrés dans la Charte des droits fondamentaux de l'Union Européenne (considérant 20), et indique que les contrôles aux frontières devraient être effectués dans le plein respect de la dignité humaine et du principe de proportionnalité (considérant 7 et art. 6). La portée de ces obligations est telle que l'État membre peut décider d'autoriser le citoyen d'un PT qui ne répond pas aux exigences de l'art. 5, même s'il représente un danger pour l'ordre public, de rester dans son territoire pour des « raisons humanitaires » (art. 4, par. 4, lettre C).

S'appuyant donc sur les règles ci-dessus, les contrôles aux frontières devraient avoir lieu dans le respect du droit d'asile et du principe de non-refoulement, dont le HCR (Haut Commissariat des

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<sup>14</sup> On renvoie, entre autres, à l'arrêt de la Cour européenne des droits de l'homme, *Gebremedhin c. France* du 26 avril 2007. Dans la doctrine voir A. Liguori - *Le garanzie procedurali avverso l'espulsione dei migranti in Europa*, Napoli, 2010.

Nations Unies pour les Réfugiés) tire l'obligation de l'État d'admettre, au moins temporairement, la personne sur son territoire jusqu'à la conclusion des procédures visant à examiner la situation. Ces principes ont une portée juridique obligatoire pour les États membres de l'UE, en raison d'obligations internationales, figurant à la fois dans les traités consolidés (art. 78 TFUE) et dans la Charte des droits fondamentaux (articles 18 et 19), qui, après l'entrée en vigueur du traité de Lisbonne, a acquis une valeur contraignante. Il semble donc ne plus y avoir de doute quant à l'obligation pour les gardes-frontières de respecter les droits fondamentaux des personnes qui demandent à entrer sur le territoire de l'Union et, surtout, de ne pas refouler ceux qui ont exprimé des préoccupations au sujet d'un possible retour dans leur pays d'origine ou de transit.

### **Les exceptions au système Schengen et l'affaire « franco-italienne » de 2011**

Bien que le règlement 562/2006 du Conseil ait été adopté dans le but ultime d'assurer la libre circulation des personnes dans l'espace Schengen, dans certaines circonstances, la possibilité de réintroduction des contrôles aux frontières intérieures, qui en règle générale ne devrait jamais avoir lieu (article 20 et 21), est autorisée. La réintroduction des contrôles aux frontières intérieures est régie par le chapitre II du « Code Schengen ». Elle est admise dans des situations exceptionnelles, et pour des périodes temporaires, en cas de menace grave à l'ordre public ou à la sécurité intérieure de l'État membre (article 23). La durée de ce régime exceptionnel est de trente jours, ou pour la durée prévisible de la menace si celle-ci dépasse trente jours, renouvelable pour des périodes d'une trentaine de jours. Lorsque la nécessité de rétablir les contrôles aux frontières est liée à des événements prévisibles (qui peuvent être des réunions des chefs d'État et de gouvernement, des sommets des organisations internationales ou des événements sportifs), l'État qui a l'intention de se prévaloir de cette possibilité doit suivre les indications de l'art. 24 du « Code ». En particulier, il est tenu d'informer la Commission et les autres États membres et de fournir des orientations en ce qui concerne les raisons, la durée et la date de la réintégration des contrôles. Le règlement prévoit également la possibilité d'un événement non prévisible requérant une action urgente (article 25). Qu'il s'agisse d'événements prévisibles ou d'une action urgente, la restauration doit être exceptionnelle et doit faire l'objet d'un rapport

qui sera présenté en même temps ou peu de temps après, à la Commission, au Parlement européen et au Conseil.

Depuis l'adoption du règlement 562/2006, les États membres ont réintroduit les contrôles aux frontières intérieures 22 fois, le plus souvent à l'occasion de réunions politiques ou d'événements sportifs, dans certains cas pour réagir à des attaques terroristes.

Un épisode en particulier a néanmoins mis en évidence le caractère critiquable du mécanisme établi par le règlement 562/2006. Il est bien connu que suite à la « révolution des jasmins », sont arrivés sur les côtes italiennes des milliers de citoyens tunisiens. Devant le refus du Conseil de l'Union d'activer la directive 2001/55/CE du 20 juillet 2001 sur la protection temporaire,<sup>15</sup> le gouvernement italien a accordé à ceux qui avaient franchi la frontière italienne entre le 1<sup>er</sup> janvier et le 5 avril 2011 (environ 25 000 personnes), un permis de séjour temporaire pour des raisons humanitaires (ex art. 20 de la Loi italienne sur l'immigration),<sup>16</sup> prévu expressément par le droit de libre circulation dans l'espace Schengen « en conformité avec les dispositions de la Convention d'application de l'accord de Schengen du 14 juin 1995 et du droit communautaire ». <sup>17</sup> Le décret ministériel a été précédé par une lettre du Ministre des Affaires intérieures à la Chambre des députés par laquelle il a communiqué l'octroi de permis de séjour temporaire à tous ceux qui ont montré, dans les entretiens qui ont été faits, le désir de se rendre dans un pays européen.

L'octroi d'un permis de séjour qui a permis la libre circulation dans l'espace Schengen sans le consentement préalable des autres États membres a provoqué l'opposition de nombreux pays européens,<sup>18</sup> notamment une réaction forte de la part de la France. Ce pays a, en effet, immédiatement rétabli les contrôles aux frontières dans la ville frontalière de Vintimille et le 17 avril 2011 a bloqué les trains transportant des Tunisiens (et des représentants d'ONG) qui voulaient

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<sup>15</sup> Directive 2001/55/CE du Conseil du 20/7/2001 relative à des normes minimales pour l'octroi d'une protection temporaire en cas d'afflux massif de personnes déplacées et à des mesures tendant à assurer un équilibre entre les efforts consentis par les États membres pour accueillir ces personnes et supporter les conséquences de cet accueil. Depuis son adoption, la directive n'a jamais été appliquée.

<sup>16</sup> *Decreto del Presidente del Consiglio dei Ministri (DPCM)* du 5/4/2011, adopté sur la base de l'art. 20 de la loi.

<sup>17</sup> Art. 2 par. 3 du DPCM.

<sup>18</sup> Allemagne, Belgique, Autriche, Pays Bas.

rejoindre les membres de leurs familles résidant sur le territoire français.<sup>19</sup>

Le conflit a soulevé un certain nombre de questions. Tout d'abord, la légalité des mesures adoptées par les deux États à la lumière de la législation européenne, en particulier des dispositions de l'acquis de Schengen, auxquelles les deux États sont liés à la fois dans la gestion du contrôle des frontières extérieures de l'Union et dans le respect du principe de la liberté de circulation au sein de leurs territoires. En deuxième lieu, ont été mis en question, voire en danger, les principes généraux du droit qui sont à la base d'une politique européenne commune de l'immigration et du régime de Schengen,<sup>20</sup> à savoir les principes de la solidarité, du partage équitable des responsabilités et d'une coopération sincère.<sup>21</sup>

Par rapport à la première question, il nous semble qu'on ne saurait douter de la légitimité de la concession, de la part de l'Italie, d'un permis de séjour pour raisons humanitaires aux citoyens tunisiens, compte tenu des événements survenus dans le pays nord-africain. Comme nous l'avons vu, le « Code » prévoit expressément la possibilité d'admettre sur son territoire des ressortissants de pays tiers qui ne remplissent pas les conditions énoncées à l'art. 5 lorsqu'il y a des raisons humanitaires (paragraphe 4, lettre C).<sup>22</sup> La seule obligation de la part de l'Italie était d'informer la Commission, conformément à l'art. 34 du règlement 562/2006, et les autres États membres, en vertu de la décision 2006/688/CE relative à l'échange d'informations sur les mesures que les États membres adoptent dans les domaines de l'asile et de l'immigration.<sup>23</sup> L'art. 1 de la directive prévoit expressément que les États membres communiquent l'un à l'autre les mesures nationales « qui peuvent avoir un impact significatif sur plusieurs États membres

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<sup>19</sup> *France blocks Italian trains carrying migrants*, 17/4/2011, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-13109631> (accès 9/9/2016).

<sup>20</sup> Cf. S. Carrera - E. Guild - M. Merlino - J. Parkin, 'A Race against Solidarity, The Schengen Regime and the Franco-Italian Affair', in *CEPS Paper in Liberty and Security in Europe*, 29 April 2011, <https://www.ceps.eu/publications/race-against-solidarity-schengen-regime-and-franco-italian-affair> (accès 9/9/2016), p. 2.

<sup>21</sup> Sur ces concepts, voir la Communication de la Commission, COM (2008) 359 déf., du 17 juin 2008.

<sup>22</sup> Dans le même sens, voir Carrera - Guild - Merlino - Parkin, 'A Race against Solidarity', p. 8.

<sup>23</sup> *Décision* 2006/688/CE, dans J.O.U.E., L 283/40 du 14.10.2006.

ou sur l'Union européenne en général». Il semble que le gouvernement italien n'ait pas manqué à cette obligation.<sup>24</sup>

Des perplexités peuvent être tout à fait exprimées plutôt sur les raisons qui semblent être à l'origine de l'adoption du décret, à savoir l'attribution aux citoyens tunisiens de la liberté de quitter le territoire italien pour se rendre dans d'autres États membres, déchargeant ainsi l'Italie du poids de leur présence sur le territoire. Il s'agit d'une violation flagrante du principe de coopération loyale inscrit à l'art. 4 al.3 du TUE.<sup>25</sup>

Il faut bien préciser, au contraire, si la délivrance d'un permis de séjour national pour raisons humanitaires (en application de l'art. 5.4 du « Code ») donne automatiquement le droit à la liberté de circulation dans l'espace Schengen. En ce qui concerne cette affaire, la confusion a été générée par l'attitude contradictoire de la Commission européenne qui, en un premier temps, a approuvé la réaction française, tout en invitant, après quelques jours, les pays qui font partie de l'accord de Schengen à reconnaître les Aliens travel document (Atd) délivrés par l'Italie (avec l'approbation de la Commission), ainsi que les permis de séjour, pour permettre la liberté de mouvement « pour des raisons humanitaires » aux ressortissants tunisiens. Une fois accordé un permis de séjour pour des raisons humanitaires en vertu de l'article 5.4 du « Code » et une fois communiquée toute l'information à la Commission (ce que l'Italie avait fait), les bénéficiaires d'un tel permis étaient donc libres de se déplacer dans l'espace Schengen sans avoir à démontrer la conformité avec les exigences de l'art. 5.1, contrairement à ce que la France soutenait. La vérification des exigences visées dans cette disposition avait en fait eu lieu au moment de l'entrée à la frontière extérieure et ne pouvait pas être effectuée systématiquement à la frontière intérieure, car ce serait contraire au principe de libre circulation dans l'espace Schengen. Par conséquent, comme il a été soutenu, le permis de séjour délivré par les autorités nationales « has the equivalence of a visa for automatic entry anywhere in the Schengen space ».<sup>26</sup> Selon quelque autre auteur, partisan d'une opinion différente, ces permis constituent une mesure nationale, valable sur le territoire italien, sous

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<sup>24</sup> Sur le point, Carrera - Guild - Merlino - Parkin, 'A Race against Solidarity'.

<sup>25</sup> Sur ce point, voir aussi B. Nascimbene - A. Di Pascale, 'Emergenza immigrazione Italia fuori dall'Ue?', 13/4/2011, <http://www.affarinternazionali.it/articolo.asp?ID=1727> (accès 9/9/2016).

<sup>26</sup> Carrera - Guild - Merlino - Parkin, 'A Race against Solidarity', p. 10.

réserve des conditions prévues pour la liberté de circulation pour une période n'excédant pas trois mois dans le respect des dispositions en matière de l'Union Européenne.<sup>27</sup>

Concernant la réintroduction des contrôles aux frontières intérieures de la France suite à l'émission, par l'Italie, d'un permis de séjour pour raisons humanitaires aux citoyens de la Tunisie, on a déjà dit que ce n'est pas la première fois que le chapitre II du règlement 562/2006 trouve application.<sup>28</sup> Cependant, l'affaire qui nous occupe est particulière en raison de ses implications en termes de principes de solidarité et de coopération loyale entre les États membres, et de l'impact produit sur la protection des droits des personnes concernées. Nous avons des doutes quant à la légitimité et à la proportionnalité des mesures prises par le gouvernement français. Il ne semble pas, en effet, que le franchissement de la frontière par quelques centaines de Tunisiens et leurs compagnons (militants italiens des mouvements antiracistes) pouvait être considéré comme une menace à l'ordre public et, par conséquent, une base légitime pour l'activation des articles 21-23 du « Code ».<sup>29</sup> Dans les circonstances décrites, l'urgence qui pouvait justifier la restauration immédiate sans notification préalable à la Commission et aux autres États membres n'est non plus apparente. Les mesures prises par la France étaient donc incompatibles avec le principe de proportionnalité, auquel le « Code » fait également référence. Même sur le plan des conditions économiques requises aux bénéficiaires d'une protection humanitaire en vertu de l'art. 5.1 (disponibilité des ressources), la requête apparaît légitime, compte tenu du fait que l'Italie avait informé la Commission européenne de la décision d'accorder un permis de séjour. La restauration des contrôles aux frontières a également violé les droits fondamentaux des personnes concernées, et en particulier le droit à la liberté de mouvement, qui a été refusé aux citoyens de la Tunisie sur

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<sup>27</sup> Nascimbene - Di Pascale, 'Emergenza immigrazione'.

<sup>28</sup> Voir la relation de la Commission au Parlement européen sur l'application du règlement (CE) n. 562/2006 (code Schengen), COM(2010) 554 def., 13/10/2010.

<sup>29</sup> Dans ce sens, la Commission européenne aussi. On renvoie aux déclarations du Commissaire Malmström du 1<sup>er</sup> avril 2011, voir <http://ec.europa.eu/avservices/player/streaming.cfm?type=ebsvod&sid=177156>. Puis-je simplement rappeler que nous parlons de pas plus de 28 000 immigrés en totalité, et pas plus de 400 personnes à la frontière française.

la base de leur nationalité, en violation du principe de non-discrimination consacré à l'art. 6 du « Code ».<sup>30</sup>

### Conclusions

L'épisode décrit ci-dessus a mis en évidence la nécessité d'adopter des mesures pour veiller à ce que l'espace Schengen soit effectivement en mesure de faire face aux pressions pouvant résulter de facteurs externes ou de faiblesses à la frontière. Sur ce point, un certain nombre de projets de révision normative sont actuellement soumis à l'attention du Conseil et du Parlement européen. Le partage du fardeau, la solidarité, une répartition équitable des responsabilités, la coopération sincère et loyale, le respect des droits fondamentaux, les paramètres de l'espace Schengen en s'appuyant sur un degré élevé de confiance entre les États participants : tous ces principes ont été ignorés par les deux États membres. Mais ce que je tiens à souligner, c'est surtout l'effet négatif de cette attitude divisée aux yeux de la Communauté internationale. Une page triste qui ne doit plus se répéter, et qui a peut-être soulevé la question de la nécessité d'une Charte des droits des migrants de l'Union Européenne.

Sur ce genre de problèmes, à notre avis, un effet positif sera assuré par l'adhésion de l'Union à la Convention européenne des droits de l'homme. Il n'y a pas de problèmes spécifiques liés à la législation communautaire adoptée dans le cadre de l'espace de liberté de justice qui résulterait de l'adhésion de l'UE à la CEDH. Au contraire, les cours et les tribunaux dans les États membres sont d'ores et déjà confrontés à des questions qui ont été peut-être insuffisamment abordées lors de la rédaction de certains de ces actes juridiques relatifs aux droits de l'homme. La jurisprudence de la Cour de Strasbourg peut avoir un rôle utile à jouer tout en rappelant aux institutions de l'Union et à ses États membres les valeurs fondamentales sur lesquelles l'intégration européenne est fondée.

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<sup>30</sup> Sur ce point, on renvoie encore à l'analyse approfondie de Carrera - Guild - Merlino - Parkin, 'A Race against Solidarity'.

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# **Economic Opportunities and Social Challenges in the North African Transition**

Ersilia FRANCESCA

## **Abstract**

Economic factors seem to have played a major role in the recent Arab awakening throughout North Africa. The perception of exclusion, the deteriorating standards of living, the high (and rising) unemployment rate were among the many reasons behind the 2011 revolutions.

People demanded, among other things, a new socioeconomic model of economic participation and development. But six years after the 'Arab Spring', the perception of inequality has risen and the social and political unrest sweeping the Arab world has further deteriorated the economic and social situation of average citizens.

Governments have started to take measures to reverse the rising unemployment figures and to shift spending in favour of the most disadvantaged sections of society. But in turning back to World Bank and IMF endorsed neoliberal policies, governments run the risk of further alienating the youth who spearheaded the revolution. Moreover, new political actors emerged in the North African transition: the Arab Gulf countries – in particular, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and the UAE – have been playing a leading geopolitical role and there is a great likelihood that they will get increasingly involved in North African reconstruction and development.

In this new scenario, understanding the factors that are driving economic inequality is a crucial issue, not just for reasons of pursuing equity and economic inclusion, but also for political reasons.

Focusing mainly on Tunisia and Egypt (two countries where the 2011 revolutions share many similarities), this paper aims at exploring how the post-revolution political and economic situation is affecting the status of women and young people, who played a significant role in the revolutionary phase.

## **Introduction**

The application of neoliberal economic models throughout the MENA (Middle East and North Africa) region resulted, on the one side, in an impressive concentration of wealth and power in the hands of a few crony capitalists and public sector components, and on the other, in an impoverishment of the middle classes and the lower strata of society. Industrial workers, peasants, people relying on the informal

labour market (especially women, young people, and city dwellers) became more and more marginalised and increasingly disenchanting with the so-called macroeconomic success of the region. Even though the roots of popular discontent lie deeper than economic factors and social inequality, the Arab revolutions were in part entwined with the increasing feeling of dissatisfaction with a non-inclusive development model.<sup>1</sup>

Following their independence, many countries in the region adopted economic policies, which saw the state as an instrument of social transformation, political mobilization and economic distribution. Up until the late 1980s many countries were able to ensure employment, social stability, and a moderate incidence of poverty and income inequality, thanks to the massive presence of state-owned enterprises, public investments in infrastructure, health care and education. Rising oil prices, intra-regional flows of capital and labour, and workers' remittances were also factors, which contributed to social and economic stability.

The introduction of neoliberal policies across the region, beginning in the 1990s, affected people negatively, giving rise to different forms of inequalities, and widening the disparities among socioeconomic groups and urban and rural areas. Inequality of opportunities and people's disenchantment with the macroeconomic growth rate became a serious concern in the region and therefore constituted a partial precursor to the Arab revolutions.<sup>2</sup>

The massive demonstrations, which characterized the Arab awakening, were also driven by these economic failures and by the growing perceptions of widening inter-personal and regional welfare disparities. People asked for a new developmental paradigm, but in the aftermath of the revolutions the governments were not able to undertake substantial reforms to stimulate a more inclusive growth capable of generating more jobs.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, the widespread political

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<sup>1</sup> R. Rocca, *The Political Economy of the Egyptian Revolution: Mubarak, Economic Reforms and Failed Hegemony*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, Hampshire (UK), 2013, p. 92.

<sup>2</sup> N. Belhaj Hassine, *Economic Inequality in the Arab Region*, World Bank, Policy Research Working Paper 6911, June 2014, <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/341911468275939996/pdf/WPS6911.pdf> p.2.

<sup>3</sup> B. Momani, 'Arab Gulf Investment into Non-Inclusive Urban Development in the Middle East: A partial Precursor to the Arab Spring', in Mohammed M. Aman - Mary Jo Aman (eds.), *Middle East Conflicts and Reform*, Westphalia Press, Washington DC, 2014, pp. 119-130.

and social unrest the Arab world is currently experiencing has further deteriorated the economic and social situation, thus exacerbating the perceptions of declining welfare and rising inequality, which led to the 2011 uprisings in the region. Understanding the factors and the extent of economic inequality in North Africa is crucial for economic and political reasons and for helping draw popular support for the current transitional period.

The phase of transition is following very different trajectories in the North African countries, which experienced the revolutions. Libya, plunged into civil war, is in fact divided into two, while Egypt and Tunisia are undergoing a difficult political transition, whose final outcome is still uncertain. In Tunisia the fall of the Ben Ali's regime opened up spaces for the participation and mobilization of civil society. Some of the outcomes of the 2011 revolutions, such as freedom of expression and a quest for democracy, seem to be an untouchable achievement in spite of serious political difficulties and the economic crisis.<sup>4</sup>

The ousting of Mubarak in February 2011 was a momentous victory for the Egyptian people, but the immediate aftermath has clearly shown the serious difficulties Egypt's revolutionary process had to face, including the incapacity of the energy of the masses to consolidate into a concrete political movement. The Sisi regime clearly demonstrates how the counter-revolution has used all means to derail the revolutionary process and to protect the interest of the main elements of the old regime which are still well entrenched.<sup>5</sup>

In Morocco the politics of compromise, initiated and controlled by King Mohammed V to neutralize protests in the wake of revolutions in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya, have allowed a smoother transition and a slow political reform process with positive and negative fluctuations.

The past few years in North Africa have witnessed a gradual move toward resistance and the rupture of the pact of coercion and consent.

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<sup>4</sup> F. Merone, 'Enduring Class Struggle in Tunisia: The Fight for Identity beyond Political Islam', in *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 42/1 (2015), pp. 74-87. The special issue of the *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* has been republished by Routledge: Paola Rivetti - Rosita Di Peri (eds.), *Continuity and Change before and after the Arab Uprisings: Morocco, Tunisia, and Egypt*, London, 2015.

<sup>5</sup> G. Achcar, *Morbid Symptoms: Relapse in the Arab Uprising*, Saqi Books, London, 2016, in particular chap. 2; M. Abdelrahman, 'A Hierarchy of Struggles? The 'Economic' and the 'Political' in Egypt's Revolution', in *Review of African Political Economy*, 39/134 (2012), pp. 614-628.

People have experienced dramatic changes but also faced various frustrations as their political expectations and aspirations have at times not been met immediately or in a satisfactory fashion.

This article aims at contributing to the understanding of a crucial point in the North African transition, namely how people, and in particular young people and women who embodied the spirit of the revolution, are reacting (or will react) to the changing scenario and to the challenges of economic and political transformation/restoration.

### **The Economic Situation in Transition: Tunisia and Egypt**

Many difficulties that are currently being confronted by North African countries have an international dimension and are not unique to the region. The global economic slowdown of international trade and financial flows as well as the terror attacks and the influx of refugees from war-torn neighboring countries are at the root of the severe strains they are experiencing. Nonetheless, the aftermath of the 2011 revolution has exacerbated the region's structural problems: sluggish economic growth, declining opportunities, growing socio-economic vulnerability. Inequality remains the region's major challenge with almost 56% of the young population having no option but to enter the informal sectors of the economy.

In the region, the average growth rate in gross domestic product (GDP) in real terms was estimated to be 3.0% in 2013, compared to 7.7% in 2012. The economic situation in the fourth quarter of 2015 remains grim and, according to the World Bank data, the average growth is estimated to be around 3% in 2016. The Real GDP is forecast to grow to close to 4% in 2017 and 2018, but this is still too low to ensure even a very gradual and uneven economic recovery in the region. Continuing at sluggish growth rate will affect the overall unemployment rate, now standing at 12%, and household earnings in the region.<sup>6</sup>

Since 2011, North Africa has experienced a fluctuation in its growth rate as result of unstable Libyan economic performance. Overall, the growth of Arab economies is decelerating as energy prices and associated energy export revenues continue to decrease. A variety of reasons, including political instability, social unrest, civil war, armed conflict and a general sentiment of uncertainty, are still

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<sup>6</sup> See the WB website: <http://data.worldbank.org/region/middle-east-and-north-africa>.

dampening the economic prospects of the region. Low levels of foreign direct investment and the crisis of the tourism sector place the Egyptian and Tunisian economies in particular in a spiral of slow growth rate. The share of total world FDI (Foreign Direct Investments) inflows towards Egypt and Tunisia was already declining before 2010, and the trend was further exacerbated by the 2011 uprisings.

In Tunisia the FDI inflows have almost constantly been outperformed by remittances from permanent migrants in European countries since the second half of the 2000s, thus proving the country's failure in implementing neo-liberal and structural reforms and its marginalisation from the global political economy. The extent to which Tunisia has been progressively marginalised from the global political economy is further revealed by the share of extra-regional brain drain which has always been above 80% in the first decade of the 2000s.<sup>7</sup>

Egypt also appears to be increasingly marginalised from the global political economy despite a policy of liberalisation and privatisation which began as early as in 1974 with Sadat's policy of 'opening the door' (*infitāh*) to private investment. In Egypt, the declining trend in the percentage of total FDI stock was very marked in the last three decades, while the most stable sources of GDP continued to be the remittances coming first of all from the USA and increasingly also from Europe. The permanent extra-regional migration of specialized and highly skilled migrants is on the rise in both Tunisia and Egypt, proving that the growing marginalisation of the countries from the global economy constitutes a vicious circle, which the current unstable transition phase could even make worse.<sup>8</sup>

The inflow of external bilateral and multilateral financial support became even more crucial for these countries in order to alleviate foreign exchange constraints and inflationary pressures and to establish a renewed policy platform for sustainable economic and social development.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> L. S. Talani, *The Arab Spring in the Global Political Economy*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, Hampshire (UK), 2014, pp. 123, 156, 162-173.

<sup>8</sup> Talani, *The Arab Spring in the Global Political Economy*, pp. 184, 200-201.

<sup>9</sup> ESCWA (Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia), *Survey of Economic and Social Developments in The Arab Region, 2013-2014*, 2014, pp. 3-15, <https://www.unescwa.org/sites/www.unescwa.org/files/uploads/summary-survey-economic-social-arab-region-2013-2014-english.pdf>.

An increased number of financial agreements have been signed with foreign actors, including World Bank, IMF, EU and GCC countries, to support the recovery of North African economies. Nevertheless, weak industrial development and high unemployment remain structural risk factors for the region. Employment creation continues to be the most important item on the policy agenda of the region. Unemployment rates remain high: in 2013, Egypt stood at 13.4%, Morocco at 10% and Tunisia at 15.3%.<sup>10</sup>

The unemployment situation appears critical in Egypt due to political and economic uncertainties, the reduction in income from tourism and in the flow of FDI, as several investors have either postponed their projects or withdrawn their capital altogether, resulting in the loss of thousands of jobs. Inefficient institutions and high political risk adversely affected the FDI flow towards Egypt which decreased from 8999M\$ in 2005-2007 (pre-crisis) to 4256M\$ in 2013 and 4612M\$ in 2014 and finally stood at 6885M\$ in 2015.<sup>11</sup> This phenomenon has been exacerbated by the intervention of rating agencies that have, since 2011, lowered the rating of the country, thus making access to financing for projects and enterprises more expensive.<sup>12</sup>

Poverty is widespread in rural areas. Rural Upper Egypt recorded the highest rates of poverty affecting 51.5% of the population (twice the national average), while the Greater Cairo region has the largest number of poor and food-insecure people (about 3.5 million people). Monetary poverty affects 21.6% of the population and it is a major constraint for access to food given that households spend about 40% of their monthly income on food.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> *Ib.*, p. 9; AlexBank Research, *Egypt Macroeconomic Update*, p. 6, [https://www.alexbank.com/Cms\\_Data/Contents/AlexBank/Media/Publication/Egypt-Country-Report-2014.pdf](https://www.alexbank.com/Cms_Data/Contents/AlexBank/Media/Publication/Egypt-Country-Report-2014.pdf).

<sup>11</sup> Data from the World Investment Report (WIR) of UNCTAD, available at: <http://unctad.org/en/Pages/DIAE/World%20Investment%20Report/Country-Fact-Sheets.aspx>.

<sup>12</sup> UNECA (United Nation Economic Commission for Africa), *The Economic Situation in Egypt in the Context of Political Instability and a Risky Transition*, August 2013, p. 6, <http://www.uneca.org/sites/default/files/PublicationFiles/note-on-egypten.pdf>.

<sup>13</sup> *Ib.*, p. 6.

In Tunisia Government revenues as a percentage of GDP declined by 26% in 2015 compared to 2014, while the debt stood at 33%.<sup>14</sup> Due to political instability, tourism dwindled by 50% and FDI declined from 1902M\$ in 2005-2007 to 1063M\$ in 2014 and 1002M\$ in 2015, with more than 80 foreign companies leaving Tunisia.<sup>15</sup>

The number of unemployed people has been growing in the last few years due to the return of Tunisian migrant workers fleeing the conflict in Libya, and the increased number of unemployed university graduates, who make up around 70.000 to 120.000 persons entering the workforce each year.<sup>16</sup>

In order to face the difficult economic situation, Egypt turned again to the FMI, in addition to resorting to donations and loans from Saudi-Arabia, Qatar and the Arab Monetary Fund. Negotiations with the IMF have been crucial for the Egyptian authorities as they have facilitated further aid from the World Bank and other international financial institutions and have contributed to the restoration of economic operators' confidence. Within this context, the government has intended to reduce the deficit by lowering expenditure, mainly by reducing energy grants, which currently represent approximately a fifth of the total expenditure. The government is also working on increasing income through a series of fiscal reforms, including the implementation of older projects to move from a general tax on sales to the establishment of a true value added tax. These reforms, which were announced several times over the last budgetary years, have not yet been fully implemented because of the lack of consensus and the risk that they could adversely affect social stability.<sup>17</sup>

The Islamist parties, both in Tunisia and in Egypt, did not introduce significant changes in the national economic policies. *Al-Nahda* leaders talked of a hybrid 'social economy' of free market capitalism and socialism without clarifying all the details.<sup>18</sup> They tried to combine initiatives to create a friendly climate for investments and to foster public-private entrepreneurship with slogans for social justice,

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<sup>14</sup> T. Brésillon, « Alliance conservatrice à l'ombre de la menace djihadiste », in *Le Monde Diplomatique*, January 2016, pp. 6-7. On line edition: <https://www.monde-diplomatique.fr/2016/01/BRESILLON/5445>.

<sup>15</sup> Data from the World Investment Report (WIR) of UNCTAD.

<sup>16</sup> S. L. Alianak, *The Transition towards Revolution and Reform. The Arab Spring Realised?*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 2014, pp. 52-54.

<sup>17</sup> UNECA, *The Economic Situation in Egypt*, p. 3.

<sup>18</sup> A. Etzioni, 'Socioeconomic Rights: A Dialogue with Islam', in Mohammed M. Aman - Mary Jo Aman (eds.), *Middle East Conflicts and Reform*, p. 191.

equitable growth and a sound governance system. *Al-Nahda's* guiding party document, the Basic Law, is strongly influenced by the general principle of Islamic economic thinking, but it is not revolutionary. It places labour at the origin of earning and as basis of economic revival; it also advocates social justice and the abolition of disparities stemming from corruption, wasteful consumption, monopoly, hoarding and other illegitimate practices. According to the ambitious electoral platform, which covers the 2012-2016 period, the party committed to achieving a 7% annual growth in GDP combined with a decline in the unemployment rate from 14% in 2010 to around 8% by 2016, thus securing Tunisian leadership in the region. But *Al-Nahda's* economic program suffers from two major shortcomings: it does not clearly specify the state's involvement into economics, and does not identify the sources of revenue to finance its ambitious economic goals.<sup>19</sup>

The short lived Morsi government in Egypt was also unable to formulate a coherent economic program which could meet the country's growing economic problems, particularly unemployment and the lack of opportunities for young people. Changes have been mainly cosmetic since the time of Mubarak: economic and foreign policies, authoritarian methods, and demagogic consensus co-optation strategies have remained virtually unchanged.<sup>20</sup>

The mismanagement of power that Morsi displayed during his year in power clearly demonstrated as the idea that the Muslim Brothers (MB) were an effective counter-hegemony movement was completely false. On the one hand, they attempted to come to terms with the army and the security forces, and on the other hand, they managed to occupy all the top policy making positions, suggesting that they aimed at achieving integration within the extant regime, rather than pursuing its systematic transformation. The inability to provide at least some measures, which could meet popular demands, together with the generalised economic crisis, paved the way to their ousting.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Ibrahim Saif - Muhammad Abu Rumman, 'The Economic Agenda of the Islamist Parties', *The Carnegie Papers*, Carnegie Middle East Center, May 2012, in [http://carnegieendowment.org/files/islamist\\_econ.pdf](http://carnegieendowment.org/files/islamist_econ.pdf), pp. 6-9.

<sup>20</sup> A. Teti - G. Gervasio - L. Anceschi, 'Introduction. Crossing the Formal/Informal Boundary', in Luca Anceschi - Gennaro Gervasio - Andrea Teti, *Informal Power in the Greater Middle East: Hidden Geographies*, Routledge, London, 2014, p. 66.

<sup>21</sup> Saif - Abu Rumman, 'The Economic Agenda of the Islamist Parties', pp. 9-13; A. Teti - G. Gervasio, 'The Army's Coup in Egypt: For the People or against the

The MB was not able to develop economic projects that would go beyond the economic-corporate moment, despite its roots in the wealthy community of ‘pious’ entrepreneurs (as for example Kairat El Shater, a leading member of the MB and a successful businessman), and their presence among small- and middle-sized entrepreneurs as well as within the working classes.

The ‘Turkish Model’, as an example of reconciling a secular state, Islam and vibrant economic liberalism, attracted the attention of the businessmen’s circles linked to the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and the *al-Nahda* party in Tunisia. As is well known, the ‘Turkish Model’ formed the basis of the *Justice and Development Party* (AKP)’s ascendancy and for some time it was hailed across the world as the main reason for the economic and political development which Turkey underwent over the last two decades.<sup>22</sup> But in fact the ‘Turkish model’ not only showed its structural weakness in its home country but proved not to be compatible with the political and economic situation of the Arab world. As Gilbert Achcar argues, both the Egyptian Brotherhood and Tunisian *al-Nahda* party have very little in common with the AKP. The MB tried to emulate the Turkish experience by constructing an association of businessmen, EBDA (Egyptian Business Development Association) on the model of the Turkish MÜSİAD (Independent Industrialists and Businessmen Association) whose successful economic performance supported the AKP’s political ascendancy. But the Egyptian attempt was short lived, frustrating the Muslim businessmen’s alleged intentions to ‘inject new blood into the country’s ossified business culture by mixing ethics and values in economics, along with social and political reforms’, as Osama Farid, co-founder and head of international relations at EBDA, declared in an interview published in *Financial Times* on November 8<sup>th</sup> 2012.<sup>23</sup> Nonetheless, it remains unclear if EBDA really represented an expression of pluralism and a novelty in Egypt’s post-revolutionary economic landscape or if it simply constituted a new channel for the

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People?, *OpenDemocracy*, July 2013, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/andrea-teti-gennaro-gervasio/army%e2%80%99s-coup-in-egypt-for-people-or-against-people>.

<sup>22</sup> K. Kirisci, ‘Is the Turkish Model Relevant for the Middle East?’, in Clement Henry - Jang Ji-Hyang (eds.), *The Arab Spring: Will It Lead to Democratic Transitions?*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2012, pp. 161-180.

<sup>23</sup> B. Daragahi, ‘A New Voice for Egyptian Business’, in *Financial Times* [ft.com/work&careers](http://www.ft.com/work&careers), in <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/a9509002-28ee-11e2-b92c-00144feabdc0.html#axzz4GMiE40yZ>.

cronyism that characterized the relationships between the business elite and Mubarak's regime.

Moreover, as Achcar states, Turkey represents an 'emergent' country with a strong export-oriented neoliberal economy, while in Tunisia and Egypt industrialization and neoliberal economic reforms adapted to a neo-patrimonial dictatorship highly dominated by crony capitalism and nepotism.<sup>24</sup>

From the perspectives of a political economist, what is most striking in the current situation in Tunisia and Egypt is the staggering continuity with respect to the economic policies pursued by the previous regimes. The only arguable transformation with respect to the functioning of the national economy is to be found in the shifting networks of support and patronage in the region, with Qatar strongly supporting Morsi, and currently Saudi Arabia and Kuwait doing the same with the Sisi regime.<sup>25</sup>

The Revolution had initially raised Tunisian people's expectations, but they were soon confronted with harsh realities.<sup>26</sup> The expectations of the unemployed youth, who were impatient for results and who wanted quick economic relief, were frustrated. The government started to take measures to reverse the rise in unemployment figures and to shift spending to the impoverished regions of the interior of the country. But it faced a dilemma. Should it accept the IFM-endorsed policies and cut fuel and food subsidies and resume privatization, which would run the risk of alienating further the youth who spearheaded the revolution, or not? People's frustration and the rise of corruption (according to a survey by the Transparency International, the level of the corruption in the country rose over the course of the two years following the 2011 uprisings) could undermine the efforts of the Government to restore stability.<sup>27</sup> Political tensions are currently delaying the implementation of policies necessary to stimulate the economy and are undermining government efforts to root out corruption and improve the economic situation in the internal

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<sup>24</sup> G. Achcar, *The People Want: A Radical Exploration of the Arab Uprising*, (trans. by G.M. Goshgarian), University of California Press, Berkeley, 2013, pp. 220-221, 231-232.

<sup>25</sup> Roccu, *The Political Economy of the Egyptian Revolution*, pp. 116-118.

<sup>26</sup> Commission économique pour l'Afrique, Bureau sous-régional en Afrique, *Situation et perspectives économiques en Tunisie dans le contexte de transition actuel*, July 2014, pp. 3-9, [http://www.uneca.org/sites/default/files/PublicationFiles/note\\_tunisie\\_fre.pdf](http://www.uneca.org/sites/default/files/PublicationFiles/note_tunisie_fre.pdf).

<sup>27</sup> Alianak, *The Transition towards Revolution and Reform*, pp. 52-54.

regions which were neglected under the former regime. Cronyism, blackmail and nepotism are among the main problems the Tunisian government is still facing. They can only be tackled successfully through new transparency mechanisms for business and public tenders, within a climate of national reconciliation.<sup>28</sup>

In Egypt, the military restoration (or counter revolution?) re-established the Mubarak-era hierarchies of emphasising stability and prioritising security. In so doing, the Sisi regime preserved those elements of the authoritarian state – the plutocrats, the security and the military – that were necessary to recreate Egypt’s status quo from the full brunt of revolutionary unrest.<sup>29</sup>

Sonia Alianak’s study of four cases (Tunisia, Egypt, Morocco, Jordan) proves that at the origins of the 2011 Arab revolution there lay a hierarchical dissonance in values between the priorities of the rulers who aimed towards stability, and of the ruled who yearned for economic justice and democracy. This conflict was perceived less in Morocco and Jordan where the kings could resort to religion as a legitimisation strategy and as a diverting method of co-optation, repression and illiberal democracy. In the more secular republics of Tunisia and Egypt, without the umbrella of religious legitimacy, the authoritarian regimes’ tactics were hence perceived as insincere, opportunistic and unjust.<sup>30</sup>

The ultimate aim, in all four countries, seems to have been a return to the prioritising of an elusive political stability in the quest for economic relief. But appealing again to the IFM in this search for economic relief, the North African countries were only told to cut subsidies to fuel and food, which did not match well with the economic justice their people demanded. The failing neoliberal economies and the emergence of a financing gap might contribute to economic risks associated with political instability and social unrest, which are often part of socio political transition processes. Designing a new financing strategy in the North African context seems to be

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<sup>28</sup> International Crisis Group, *Tunisia: Transitional Justice and the Fight Against Corruption*, Report 168/Middle East & North Africa, 3/5/2016, in <https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/north-africa/tunisia/tunisia-transitional-justice-and-fight-against-corruption>.

<sup>29</sup> Alianak, *The Transition towards Revolution and Reform*, pp. 95-96.

<sup>30</sup> *Ib.*, pp. 157-168.

crucial to resolving the financing gap problems and to achieving sustainable socioeconomic development in the post-transition era.<sup>31</sup>

### **The Support of the Gulf Countries versus that of the International Finance Institutions?**

International actors are playing a strongly supportive role in elaborating policies that should promote investment and improve the business climate in the North African region.

In particular, the geopolitical weight of the Arab Gulf countries' involvement has increased in the aftermath of the Arab Spring, with Saudi Arabia, Qatar and the UEA getting increasingly involved in the region's reconstruction and development. However, in spite of the billions of dollars in loans, grants and investments the oil rich Gulf countries poured (or sometimes just announced they would pour) into the struggling North African transition, they have initiated no 'Marshall Plan' in the Middle East as called for by a number of Arab policymakers at the 2011 World Economic Forum meeting.<sup>32</sup>

During the last five years the Gulf countries (Saudi Arabia, UAE, Kuwait) provided a strong hand in helping the Egyptian economy with more than 12 billion US\$ in form of cash grants, oil products and interest free loans promised to the Egyptian transitional government. This financing and stimulus package from the Gulf countries was intended to sustain investors' confidence in Egyptian markets in order to push private investment up to 5% during the financial years of 2013/14 and 2014/15.<sup>33</sup> It has also helped to reduce the impact of the cut in US military grants and the return of 3mUS\$ in Qatari funds. Recently Saudi Arabia agreed to provide Egypt with more than 3bn US\$ in loans and grants plus a 1.5bn US\$ loan to develop the Sinai Peninsula and 1.2bn US\$ to finance Egypt's oil purchases. The massive pledge of aid from the GCC states is a significant example of the rich Arab oil countries seeking to extend their influence, via financial munificence, in post-revolutionary or politically vulnerable states.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> ESCWA, *Survey of Economic and Social Developments in the Arab Region, 2013-2014*, p. 10.

<sup>32</sup> Momani, 'Arab Gulf Investment into Non-Inclusive Urban Development in the Middle East', p. 130.

<sup>33</sup> AlexBank Research, *Egypt Macroeconomic Update*, pp. 4-5.

<sup>34</sup> The Economist Intelligence Unit (London UK), *Country Forecast, Middle East and Africa. Regional Overview*, December 2013 ([www.eiu.com](http://www.eiu.com)), pp. 27-28; A.

The enthusiastic support Saudi Arabia offered Sisi allowed Egypt to receive substantial economic assistance and, in the meantime, diminished the role of Qatar, the small Gulf country which had proactively backed the Morsi government, in the region.<sup>35</sup> For Saudi rulers fostering Egyptian recovery and therefore sustaining the stability of the most populous Arab country in the region is part of their project of supporting conservative Islam throughout the world. Moreover, the Egyptian community constitutes the largest expatriate group, numbering about 1.6million, in Saudi Arabia, and the remittances sent home by this community are a significant source of revenue for the Egyptian economy.<sup>36</sup>

Qatar is still committed to supporting Tunisia, though its aid seems to be significantly smaller than what was promised when *al-Nahda* rose to power.<sup>37</sup>

Financial support from some Gulf States, mainly without clear constraints on funding, does not mean an absence of dependency on donor countries. Nonetheless this support has helped transition authorities not to feel compelled to hastily reach a deal with the International Financial Institutions (IFI), thus accepting the social risks involved in their conditions. The amount of IFI support to Egypt is smaller than that provided by Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and the UAE, but Egypt is expected to receive in December 2016 the first 1bn US\$ tranche of a 3bn US\$ loan from the World Bank.<sup>38</sup>

Moreover, IMF funding is a necessary condition for obtaining further funds from a variety of IFI, including the African Development Bank and the European Union, as it plays a central role in the implementation of the partnership, and no significant

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Feteha - A. L. Wahba, *Saudi Arabia to Support Egypt with \$3 Billion of Loans, Grants*, Bloomberg, 4<sup>th</sup> January 2016, in <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2016-01-04/saudi-arabia-to-support-egypt-with-3-billion-of-loans-grants>.

<sup>35</sup> M. C. Bassiouni, 'Egypt's Unfinished Revolution', in Adam Roberts - Michael J. Willis - Rory McCarthy - Timothy Garton Ash (eds.), *Civil Resistance in the Arab Spring: Triumphs and Disasters*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2016, p. 81.

<sup>36</sup> V. Talbot, 'The Gulf Monarchies' Role in the New MENA Region', in Carlo Altomonte - Massimiliano Ferrara (eds.), *The Economic and Political Aftermath of the Arab Spring: Perspectives from Middle East and North African Countries*, Edward Elgar, Cheltenham (UK), 2014, pp. 22-23.

<sup>37</sup> S. Halimi, « Islamistes au pied du mur », *Le Monde diplomatique*, March 2013, pp. 1 e 12, in <http://www.monde-diplomatique.fr/2013/03/HALIMI/48807>.

<sup>38</sup> Africanews, 'Egypt to receive first \$1 billion of a \$3 billion loan from World Bank', April 13<sup>th</sup> 2016, <http://www.africanews.com/2016/04/13/egypt-to-receive-first-1-billion-of-a-3-billion-loan-from-world-bank/>.

disbursement is carried out without an agreement with the IMF on structural reforms.<sup>39</sup>

Tunisia, which has made important strides in the political and constitutional realms, necessitates financial support and yet this assistance has been lacking or is not sufficient. The international community must do more to help Tunisia, as the model it has come to represent in the region cannot be allowed to fail. The IMF agreed a US\$1.74bn financing program with Tunisia in June 2013, which is meant to encourage faster progress in the country's structural reform program including reform of food and fuel subsidies.<sup>40</sup> Already in June 2011, the World Bank agreed to provide two US\$500million Development Policy Loans (DPL) as part of a US\$1.3billion package offered in conjunction with the African Development Bank, the African Development Fund and the European Union. The loan is aimed at the achievement of three main goals: sustainable growth and job creation, social and economic inclusion, strengthening governance: voice, transparency and accountability.<sup>41</sup>

The general character of the platforms proposed by International Financial Institutions and the goals that they aim to achieve do not constitute significant changes compared to the economic policies they fostered in the region before the revolutions, even though they profess a new course in line with the socio-economic goals of the uprisings, namely enhancing sustainable inclusive growth while ensuring adherence to good governance and the democratic process. It is difficult to judge the efficacy of their economic assistance before it has been practically tested. What is clear is that the challenges confronting the North African countries require radical changes in the existing order, and also farsighted planning. They all suffer from large budget deficits and deteriorating economic conditions, and will require financial assistance to meet their political and socio-economic objectives. In this context, the deepening engagement of International Financial Institutions with North Africa will likely constitute a key

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<sup>39</sup> UNECA, *The Economic Situation in Egypt in the Context of Political Instability and a Risky Transition*, p. 7.

<sup>40</sup> The Economist Intelligence Unit, *Country Forecast, Middle East and Africa. Regional Overview*, p. 27.

<sup>41</sup> A. Hanieh, 'Shifting Priorities or Business as Usual? Continuity and Change in the post-2011 IMF and World Bank Engagement with Tunisia, Morocco and Egypt', in *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 42/1 (2015) [pp. 119-134], pp. 123-124.

axis to allow an economic growth with rapid recovery of public finances and balance of payments.<sup>42</sup>

According to the ESCWA (UN Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia), the difficulty of the transition and lack of national consensus in the MENA region will have a negative impact on the security situation and on economic activity, thus worsening the economic and social crisis. An ideal scenario would be the end of violence with strong consensus among the different actors. This consensus would be the main leverage to implement sound economic reforms.<sup>43</sup>

### **Women and Young People in Transition: Resilience and Calling for Change**

Starting from the 1950s and the 1960s the MENA region made important strides in the realm of women's education, access to the labour market and political and social participation. Although these positive trends slowed down by the end of the 1980s, socio-economic indicators concerning women's empowerment continued to improve, with the rate of female schooling rising very fast. In the 2000s the MENA region succeeded in bringing up to 0.96 the ratio of girls to boys in primary and secondary education, and in significantly increasing the ratio of young women attending universities. Maternal mortality as well as fertility rate decreased dramatically in the last decades, thus meeting the objectives set by the UN Millennium Goals with regard to improving maternal health and reducing child mortality.<sup>44</sup>

However, these advancements have not been translated into a more effective economic and political inclusion for women. In particular, the Middle East and North Africa region shows an increase in women's unemployment between 2012 and 2014, and a persistent gender gap with rates of young women's participation in the labour market much lower than those of young men. Women, particularly young women, are more exposed than their male counterpart to unemployment, underemployment or informal employment.

Gender disparities are key to understanding the situation of youth in the North African labour market as well. Young people represent a

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<sup>42</sup> Hanieh, 'Shifting Priorities or Business as Usual?', p. 134.

<sup>43</sup> UNECA, *The Economic Situation in Egypt in the Context of Political Instability and a Risky Transition*, p. 7.

<sup>44</sup> <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/>.

large share, almost 1/5, of the Arab region's total population. They constitute a significant group, not only in terms of its size, but also because the progress in education in recent years has turned this generation into the best-educated in the history of the region. Nonetheless, Arab countries have made insufficient progress in empowering their young people and in improving their agency and participation in political and governance processes. The region continues to be plagued by a very high youth unemployment rate, which currently stands at 28.2% in the Middle East and 30.5% in North Africa.<sup>45</sup>

One main problem in the region is the state's incapacity to ensure a healthy dynamic labour market, which is able to create more productive jobs and to progressively reduce the number of less productive ones. Public sector jobs still remain the most sought-after as they are much better compensated than equivalent private sector positions, particularly for the highly educated. However, as the creation of new positions in the public sector has decreased and has not been able to keep pace with the growing number of young people looking for qualified jobs, a new pattern has occurred in the labour market, the so called 'wait unemployment', namely young people who remain unemployed in the hope of eventually finding a job in the public sector.

According to Chaimaa Yassine, in Egypt both the formal public and private sectors suffer from extremely rigid environments in which workers, after securing their job, will hardly ever leave or move to other jobs. Job-to-job transition occurs more within or towards the informal sector, which offers less protection than the formal one and is targeted at specific groups of workers, such as young people and women, who are already among the most vulnerable. Unemployment in Egypt tends to be dominated by structural patterns, rather than cyclical or frictional ones. However, it has worsened following the 2008 financial crisis and the January 25<sup>th</sup> 2011 revolution.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> ILO, *Global Employment Trends for Youth 2015: Scaling up Investments in Decent Jobs for Youth*, Geneva, 2015, [http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/---publ/documents/publication/wcms\\_412015.pdf](http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/---publ/documents/publication/wcms_412015.pdf); ESCWA, *Promoting the Empowerment of Marginalized Social Groups in the Arab Region*, 2014, p. 1, [https://www.unescwa.org/sites/www.unescwa.org/files/publications/files/e\\_escwa\\_sdd\\_14\\_p-1\\_e.pdf](https://www.unescwa.org/sites/www.unescwa.org/files/publications/files/e_escwa_sdd_14_p-1_e.pdf).

<sup>46</sup> C. Yassine, 'Job Accession, Separation, and Mobility in the Egyptian Labor Market over the Past Decade', in Ragui Assaad - Caroline Krafft (eds.), *The*

The Arab uprisings have highlighted the precarious and marginalized situation of women and young people across the region.<sup>47</sup> They increasingly voiced their aspirations and their calling for change and participation in development, providing new solutions and bringing high levels of energy and commitment to the improvement of their societies. A key part of this call for change is access to greater economic opportunities. To date, on the socio-economic front, the governments have responded to their call by increasing spending on subsidies and public sector wages and expenditures. However, addressing the aspirations and needs of these countries' youth will require more comprehensive reforms focusing on job creation strategies without further affecting the budget deficit.<sup>48</sup> The lack of job opportunities and growing frustration are especially poignant for the young women of the MENA Region.

In post-revolutionary Egypt, the economic and political empowerment of women is uncertain and their status may be deteriorating. Gender based violence (GBV), including sexual harassment in public spaces or the rape of women and girls, has increased due to the general climate of conflict and insecurity. The enforcement of measures to promote gender equity is lagging behind. Moreover, first the agenda of the Islamist political forces, and later the autocratic and authoritarian shift of Sisi's regime, challenged women's participation in the democratic process. Despite the remarkable increase in women's education, their participation in the labour market remains relatively low. Women remain marginalised in economic activities: data from Egypt's statistical agency show an unemployment rate of 24% among women during 2012, more than double that of men (9.1%). Data figures have continued to worsen since then particularly for young women.<sup>49</sup>

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*Egyptian Labor Market in an Era of Revolution*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2015, p. 238.

<sup>47</sup> See for example: R. Salih - L. Welchman - E. Zambelli, 'Gender, Intersectionality and Youth Policies in the South and East Mediterranean', IAI, Power2Youth, working paper n. 12 (May 2016), in [http://www.iai.it/sites/default/files/p2y\\_12.pdf](http://www.iai.it/sites/default/files/p2y_12.pdf), 20 pp.

<sup>48</sup> The World Bank, MENA Development Report, *Opening Doors*, pp. 115, 121., <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/338381468279877854/pdf/751810PUB0EPI002060130Opening0doors.pdf>.

<sup>49</sup> UNECA, *The Economic Situation in Egypt in the Context of Political Instability and a Risky Transition*, p. 6; R. Hendy, 'Women's Participation in the

Tunisian women have enjoyed greater socio-political and civil rights compared to the neighboring countries since independence in 1956. However, their political participation and economic empowerment remained controlled by the state. They actively took part in the revolution, calling for freedom, equal citizenship, and for a greater role in society for women. In the aftermath of revolution their economic situation is grim. In Tunisia in 2012, the unemployment rate among women reached the 26.9%, compared to a world average of 6.5%; moreover, there was a significant increase in the unemployment rate of undergraduate women, which stands at 49,4%, compared to 21% among their male peers.<sup>50</sup>

The North Africa region remains a traditional society which generally prioritizes women's role within the household. The patriarchal elements are not unique to the region but are perhaps more pronounced there than elsewhere. However, these elements are changing: as education spreads and the demographic balance shifts, younger and more educated women are less supportive of the housewife stereotype. The same applies to women's participation in the political sphere: younger and better-educated women in the North Africa region express greater confidence in women's ability to contribute in the public sphere.<sup>51</sup>

According to the recent World Bank report *Opening Doors: Gender Equality and Development in the Middle East and North Africa*, the North Africa region is experiencing several forms of discrimination against women, which are exacerbated by the present political and economic situation. First of all, women experience inequality in the workplace. The majority of North African countries have laws against discrimination in the workplace and legislation mandating equal pay for equal work. In practice, however, the enforcement of non-discrimination laws is difficult. The equal pay provisions are undermined by inequalities in non-wage benefits which usually are allocated to the husband. Many women cannot benefit from proper labour legislation as they are employed in the informal sector – mainly domestic or agricultural labour –, which offers less protection than

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Labor Market: 1998-2012', in Ragui Assaad - Caroline Krafft (eds.), *The Egyptian Labor Market in an Era of Revolution*, pp. 147-161.

<sup>50</sup> UNECA, *Situation et perspectives économiques en Tunisie dans le contexte de transition actuel*, 2014, pp. 8-9, [http://www.uneca.org/sites/default/files/Publication\\_Files/note\\_tunisie\\_fre.pdf](http://www.uneca.org/sites/default/files/Publication_Files/note_tunisie_fre.pdf).

<sup>51</sup> The World Bank, MENA Development Report, *Opening Doors*, pp. 63-64.

normal employment contracts. This lack of protection leaves them vulnerable to exploitation and unfair employment practices. Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia have legislation sanctioning sexual harassment in the workplace. They encourage victims of sexual harassment to report instances of illegal conduct but, as in many other countries, there are significant barriers to the effective enforcement of the law. Legal claims against the harasser are difficult to pursue and are rarely an option for women who are afraid they would be blamed by their communities.<sup>52</sup>

The expansion of the public sector mainly in the 1960s and 1970s created many jobs, especially for the well-educated. Women have benefited directly from these jobs, which they perceived as socially acceptable and compatible with family care and housework. But the high level of public sector employment has distorted the labour market by attracting the brightest workers at rates of pay that the private sector cannot match. Second, generous subsidies and family benefits certainly have helped to reduce vulnerability and poverty, but have worked also to reinforce a vision of women as homemakers and discouraged them from entering the labour market.<sup>53</sup>

Finally, a central tenet of the social contract has been heavy state investment in education. But, despite the high level of educational attainment in the region, there is a disconnection between what students learn and what productive jobs require. This problem is more pronounced for women. Following gender norms, women are inclined to study education, health and welfare, humanities and the arts. These educational specializations in turn limit the job opportunities available to educated women: predominantly public sector positions in education, health, and administration. Unfortunately, given the cuts to the public sector, the number of new positions in these fields has been decreasing. Women also are less likely than men to acquire job-relevant skills outside formal education. As a result, women have relatively less diversified and fewer marketable skills than men do. These limitations restrict women's ability to adjust their skills to suit private sector employers.<sup>54</sup>

The school-to-work transition of young people seems today to be a long and difficult path. In Upper Egypt, focus group discussions with young adults highlighted how they felt that they had not learnt any job-relevant skills either in school or in vocational education.

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<sup>52</sup> The World Bank, MENA Development Report, *Opening Doors*, p. 80.

<sup>53</sup> *Ib.*, p. 93.

<sup>54</sup> The World Bank, MENA Development Report, *Opening Doors*, p. 106.

Employers in Egypt share similar views. Less than 30% of human resource managers agreed that the university graduates whom they had hired in the previous year possessed the appropriate professional skills.<sup>55</sup> In order to face the challenges of the labour market, the Egyptian Government developed the Youth Employment National Action Plan (2010-15) which includes three priority areas: technical education and vocational training, enterprise development, and labour market policies and programmes.<sup>56</sup> Major gender- and youth-related concerns in the Egyptian labour market are represented by young women's very low participation in the labour force and the poor quality of jobs held by young men and women. Moreover, Egypt has a very low presence of young entrepreneurs who also cannot count on institutional financing mechanisms. According to the ILO program *Work4Youth*, only 34.4% of Egyptian youth is able to access a stable and/or satisfactory job; another 29.4% of young people remains 'in transition', meaning that they are unemployed or have been only able to obtain a temporary and non-satisfactory job, and the remaining 36.2% has not yet started the 'transition' to work.<sup>57</sup> The average time Egyptian young people spend in transitional activities before obtaining stable or satisfactory employment is very lengthy, almost four years (48.5 months), with a quite significant difference between young men and women (about 35 and 53 months respectively).<sup>58</sup>

Education seems not to have a positive influence on young people's job opportunities. Indeed, the youth unemployment rate increases with each additional level of educational attainment; university graduates show the highest unemployment rate (34%), compared to an unemployment rate of only 2.4% among young people with less than primary-level education. However, important gender related differences

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<sup>55</sup> *Ib.*, p. 109.

<sup>56</sup> Gh. Barsoum - M. Ramadan - M. Mostafa, *Labour Market Transitions of Young Women and Men in Egypt*, Work4Youth Publication Series No. 16, ILO, Geneva, 2014, p. 1, [http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/documents/publi\\_cation/wcms\\_247596.pdf](http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/documents/publi_cation/wcms_247596.pdf). In 2010 ILO developed, in cooperation with MasterCard Foundation, the five years Work4Youth project aiming to promote better work opportunities for young men and women all over the world. In 2012 ILO also implemented a school to work transition survey (SWTS) focused on young people aged 15-29 years, which is intended to help policy makers to evaluating the impact of youth-related policies and programmes in their home countries.

<sup>57</sup> Barsoum - Ramadan - Mostafa, *Labour Market Transitions*, p. 3.

<sup>58</sup> *Ib.*, p. 43.

can be found. For young women, the highest unemployment rate (76%) is among those with general secondary-level education, while it is 46.9% for female university graduates and 56% for young women with educational qualifications above the intermediate level. On the other side, the unemployment rate of young Egyptian men reaches a maximum of 23% among young university graduates.<sup>59</sup>

According to the analysis provided by the ILO, the main problems in the Egyptian gender and youth-related labour market are represented by low quality employment, high level of informal employment, depressed wages and very long study-to-work transition paths, thus resulting in high rates of unemployment and inactivity. There is little consensus in the literature on how to stimulate job creation. Approaches span from emphasis on skill specialization and division of labour to promoting investment in infrastructure and human capital, and enhancing macroeconomic stability and good governance. Mainstream policies focus on cooperation between the public and private sectors, and between state and civil society organizations to improve youth employment outcomes. Whatever policies Egypt will implement, it needs to address its youth employment issues as soon as possible by creating more and better jobs, particularly high-skilled jobs that are necessary to meet the demand for workers in this type of occupation.<sup>60</sup>

Tunisia shares several commonalities with Egypt. Despite the decline in the number of births, the demographic transition is not yet completed and the number of young people entering the labour market is still above the number of the workers reaching retirement age. This makes young people highly vulnerable to the risk of long term unemployment or underemployment. Young people's level of education has increased dramatically over the past 20 years, thanks to massive public investment in the sector, but the system continues to be mainly academy-oriented and doesn't provide adequate employment schemes. Vocational education and training systems are slowly emerging but remain mainly linked to the school system rather than organized in apprenticeships or other alternative schemes.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> *Ib.*, p. 29.

<sup>60</sup> Barsoum - Ramadan - Mostafa, *Labour Market Transitions*, pp. 45-46.

<sup>61</sup> M. Mansuy - P. Werquin, *Labour Market Entry in Tunisia: The Gender Gap*, W4Y Publication Series no 31, ILO Geneva, December 2015, p. 19, in [http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed\\_emp/documents/publication/wcms\\_440855.pdf](http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_emp/documents/publication/wcms_440855.pdf).

According to current Tunisian labour market data, 24% of young people (aged 15-29) are unemployed, 32% are employed in the informal sector, 13% are in education and 18% are inactive non-students. Only 8% of young people have a formal job (with a written contract) and 5% are freelance workers or employers.<sup>62</sup> There are significant differences in the labour market data according to geographical patterns (the depressed inland and southern region versus the coastal regions, and rural versus urban areas), as well as according to gender indicators. Gender disparities are strong when it comes to employment opportunities with 39% of young women aged 15-29 neither participating in the labour market nor being enrolled in education. The considerable difference between young women and young men in terms of overall participation in the labour force is partially due to social norms dictating that women (especially married women) are not expected to work outside the family circle. The primary role of women as housewives and caretakers for children and elders within the family is due not only to the norms of a conservative patriarchal society but also to the difficulties in accessing childcare and other social services. The possibilities for married women of having a job as employees in both the formal and informal sectors is lower than for their male counterparts. The private sector in particular seems to be a hostile environment for women. On the one side there are elements of discrimination against female applicants on the part of employers, and on the other women themselves refrain from engaging in long term training and long working hours in the private sector, having internalized the prevailing social norms which dictate their principal role to lie within the household. The gender gap is exacerbated in rural areas where almost half of the young female population does not enter the labour market at all. For both women and men, being a new entrant increases the probability of unemployment (+21 points for women and +17 for men). The level of education does not influence women's access to the labour force but women with a tertiary education do not give up hope of finding a job, even if they are not actively seeking one. Self-employment is rare among young men and almost non-existent among young women. It would therefore be appropriate to implement policies which would

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<sup>62</sup> Mansuy - Werquin, *Labour Market Entry in Tunisia: The Gender Gap*, p. 11.

aim towards steering a greater number of young people into creating their own enterprises by providing training in SME management.<sup>63</sup>

According to the ILO, a way out of the high unemployment rate which has deteriorated the socio-economic stability of most Arab countries can be found by rethinking the recruitment system and innovating the whole educational system in order to provide young people with qualifications and skills necessary to meet the profound changes in the labour market. In its reports, the ILO voiced young people's demand to be offered better job opportunities and to be allowed to participate in political decisions related to education and labour by inviting the Arab countries to put emphasis on an innovation-based school and training system and to foster the creation of new companies or activities by providing counselling services and specific training in business management.

The Egyptian and Tunisian governments have, in general, not remained inactive and have introduced programmes to assist young people entering into the labour market. Egypt launched the Youth Employment National Action Plan (2010-15) which is, unfortunately, still concentrated on low labour intensity sectors, and neoliberal economic policies, the major factors of youth exclusion; moreover, no information is yet available regarding the results obtained by the plan.<sup>64</sup> In 2011 Tunisia developed the AMAL programme, aimed at people seeking their first job, and who are higher education graduates and holders of the 'Brevet de Technicien Supérieur' vocational qualification. This programme encountered a number of shortcomings and therefore the Government established, in substitution of AMAL, the National Unemployment Fund (21/21 Fund) aiming to address the challenges of unemployment through the creation of the Employment

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<sup>63</sup> Mansuy - Werquin, *Labour Market Entry in Tunisia: The Gender Gap*, pp. 6-8, 17-23.

<sup>64</sup> A. Galal - J. L. Reiffers (coord.), *Towards a New Dynamic to Sustain the Economic and Social Balances*, FEMISE Euromed Report, June 2014, p. 135, <http://www.femise.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/Rapport-FEMISE-2013-VGB-ac5.pdf>. See also M. Catusse - B. Destremau, *Governing Youth, Managing Society: A Comparative Overview of Six Country Case Studies (Egypt, Lebanon, Morocco, Occupied Palestinian Territories, Tunisia and Turkey)*, IAI, Power2Youth project, working paper n.16, June 2016, p. 17, [http://www.power2youth.eu/system/resources/W1siZiIsIjIwMTYvMDYvMjc0MTRfMDNfNTVfNjU1X3AyeV8xNC5wZGYiXV0/p2y\\_14.pdf](http://www.power2youth.eu/system/resources/W1siZiIsIjIwMTYvMDYvMjc0MTRfMDNfNTVfNjU1X3AyeV8xNC5wZGYiXV0/p2y_14.pdf).

Promotion Programme (Programme d'Encouragement à Emploi) targeting in particular the most vulnerable among the unemployed.<sup>65</sup>

Self-employment and vocational education policies alone do not suffice to address the severe economic crisis and the large social inequalities North African countries are currently facing, unless they are included in a broader framework of economic reforms, including labor policies aiming at reducing the incidence of informal employment, and social policies, especially in the area of housing. Indeed, housing issues, as well as transportation, are crucial to young people. Many, even when married, don't have access to a first home due to lack of resources, and still live with their parents. Thus their claim to autonomy is almost impossible.<sup>66</sup>

Because the 2011 Arab uprisings have largely been considered as 'youth revolutions' against political, socioeconomic and cultural marginalization, 'youth' as a category has increasingly attracted the interest of scholars and experts who have generated a large number of papers, articles and books looking for a comprehensive understanding of inclusionary and exclusionary dynamics of youth in the Arab world. The majority of these works feature a multidimensional approach structured not only on generation, but also on gender, class, ethnicity and other social differences that contribute to the creation of inequalities among young people themselves.<sup>67</sup>

The experience of exclusion and marginalization does not only characterize young Arabs, but is instead typical of many young people living in Africa and now this phenomenon is emerging among young people in developed societies as well, due to the widespread financial and economic crisis. The working class and impoverished youth, especially members of racial-ethnic minorities, are more and more bearing the heaviest burdens of the crisis, and experiencing a delayed or blocked transition to adulthood. They are not able to achieve social and economic autonomy under the socio-economic and political conditions that prevail in most countries. Having no access to a proper

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<sup>65</sup> Galal - Reiffers, *Towards a New Dynamic to Sustain the Economic and Social Balances*, p. 239.

<sup>66</sup> C. Paciello - R. Pepicelli - D. Pioppi, *Youth in Tunisia: Trapped Between Public Control and the Neo-Liberal Economy*, IAI, Power2Youth project, working paper n. 6, February 2016, [http://www.iai.it/sites/default/files/p2y\\_06.pdf](http://www.iai.it/sites/default/files/p2y_06.pdf), 29 pp.

<sup>67</sup> See for example the Project Power2Youth developed by the IAI (Italian Institute of Foreign Affairs): <http://www.iai.it/en/ricerche/power2youth-freedom-dignity-and-justice>.

job or to any form of economic autonomy, they are forced to renounce to (or to indefinitely postpone) what are considered the markers of 'adulthood': being independent, getting married and providing for their own families. The term 'waithood' has been coined to describe this generation, forced by a deep socioeconomic crisis into a long process of negotiating personal identity and financial independence which could potentially last for years or even for their entire lives. 'Waithood' has become an indefinite status for many young Africans and a new form of 'adulthood', in which young people have to create their model of what it means to be a mature person despite miserable prospects for the future. But this 'waiting generation' is also an agent of change. It is actively asserting itself, fighting against government corruption and repression, and opposing economic policies that exacerbate poverty, class inequality and uneven development. They are working out their own lives in their concrete circumstances and using the resources available to them. 'Waithood' is not a failed transition, it is a new and difficult phase that young people are actively and creatively engaging with in order to find solutions for their everyday problems.<sup>68</sup>

The North African 'waiting generation' has been the major player in the revolution, but it has been nonetheless progressively disenchanted and marginalized by the course of the democratic transition which, respectively: prioritized compromise with the former regime's institutions while introducing a few reforms in Tunisia; and turned into an authoritarian counterrevolution in Egypt. The collective force of young people, women and men, who led the revolution, was diluted in the aftermath while different interests and prospects emerged, so that they were not able to articulate an alternative political discourse that could stand on its own, and face the challenges of the democratic transition. The revolutionary discourse, which centered on social justice and freedom, better job opportunities and demand for participation, was outstripped by the dominant discourses adopted by the political forces. These focused instead mainly on issues of Islamism versus secularism, modernism versus conservatism, national security and war on terror. Young people do not believe in the old political models but at the same time they have not yet been

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<sup>68</sup> A. Honwana, *The Time of Youth. Work, Social Change, and Politics in Africa*, Kumarian Press, Sterling (Virginia), 2012, pp. 19-37.

able to articulate a new one.<sup>69</sup> They thus distanced themselves from the formal political parties, or were sidelined by the dominant forces. However, they remain nonetheless politically engaged in the democratic transition through their own associations and civil society initiatives. Like many other young people all around the world who have divorced from formal politics, young North Africans are convinced that the current system is not serving them, but continue to put pressure on the authorities through street protests, sit-ins, activities on social networks and independent associations.<sup>70</sup>

### **Conclusion: North Africa in Flux**

The North African countries which experienced the 2011 revolutions are in a phase of political transition, but at very different stages from one-another. Morocco and Tunisia mostly succeeded in establishing more transparent, more efficient and more participative institutions; Tunisia, in particular, still represents an exemplar for revolutionary change in the region. Libya is in the throes of an unprecedented civil war. In Egypt the spectre of the counter-revolution has emerged with the current elite using the old regime's consolidated autocratic instruments of repression, violence and occasional concessions.

The region's future is uncertain, shocked by fragile democratic institutions, weak economic momentum, identitarian issues, and the insufficient level of maturity and/or democratic commitment on the part of some parties or leading politicians.

International as well as Arab scholars advocate for the restoration of a sense of complementarity and interdependence in the social and economic spheres in order to successfully overcome the current turmoil in the region. They call on internal political actors as well the region's countries to put old grudges and divergent interest aside and work together for national and regional reconciliation, arguing that no country can be reconstructed after a crisis without a cohesive society.

According to FEMISE (Forum Euroméditerranéen des Instituts de Sciences Économiques), only by introducing significant changes in the growth model based on a shared social contract, the region can achieve its objectives of macroeconomic growth and institutional stability in a sustainable and long-term manner. The Institute strongly

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<sup>69</sup> A. Honwana, *Youth and Revolution in Tunisia*, Zed Books, London-New York 2013, pp. 120-121.

<sup>70</sup> Honwana, *Youth and Revolution in Tunisia*, pp. 196-202.

calls for policymakers to base growth dynamics on innovation and technological progress and to reallocate the production factors in order to favour the opening up of the markets. It also suggests a greater decentralisation so as to allow a larger participation on the part of the population, notably at the local level, combined with a particular care to the training of local staff, to their status and their autonomy with regard to the central power.<sup>71</sup>

But no one model can be easily applied to the post-revolution North African countries and there are several patterns deserving of a more in-depth analysis. Paradoxically, the governments of countries in transition are reluctant to implement economic reforms, as they are focused on seeking ways and means to improve the political situation. Some obstacles to economic growth in North African countries may be common to other emerging economies, and moreover, the situation of the North African countries before 2011 was already characterized by a relatively slow growth rate due to the negative impact of neo-liberal reforms and the exploitation by the ruling elites of sectors of the economy through privatisation schemes and crony capitalism. Authoritarian regimes, declining opportunities and growing socio-economic vulnerabilities increased the gap between political power and ordinary citizens, allowing a number of non-state actors to fill the vacuum of the receding state. Among the clearest indications of the failures of Arab states there is the highest level of youth unemployment in the world with more than 50% of young people having no option but to get a job in the informal sectors of the economy.

International donors and IFI support seems to be fundamental to overcoming the economic crisis. But the solutions they suggest do not differ from the previous neoliberal policies. They still focus on easing monetary policy and using the exchange-rate mechanism in order to improve competitiveness in the export market; reorienting the macro-economic policies towards a growth objective; and rethinking the subsidies policies, thus leading to a distortion of competition and undermining the operation of the internal market.<sup>72</sup> The policies carried out by international actors, including those of the EU, towards North African transitional countries continue to concentrate primarily

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<sup>71</sup> Galal - Reiffers, *Towards a New Dynamic to Sustain the Economic and Social Balances*.

<sup>72</sup> Mansuy - Werquin, *Labour Market Entry in Tunisia: The Gender Gap*, pp. 26-27.

on free-market approaches to economic growth and to prioritize stability over the importance of social justice. These elements of continuity between pre- and post-revolution strategic choices are worrying: although all international institutions are sympathetic with the revolutionary claim to social and economic justice, they continue to emphasize policy stances which have historically reinforced inequality and supported oppressive regimes bearing no more than democratic ‘facades’.<sup>73</sup>

A more holistic approach would have been better suited to accommodating the combination of political and socio-economic demands in the conception of democracy emerging from the Arab revolutions.

The role of the Gulf countries in the North African transition seems to be ambiguous. Their interests mainly correspond to those of the Western powers and institutions, since Gulf states have been a prime beneficiary of the neoliberal opening up of the region over the last two decades. Thus, the Gulf countries’ financial support constitutes not only an attempt to strengthen their position in the region, but is also part of maintaining a status quo in the region’s economies, which continue to be fully neoliberal and accommodative towards their interests. According to Adam Hanieh, the Gulf states’ dominant position in the political economy of the Arab world has been facilitated by neoliberal choices. Therefore, the underlying causes of the revolts, namely the intensification of an authoritarian neoliberalism and the increasing dispossession and exclusion of the middle and working classes, are intertwined with the extension of the Gulf’s political and economic power across the region. Over the last two decades, Gulf-based capital has taken a central position in key sectors of the Egyptian economy – notably agribusiness, finance and real estate – as a consequence of neoliberal reforms and internationalization which have facilitated the integration of Gulf-based investors within the Egyptian economic structure. This also helps to explain the crucial role of the Gulf countries in granting financial support to Egypt, which widely surpasses the financial assistance offered by the IMF and the World Bank.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> A. Teti, ‘Democracy without Social Justice: Marginalization of Social and Economic Rights in EU Democracy Assistance Policy after the Arab Uprisings’, *Middle East Critique*, 24/1 (2015), pp. 9-25.

<sup>74</sup> A. Hanieh, ‘Re-scaling Egypt’s Political Economy: Neoliberalism and the Transformation of the Regional Space’, in Reem Abou-El-Fadl (ed.), *Revolutionary*

The policies sponsored by the International Financial Institution and the GCC match perfectly with the corporate interests of Egypt's ruling elite, which has manipulated the political process in order to maintain the neo-liberal policies and the political order which impoverished millions of Egyptians and created the impetus for ousting Mubarak.<sup>75</sup>

In North African countries, the aspirations of youth and women, the driving forces of the revolutionary process, which have been sidelined by the established political forces that have taken control of the political space, are still alive and could contribute to positive changes. They remain politically engaged in the democratic transition through their own associations and civil society initiatives even if they do not participate in formal politics. Young people's and women's rights in the North African transition are negatively affected by social attitudes, such as patriarchy and conservatism, and by institutional weakness. They cannot be disconnected from other urgent issues, such as democratic transition, judicial independence, transitional justice, internal security, and economic uncertainty.

The revolutionary act constituted a political and cultural shock for the previously established gender discourse. Women participated actively in the revolution, they took to the streets along with their male counterparts to express their anger and their quest for democratic participation and social justice. They contributed to elaborate new strategies of resistance through chants, banners, slogans and graffiti, and were able to turn physical violation and sexual harassment into a new culture of the body and in a re-positioning of the gender discourse. The revolutionary generation went 'beyond gender without abandoning gender', thus allowing women to exercise agency within a broader discourse centred on citizens' rights and democratic mobilization against authoritarian and corrupt regimes.<sup>76</sup> The young revolutionary generation, made up of women and men alike, feel themselves as if caught between a sense of empowerment and vitality and one of vulnerability and frustration with respect to its unfulfilled expectations, but its conspicuous presence in the public sphere during

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*Egypt: Connecting Domestic and International Struggles*, Routledge, Abingdon, New York, 2015, pp. 156-176.

<sup>75</sup> M. Abdelrahman, 'A Hierarchy of Struggles?', pp. 622-623.

<sup>76</sup> Abouelnaga, *Women in Revolutionary Egypt: Gender and the New Geographies of Identity*, pp. 3-9.

the revolution and in its aftermath cannot pass unnoticed and its energy is, hopefully, still alive.

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# **Crise hydrique, crise alimentaire et bouleversement politique au Maghreb**

Eugenia FERRAGINA - Giovanni CANITANO

## **Abstract**

The paper intends to analyse water and food security in the SEMCs and their domestic and regional implications. The water-food nexus explains how water consumption is strictly linked to the production, consumption and trading system of agro-food products. The trade liberalisation process imposed by the Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) has fostered a specialisation in highly water-intensive agricultural products, such as fruit and vegetables. The dependence on basic foodstuffs imports related to this production pattern, make SEMCs particularly vulnerable to price fluctuation on international markets. Environmental problems are likely to increase the uncertainty factors that weigh on the global economy and affect especially transition economies, such as those of North Africa and Middle East. The vulnerability was evident during the global food crisis of 2008, when a number of factors, both economic - reduced supply of cereals due to bad harvests in grain exporting countries - and structural - increased demand in the emerging countries, European and US incentives for biofuel production - caused a surge in the price of basic foodstuffs (wheat, rice and maize) in international markets. The strong dependence on food, coupled with the absence of social safety dampers, due to the reduction of subsidies for basic foodstuffs, made the increase in the price of bread a detonator of the riots that triggered the 'Arab Springs'. The proposed contribution wants also to explore water and food security in its geopolitical dimension at the regional scale. Demographic pressure and climatic hazards, in recent years, have strongly undermined water and food security in Southern Mediterranean region. The authors present some competition scenarios relating to both large international water basins and fossil water aquifer shared by various countries.

## **Introduction**

Au Maghreb l'eau est le lien majeur entre le réchauffement progressif de la planète et l'insécurité alimentaire, car il existe une corrélation directe entre le niveau des précipitations, la dotation des ressources en eau et les rendements agricoles. La dépendance alimentaire rend les pays de la région particulièrement exposés à l'évolution des prix agricoles, avec des retombées politiques qui ont

déjà émergé au cours des nombreuses émeutes du pain des années 80 et 90 et qui ont été confirmées par les récents événements du printemps arabe. La volatilité des prix ainsi que la persistance d'une forte instabilité dans le marché alimentaire mondial liée, entre autres, aux effets du changement climatique sur les rendements agricoles, risque donc de devenir un facteur supplémentaire de vulnérabilité politique et économique.

### **Le climat et les sols**

La surface du Maghreb est occupée en grand partie par le désert qui présente un niveau pluviométrique très bas, autour de 200 mm par an. Les zones humides soumises au climat méditerranéen se caractérisent par un été sec et deux saisons pluvieuses, l'une principale, en automne, l'autre secondaire, au printemps.<sup>1</sup> La moyenne des précipitations n'atteint les 1000 mm par an que dans quelques zones montagneuses, telles que le Nord tunisien, l'Est algérien et la chaîne du Rif, mais le régime pluviométrique est très irrégulier, tant à l'échelle journalière qu'annuelle. L'agriculture pluviale est fortement limitée par l'aridité du climat qui engendre un niveau d'évapotranspiration très élevé limitant l'apport hydrique des cultures.

La région manque de grands bassins fluviaux et les principales réserves en eau se trouvent stockées dans le Haut et Moyen Atlas marocain, dans la Kabylie algérienne et dans les nappes souterraines situées à différentes profondeurs, renouvelables dans les régions au Nord fossiles dans la région saharienne. En plus, la concentration de l'habitat et des activités productives le long des littoraux de la Méditerranée conduit à une distorsion géographique entre la localisation des sources et les zones où la demande en eau est concentrée.

Le climat a des conséquences considérables sur la conformation des sols agricoles. Contrairement à ce qui se produit aux Tropiques, où la chaleur et les pluies entraînent la décomposition des roches du sous-sol (pédogénèse), au Maghreb, ce phénomène est réduit. Cela est dû à la fois au manque de pluies estivales, qui seraient nécessaires pour provoquer les réactions chimiques indispensables à la formation du sol, et au fait d'atteindre des températures suffisamment élevées dans les autres saisons. Les sols de la région du Maghreb, formés grâce à de

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<sup>1</sup> J. Margat, *L'eau dans le bassin méditerranéen*, Les fascicules du Plan Bleu, Economica, Paris, 1994.

longues périodes chaudes et humides, ne se renouvellent plus aujourd'hui. Ils sont soumis à une forte érosion, liée à la violence des pluies en hiver et à la sécheresse de l'été, des facteurs qui rendent extrêmement difficile la reconstitution de la couverture végétale.<sup>2</sup>

Dans les pays du Maghreb, les phénomènes de dégradation des sols sont essentiellement liés à la pression humaine sur les ressources. Le taux de croissance de la population encore soutenu, associé à une disponibilité limitée des terres agricoles (5 pour cent en moyenne, à l'exception de la Turquie) a réduit, au cours des dernières décennies, la disponibilité des terres par habitant. La déforestation, l'intensification de l'agriculture et de l'élevage sur des terres structurellement fragiles a réduit la couverture végétale, tout en amplifiant l'effet érosif causé par la pluie et le vent. L'érosion hydrique est liée aux fortes pluies après de longues périodes de sécheresse qui lavent les sols, causant la perte en surface de la couche d'humus fertile. L'érosion éolienne est également liée à la présence limitée de matière organique dans le sol qui fait que le vent brise le terrain en petites particules et les disperse. Tous ces phénomènes de dégradation des terres engendrent une « réduction ou la destruction du potentiel biologique du sol qui peut conduire à des conditions désertiques », selon la définition donnée par la Conférence des Nations Unies sur la désertification tenue en 1977 à Nairobi.

Le changement climatique est susceptible d'avoir un impact significatif sur la diversité biologique, tout en provoquant l'extinction des espèces et de profonds changements dans la structure et dans la fonction des écosystèmes. La Méditerranée est considérée comme un haut lieu de la biodiversité parce qu'elle couvre 1,6 pour cent de la production mondiale et concentre 10 pour cent des espèces végétales connues. L'action humaine au cours des siècles a encore accru la diversité écologique de la région, en aidant à caractériser le paysage avec la propagation d'arbres fruitiers et cultures. Typique du paysage est l'arganier, présent principalement dans le sud-ouest du Maroc, et le palmier dattier, répandu dans de nombreuses régions d'Afrique du Nord. La résilience des nombreux écosystèmes au Maghreb, c'est-à-dire de résister et/ou s'adapter au stress, a été fortement affaiblie par les changements climatiques et les phénomènes qui leur sont associés (inondations, sécheresses, incendies, désertification), ainsi que par d'autres facteurs déclenchés par l'intervention humaine (changements

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<sup>2</sup> Y. Lacoste, « Les rythmes du climat, le drame de l'eau et des sols », en Y. Lacoste - C. Lacoste (eds.), *L'État du Maghreb*, La Découverte, Paris, 1991, p. 28.

d'utilisation des terres, la pollution et la surexploitation des ressources naturelles). Par conséquent, de nombreuses espèces végétales, déjà menacées d'extinction, pourraient disparaître d'ici la fin de ce siècle.

### **L'eau : aspects environnementaux et pression humaine**

Selon les prévisions, le changement climatique dans la région de la Méditerranée pourrait entraîner des variations spatio-temporelles des précipitations et une augmentation de l'intensité et de la fréquence des événements climatologiques extrêmes (vagues de sécheresse, exondations des fleuves, aggravation des phénomènes de déséquilibres hydrogéologique).<sup>3</sup> Le Maghreb serait exposé à une montée des températures et une diminution des précipitations, tandis que la hausse du niveau de la mer Méditerranée menace les infrastructures côtières et pourrait conduire à une perte de terres arables et au déplacement des populations.<sup>4</sup>

Au Maghreb, les précipitations, par leur rareté et leur concentration sur certaines périodes de l'année, n'assurent pas un apport suffisant et régulier en eau. Dans une situation de pénurie structurelle des ressources en eau, le changement climatique engendre une pression sur les ressources en eau régionales parce qu'il réduit le niveau des précipitations et augmente l'évapotranspiration, tout en accentuant les déficits hydriques des cultures pluviales qui couvrent la majeure partie des surfaces arables au Maghreb. Les vagues de sécheresse qui sont devenues plus fréquentes à partir de la fin des années 80 ont donc

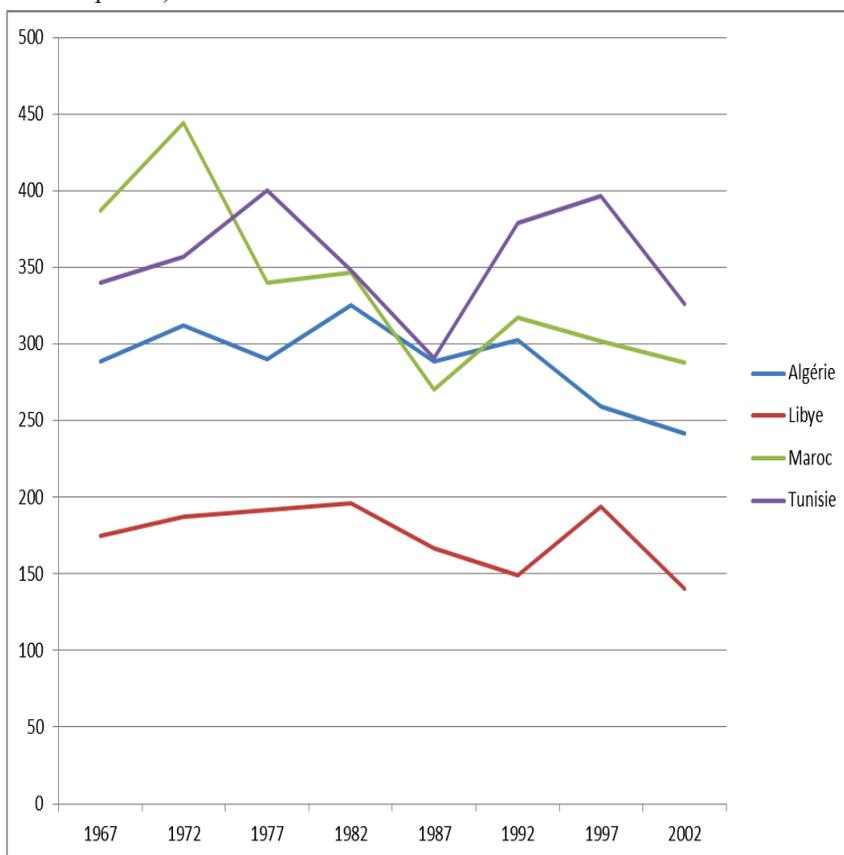
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<sup>3</sup> « De nombreuses zones semi-arides (le bassin méditerranéen, l'ouest des États-Unis, l'Afrique australe et le nord-est du Brésil) subiront les effets d'un appauvrissement de leurs ressources en eau du fait du changement climatique (degré de confiance élevé). Selon les projections, les zones touchées par la sécheresse vont s'étendre, ce qui devrait avoir une incidence négative sur de nombreux secteurs, comme l'agriculture, l'approvisionnement en eau, la production d'énergie et la santé. À l'échelle régionale, on anticipe une forte augmentation de la demande d'eau d'irrigation consécutive aux changements climatiques ». Groupe d'Experts Intergouvernemental sur l'Évolution du Climat (GIEC), *Changements climatiques*, Rapport de Synthèse, GIEC, Genève, 2008, p. 49.

<sup>4</sup> E. Ferragina - D. Quagliarotti, 'Climatic Change in the Mediterranean', in *Medit 4* (2008), pp. 4-13; Plan Bleu, United Nation Environmental Program (UNEP), *Changement climatique et énergie en Méditerranée*, 2008, p. 111; E. Ferragina - D. Quagliarotti, 'Degradazione ambientale e movimenti di popolazione: i migranti ambientali', in P. Malanima (ed.), *Rapporto sulle Economie del Mediterraneo*, Il Mulino, Bologna, 2012; F. Gemenne, *Migration et développement. L'enjeu environnemental et l'avenir des politiques migratoires*, Note de l'Ifri, janvier 2011.

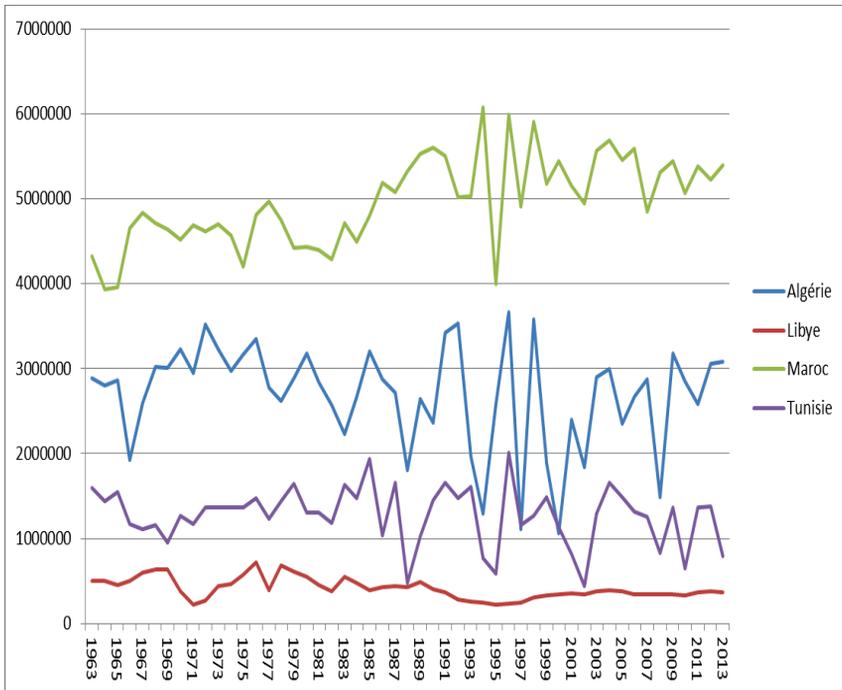
provoqué une oscillation des surfaces destinées aux cultures céréalières dans tous les pays du Maghreb entre 1980 et 2012 (Fig.1, 2).

Fig. 1. Taux nationaux des précipitations 1963-67 et 1998-02 (en millimètres par an)



Source: Élaboration à partir des données Aquastat database.

Fig. 2. Surfaces cultivées de céréales 1963-2013 (hectares)



Source: Élaboration à partir des données du World Development Indicators, 2014.

La réduction du niveau pluviométrique et l'augmentation de besoin d'irrigation des cultures alimentent la compétition entre secteurs productifs pour l'accès à l'eau. La part des ressources en eau consacrée au secteur agricole est très élevée et dépasse 80% dans le cas du Maroc et de la Libye (Fig.3). La demande en eau du secteur agricole est étroitement liée à la production et à la consommation des denrées alimentaires. Les choix culturels des dernières décennies ont contribué à la croissance de la demande en eau, en privilégiant les produits maraîchers à haute teneur en eau. Dans les périmètres irrigués, la polyculture a été remplacée par des monocultures intensives qui ont fait régresser les habitats riches en espèces sauvages beaucoup plus adaptées aux écosystèmes locaux arides que les espèces cultivées.<sup>5</sup> Pour ce qui concerne la consommation, l'élargissement de la classe moyenne

<sup>5</sup> Presque 80 espèces de légumes sauvages et de plantes céréalières utilisées par les Berbères dans la région de l'Ahaggar en Algérie ont été inventoriées. Centre International de Hautes Études Agronomiques Méditerranéennes (CIHEAM), *Mediterra 2012*, Presses de Science Po, Paris, p. 185.

a favorisé un changement du régime alimentaire avec une consommation accrue de viande. Ce phénomène a eu des retombées environnementales très graves, l'élevage étant l'un des principaux responsables de la déforestation, de la dégradation des terres, de la réduction de la biodiversité et de l'augmentation de la demande en eau. La consommation d'eau pour la production de viande et de produits laitiers est plus élevée que celle utilisée pour les cultures. Durant la phase de production d'un kilo de blé, 500 à 4000 litres d'eau s'évaporent - selon le climat, les rendements, les pratiques agronomes et la variété des cultures - tandis que la production d'un kilo de viande demande de 5000 à 20000 litres, principalement pour arroser les fourrages destinées à l'élevage.<sup>6</sup>

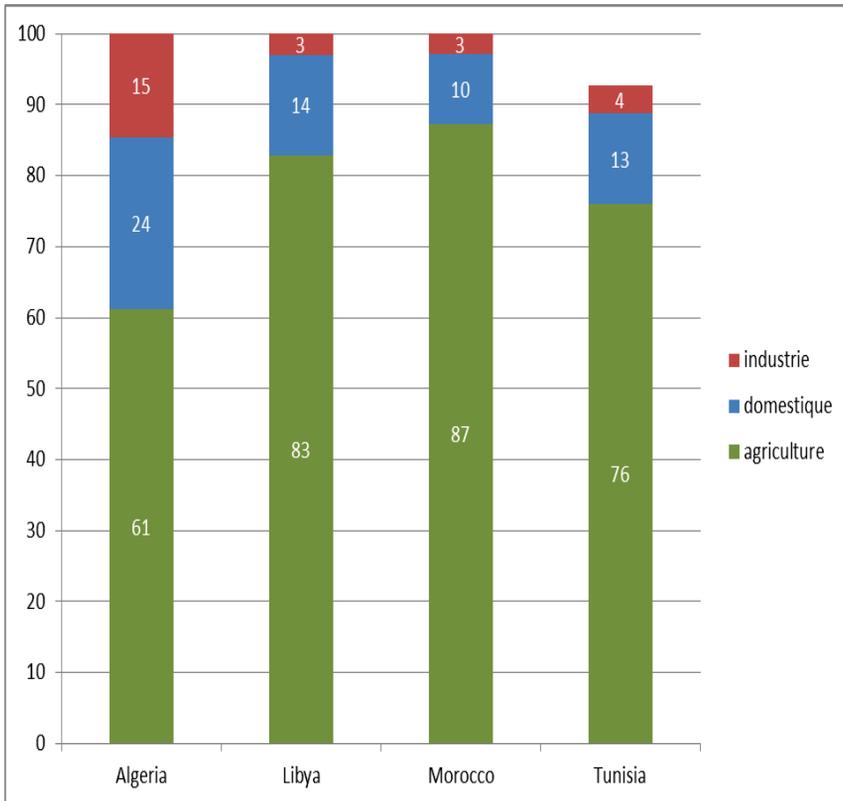
L'augmentation de la population, l'amélioration des conditions de vie, la diversification du tissu économique, contribuent de leur côté à la croissance de la demande en eau. Un indicateur très important de la pression sur les ressources en eau est l'indice d'exploitation qui mesure le rapport entre les prélèvements et la disponibilité globale des ressources en eau renouvelables. Un indice d'exploitation inférieur à 50% montre déjà des tensions entre les différents usages de l'eau, comme dans le cas de la Tunisie et de l'Algérie. Un indice d'exploitation de 100% indique que toutes les ressources en eau renouvelables sont utilisées ; un pourcentage supérieur à 100% implique une exploitation de ressources non renouvelables, comme dans le cas de la Lybie où le taux d'exploitation atteint 718% (Fig. 4). Le taux d'exploitation de la Lybie est liée au projet de la Grande Rivière artificielle développée pour satisfaire les besoins en eau du pays à travers l'épuisement de l'Aquifère des Grès de Nubie, une nappe fossile partagée entre le Tchad, l'Égypte, la Libye et le Soudan, qui occupe autour de 2 millions de kilomètres carrés, avec un volume de plus de 542 000 kilomètres cubes d'eau. Lancé dans les années 80, ce projet envisageait le transport de l'eau à l'aide d'une canalisation en direction de la côte (Tripoli et Benghazi). Le programme s'inscrivait sur une période de 25 ans et devait assurer le transfert de 6,6 millions de mètres cubes d'eau par jour pour un investissement global de 30 milliards de dollars. La mise en œuvre du projet a été affectée par les sanctions du gouvernement américain contre la Libye qui ont fait croître le coût, déjà

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<sup>6</sup> Centre International de Hautes Études Agronomiques Méditerranéennes (CIHEAM), *Mediterra 2012. La diète méditerranéenne pour un développement régional durable*, Presses de Sciences Po, Paris, 2012, p. 192.

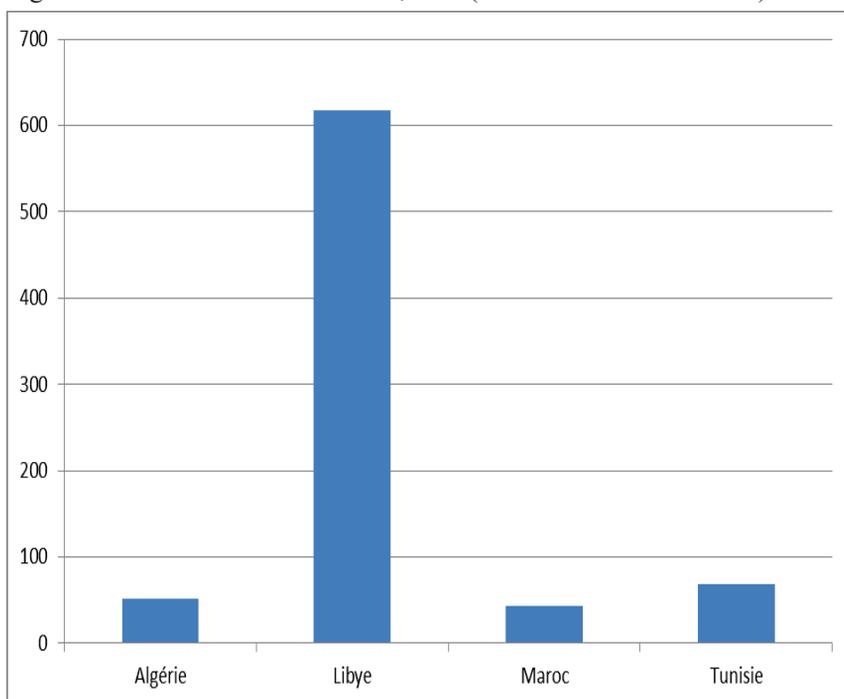
énorme, du projet. Le pipeline a été endommagé lors de l'intervention militaire de 2011 qui a provoqué la chute du régime de Kadhafi.

Fig. 3. Répartition de l'eau dans les différents secteurs productifs (%)



Source: Élaboration à partir des données du World Development Indicators 2014.

Fig. 4. Retraits annuels d'eau douce, total (% des ressources internes)



Source: Élaboration à partir des données du World Development Indicators 2014.

Le cas de la Lybie s'inscrit dans un contexte régional où le changement climatique réduit le débit des cours d'eau superficiels et entraîne une augmentation de l'exploitation des eaux souterraines qui ne sont pas exposées aux effets du réchauffement global. La diffusion de technologies simples et peu coûteuses, telles que les motopompes, a rendu l'activité de pompage des nappes beaucoup plus facile et moins onéreuse, en provoquant ce que Ramon Llamas appelle une « révolution silencieuse », à savoir le creusement illégal de puits et la multiplication des prélèvements qui échappent au contrôle de l'État et, par conséquent, ne sont pas assujettis à tarification.<sup>7</sup> L'exploitation intensive des eaux souterraines (1000 km<sup>3</sup>/an) a favorisé le développement d'une économie agricole florissante et dynamique, la

<sup>7</sup> M. R. Llamas - P. Martínez-Santos, 'Intensive Groundwater Use: Silent Revolution and Potential Source of Social Conflicts', in *Journal of Water Resources Planning and Management*, September/October (2005), pp. 337-341; R. Llamas - L. Martínez Cortina - A. Mukherji (eds.), *Water Ethics*, Taylor & Francis Group, London, 2009.

groundwater economics.<sup>8</sup> Toutefois, ce type de développement a eu des effets très graves sur l'environnement tels que l'épuisement des ressources d'eaux souterraines, la détérioration de la qualité de l'eau, la dégradation des sols et des milieux aquatiques.<sup>9</sup>

Dans la région du Maghreb, on observe un épuisement rapide des nappes dont le niveau peut s'abaisser jusqu'à 5 mètres par an. Plus de 10% de la production alimentaire repose sur la quantité d'eau souterraine mobilisée et surexploitée. La mise en valeur des eaux souterraines concerne principalement les ressources renouvelables, mais au Maghreb on enregistre une utilisation croissante des sources non renouvelables, soit les nappes fossiles. Les exploitants les plus importants d'eau fossile à l'échelle mondiale sont l'Arabie saoudite, la Libye et l'Algérie qui consomment presque 85% du total mondial estimé (Tab. 1).<sup>10</sup> Il s'agit de pays qui ont une économie basée principalement sur les hydrocarbures et qui poursuivent la même exploitation minière des ressources en eau. Cette exploitation n'est pas durable sur le plan environnemental et elle est très dangereuse à long terme dans la mesure où, si l'on peut faire face à l'épuisement des ressources en hydrocarbures grâce au développement des énergies renouvelables, en ce qui concerne l'eau, il n'existe pas de ressources de substitution et, à long terme, le coût de leur tarissement devra être payé par les générations futures.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> E. Custodio - A. Gurguí, *Groundwater Economics*, Elsevier, London, 1989.

<sup>9</sup> E. Ferragina - F. Greco, 'The Disi Project in Jordan. An Internal/External Analysis', in *Water International* 33/4 (2008), p. 456; E. Ferragina, « L'exploitation d'une ressource fossile partagée : le cas du projet Disi en Jordanie », in *Maghreb-Machrek* 210 (2012), pp. 99-117.

<sup>10</sup> J. Margat, *Les eaux souterraines dans le monde*, BRGM-UNESCO, 2008, p. 22.

<sup>11</sup> E. Ferragina, *Environmental and Sustainable Development in the Mediterranean. 10 papers for Barcelona 2010*, European Institute of the Mediterranean (IEMed), Barcelona, 2010.

Tab. 1. Exploitations minières des ressources en eau souterraines non renouvelables dans le monde

Pays	Date de valeur	Extraction (km cubes par an)	Aquifères exploités	Références
Libye	1999-2000	3,2	Nubian Sundstone Aquifer SASS Murzuk	M. Bakhbakhi 2002, OSS 2003
Algérie	2000	1,68	SASS	OSS 2003
Tunisie	2000	0,46	SASS	OSS 2003

Source: J. Margat, *Les eaux souterraines dans le monde*, BRGM-UNESCO, 2008.

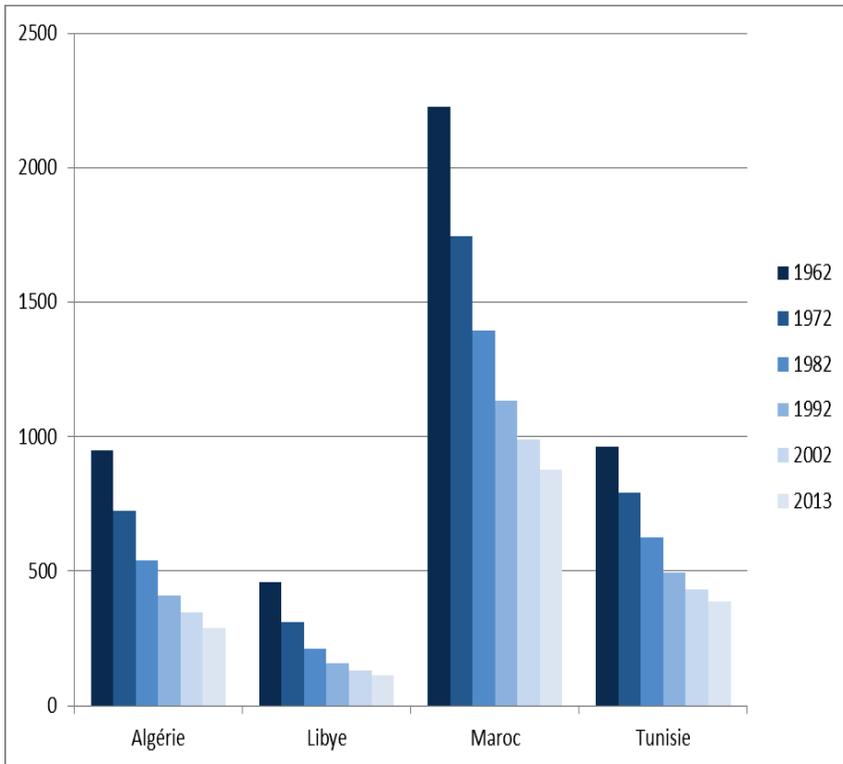
La pression humaine sur les ressources souterraines représente un défi pour la sécurité alimentaire et l'ordre social. La surexploitation des ressources souterraines, combinée à la raréfaction et pollution des ressources superficielles, risque de réduire la résilience aux épisodes de sécheresse et d'avoir un impact négatif sur la productivité agricole régionale.

Face à une offre d'eau stable ou en régression, la croissance démographique a engendré, au cours des dernières décennies, une réduction de la disponibilité en eau par habitant par an (Fig. 5). Cette disponibilité a connu une réduction entre 1962 et 2013 dans tous les pays du Maghreb, même au Maroc qui était le plus riche en eau et qui, à partir de 2002, se trouve au-dessous de la dotation minimale en eau nécessaire à la satisfaction des besoins de la population et des divers secteurs de production (1000 m<sup>3</sup> par an et par habitant).<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> La disponibilité en eau par personne par an est un indicateur très utilisé, mais qui ne tient pas compte des différences qui existent entre les pays par rapport au climat et donc la demande en eau plus élevée pour la consommation humaine et l'agriculture dans les environnements arides. J. Margat, « Quels indicateurs pertinents de la pénurie d'eau ? », in *Géocarrefour* 80/4 (2005), pp. 261-262.

Fig. 5. Disponibilité en eau par personne par an (en mètres cubes)



Source: Élaboration à partir des données du World Development Indicators 2014.

### **Le lien entre dépendance alimentaire et bouleversement politique**

La nature multidimensionnelle de la crise alimentaire au Maghreb nous amène à considérer le rôle des politiques agricoles menées et des régimes des échanges agroalimentaires entre le Maghreb et le reste du monde, ainsi que les retombées politiques de la crise alimentaire.

À partir des années 80, les grands organismes financiers internationaux poussent à une libéralisation des échanges dans le cadre des Programmes d'ajustement structurel (PAS). L'un des objectifs de cette politique est la sécurité alimentaire, à poursuivre à travers la spécialisation dans les productions agricoles irriguées à haute valeur de marché et l'achat des denrées alimentaires de base sur les marchés internationaux. Le cours des denrées alimentaires de base a favorisé l'adoption de cette stratégie, car les politiques des subventions agricoles de la part de l'Europe et des États-Unis ont entraîné entre 1976 et 2001 une chute de 53% des prix des produits alimentaires sur les marchés

mondiaux. Le processus de libéralisation a donc conduit à privilégier l'exportation de fruits et légumes, a réduit le prix interne des céréales, tout en stimulant leur importation. Le résultat de ces politiques commerciales a été un clivage croissant entre la production et la consommation des céréales qui a augmenté la dépendance vis-à-vis du marché international. Pour assurer l'alimentation de base aux couches les plus démunies de la population, les prix des céréales ont été subventionnés, mais à partir des années quatre-vingt, la Banque mondiale et le FMI ont imposé une réduction des subventions dans le cadre des politiques de rigueur économique imposées par les PAS.<sup>13</sup>

La détérioration des conditions de vie a créé un fort malaise social. En juin 1981 au Maroc, plusieurs subventions sur des produits de première nécessité ont connu une baisse très importante dans le cadre du PAS. L'effet sur les couches les plus défavorisées de la population a été aggravé par une sécheresse persistante (le pays subit sa première vague de sécheresse de 1980 à 1984) et une très grande inflation (de l'ordre de 12,5 % en 1981). Les émeutes ont éclaté dans les quartiers populaires de Casablanca. En Tunisie, en décembre 1983, suite à une demande du FMI de stabiliser l'économie nationale, le gouvernement annonce l'augmentation des prix du pain et des produits céréaliers, comme la semoule. Des « émeutes du pain » éclatent alors entre le 27 décembre 1983 et le 6 janvier 1984.

La dépendance alimentaire des pays du Maghreb est très importante, surtout vis-à-vis de l'Europe, et témoigne de la persistance de relations commerciales asymétriques entre le Nord et le Sud du bassin. Dans le cadre de la politique de libéralisation des échanges euro-méditerranéens, les pays européens ont maintenu des mesures (quotas et calendrier d'exportations) visant à protéger les secteurs les plus sensibles à la concurrence des pays partenaires. Les pays du Maghreb, au contraire, ont vu augmenter leur dépendance vis-à-vis de l'Europe surtout en ce qui concerne les céréales, la viande et les produits laitiers. Les productions maraîchères irriguées des pays du Maghreb ont donc bénéficié du processus de libéralisation commerciale envisagé par le

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<sup>13</sup> Le prix bas des denrées alimentaires de base était partie intégrante de ce que certains politologues ont appelé le modèle d'accord autoritaire, c'est-à-dire un accord entre gouvernants et gouvernés qui assurait une certaine forme de soutien de la part de l'État aux bas revenus à travers les subventions et l'emploi dans l'administration publique, sans pourtant concéder aucun droit politique et civil. A. Galal - H. Selim, 'The Elusive Quest for Arab Economic Development', in *Middle East Development Journal* 5/1 (2013).

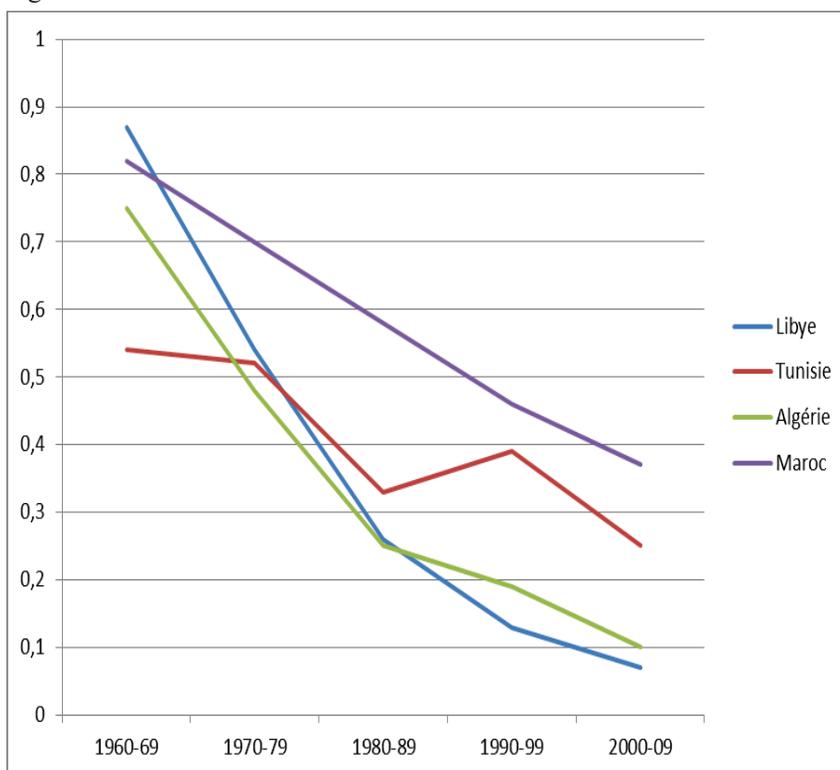
processus de Barcelone, initié en 1995, qui a accéléré l'intégration commerciale des pays du Maghreb à l'Europe avec la signature des Accords de libre-échange euro-méditerranéens. En conclusion, les mesures de protection que les pays européens ont adopté en direction de ces pays n'ont pas vraiment permis que la hausse des exportations compense celle des importations.

Le taux d'autosuffisance pour les céréales montre clairement la détérioration de la situation alimentaire dans les pays du Maghreb.<sup>14</sup> Dans les années 60, ces pays avaient un taux compris entre 0,54, pour la Tunisie, et 0,87, pour la Libye ; au début du nouveau siècle, ce taux était tombé à 0,1 pour la Libye et l'Algérie. À la même période, le taux d'autosuffisance de la Tunisie et du Maroc oscillait entre 0,2 et 0,4 (Fig. 6). Cela veut dire que, en quarante ans, les pays du Maghreb sont devenus quasiment incapables de nourrir leurs propres populations.

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<sup>14</sup> Dans cet article, on fournit des données concernant aussi bien le taux de couverture de consommation intérieure à travers les importations, que le taux d'autosuffisance, vu que le premier ne tient compte que de la dépendance des importations, alors que le deuxième considère aussi la capacité d'exportation d'un pays.

Fig. 6. Taux d'autosuffisance en céréales\*



Source: Élaboration sur la base des données Usda - Fas.

\*Le taux d'autosuffisance alimentaire exprime la capacité d'un pays à nourrir sa population par la production nationale et considère les importations et les exportations de produits alimentaires. L'indice de l'autosuffisance alimentaire varie de 0 à 1. Une valeur de 1 exprime la pleine autosuffisance alimentaire, tandis qu'une valeur de 0 exprime une complète dépendance des importations.

Dans ce contexte de forte dépendance alimentaire, la hausse de prix des produits agricoles de base sur les marchés internationaux en 2008 et en 2011 a donc bouleversé des équilibres déjà précaires, tout en mettant en évidence les interactions entre changement climatique, conditions de vie de la population et stabilité politique. En 2011, les aléas climatiques ont apporté une contribution importante à la crise alimentaire mondiale. En 2010, la production de blé a été réduite en Russie (-32,7 pour cent), en Ukraine (-19,3 pour cent), au Canada (-13,7 pour cent) et en Australie (-8,7 pour cent). La Chine - le plus grand producteur et consommateur de blé au monde - pour faire face à une sécheresse dans la partie orientale du pays a acheté du blé sur

le marché international, contribuant ainsi à la crise alimentaire mondiale.

La crise alimentaire a eu des conséquences graves sur les conditions de vie de la population parce que dans les pays arabes une grande partie du revenu familial est consacrée à l'alimentation (35,8 pour cent en Tunisie, 43,9 pour cent en Algérie). La hausse des prix des denrées alimentaires de base a donc aggravé les niveaux de pauvreté et de malnutrition dans un contexte déjà marqué par le chômage et l'augmentation des clivages sociaux. L'incidence des consommations alimentaires sur le budget familial nous amène à tirer des conclusions à propos des retombées politiques de la crise alimentaire. Appelés « démocraties de pain », les pays arabes ont pendant des années basé leur équilibre politique interne sur un modèle appelé « accord autoritaire » : un contrat social entre gouvernants et gouvernés qui engage les régimes au pouvoir à fournir de la nourriture à des prix subventionnés aux plus démunis en échange de l'abandon des citoyens à la pleine jouissance des droits civils et politiques. Bien que le printemps arabe ne puisse être attribué à une matrice unique, étant le produit d'une série de facteurs qui ont conduit à l'implosion des régimes arabes, il est indéniable que l'augmentation du prix du pain a contribué à éroder ce pacte social et à renforcer le mécontentement populaire, tout en devenant le détonateur de l'instabilité politique qui a affecté la région.<sup>15</sup>

## Conclusions

Dans les pays d'Afrique du Nord et au Moyen-Orient, la forte pression humaine sur les ressources, due à la croissance démographique, a alimenté une spirale de « consommation des ressources naturelles » dans laquelle la pauvreté a encouragé le développement de pratiques non durables de gestion, qui sont devenues, à leur tour, un obstacle au développement. Dans ce contexte, le changement climatique contribue à la dégradation des sols, à la perte de biodiversité et à la pénurie en eau, provoquant une baisse du PIB et de sérieuses contraintes à la satisfaction des besoins alimentaires de la population. En même temps, les politiques de libéralisation économique et d'intégration aux marchés européens ont favorisé une spécialisation productive en biens agricoles à haute teneur

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<sup>15</sup> A. Gana, 'The Rural and Agricultural Roots of the Tunisian Revolution: When Food Security Matters', in *International Journal of Agriculture and Food* 2 (2012), pp. 2001-2013.

en eau (fruits et légumes) à exporter sur les marchés internationaux.<sup>16</sup> Cette stratégie a conduit à une dépendance alimentaire croissante vis-à-vis des marchés mondiaux en matière de fourniture de denrées alimentaires de base.

Le déclenchement de la crise alimentaire mondiale a touché de plein fouet les pays du Maghreb tout en mettant en évidence le lien existant entre changement climatique, sécurité alimentaire et stabilité politique. Dans un monde global où les pays ont tendance à externaliser leur demande alimentaire en recourant aux marchés internationaux, le changement climatique représente un « multiplicateur de menace » qui bouleverse les équilibres à différentes échelles. La question de la sécurité alimentaire au Maghreb est donc un problème complexe, dans lequel interagissent des variables de nature économique, politique et sociale et qui détermine un degré élevé de vulnérabilité géopolitique à la crise alimentaire.

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<sup>16</sup> E. Ferragina - D. Quagliarotti, « La crise alimentaire en Méditerranée », in *Problèmes économiques* 3056 (2012), pp. 46-54.

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# **Challenging the Paradigms. Changing Theories in the Middle-Eastern Anthropology after the Tunisian Revolution**

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## **Abstract**

The major historical dimension of change, introduced in the Middle Eastern scholarship by the so-called Arab springs, should inform the anthropological study of the region. I discuss three main anthropological paradigms (interpretive, praxiological, reflexive) against this need-for-change background. The interpretive paradigm is discussed through balancing the experience-distant concepts of political-anthropological analysis with the experience-near concepts of Tunisian social actors involved in the revolutionary process: I tried to locate the analytical concept of democracy against the background of the ideological and practical tools of the protagonists of the revolutionary process. The sub-categories covered under the broader concept of democracy are closer to social actors' own experience: I refer to such concepts as freedom, dignity, social justice, governmentality, that are analysed with reference to both their explicit formulation and implicit understandings by the individuals and groups involved in the revolutionary process. The reflexive approach in the anthropological study of cultures disseminated the idea that the deeper the involvement of the researcher in the reality s/he is studying, the more comprehensive is the understanding of that culture and society. The ease of immersion in the post-revolutionary Tunisian context, due to the compelling wave of freedom of expression in Tunisia after the revolution, makes that context attractive for anthropologists and researchers in Middle Eastern issues. The sense of freedom researchers experience doing fieldwork in post-revolutionary Tunisia, studying the political movements that fostered freedom of expression during the revolutionary process, is related to the historical change and conquered freedom of expression. Praxiology might be discussed through the ethnographic experience in revolutionary Tunisia, in order to understand how such ideas as homosociality, secularism, pluralism, hegemony become part of people's daily practices.

## **Introduction**

Since the eruption of the Arab revolutions, in December 2011 - January 2012, there has been an increase in the number of statements related to change in the methods, topics and frameworks of Middle

Eastern scholarship. The common idea is that, since the societies involved in the so-called ‘Arab Springs’ have changed to some extent, the social sciences studying them should transform themselves too. Tunisian intellectual Hakim Ben Hammouda effectively summarized this mood:

For some months, theoretical reflection has developed and there has been an increase in the number of works analyzing such sudden emergence of history and its ripples through a world that many considered convicted to immobility.<sup>1</sup>

It is as if scholars drawing on Edward Said’s seminal book *Orientalism* suddenly felt the perspectives they themselves have long taken for granted had been finally accepted by a wider audience, now persuaded that an Orientalist knowledge of the Middle East, based on a powerful discourse entailing its radical otherness, its exceptionality as regards the modernization of the World and its failure to represent itself, has been proved wrong at last. According to Jean-Pierre Filiu,

The real Arab exception is the spread with which the democratic protests sweep the regimes away. Arabs are back in the headlines worldwide, this time not through war and/or terror, but because of popular dedication and celebration of liberty: this is also quite a revolution.<sup>2</sup>

According to several scholars, the Arab springs spread to a wider audience the idea of the Middle East as constituting part of the modern world:

The world has been finally taking cognizance of the fact that the core itself of what has been long dubbed the ‘Arab and Islamic’, or even ‘Arab-Islamic world’ (a construction that al-Jazeera itself has obsessively reiterated during the 15 years of its existence) does share in a modern

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<sup>1</sup> H. Ben Hammouda, « Le printemps arabe et l’effet kaleidoscope », in *Réalités* 1448 (August 2013), <http://www.realites.com.tn/2013/09/un-autre-regard-le-printemps-arabe-et-leffet-kaleidoscope/>.

<sup>2</sup> J. P. Filiu, *The Arab Revolution. Ten Lessons from the Democratic Uprising*, Hurst & Company, London, 2011, p. 16.

type of collective political subjectivity, and produces a socio-cultural experience in which it injects new interrogations and opens new gaps.<sup>3</sup>

How may this widened awareness inform the anthropological study of the Middle East and the Arab world? Since the publishing of Lila Abu-Lughod's 'Zones of Theory in the Anthropology of the Arab world' (1989), on the one hand anthropologists have reconsidered their interest for such topics as Islam, segregation, segmentation, despotism (the 'zones of theory'); on the other hand, new fields of anthropological interest have been developed by anthropologists working in the Middle East, such as media, cultural heritage, gender and piety as means of subjectivity production. The risk with developing new fields of interest is that they may lose their novelty and become in turn zones of theory, comfortable intellectual cradles in which scholars lull themselves with their favourite topics, gatekeeping concepts, anchors and languages. In other terms, certain styles of thought, approaches and methods developed starting from a critical stance towards stereotypes, risk to become stereotypical themselves.

Despite the fact that anthropologists working in the Middle East have been urging for the taking into account of the dimension of historical change and cultural transformation, the paradigms, methods and subjects of Middle Eastern anthropology have not been affected by the radical change introduced by the Arab revolutions so far. Furthermore, the anthropological stress on contemporaneity and cultural convergences has influenced other disciplines and anthropologists are not any longer unique among scholars of Middle Eastern societies in coping with such dimensions.

I discuss three main anthropological paradigms (interpretive, praxiological, reflexive) against this need-for-change background; I have chosen such paradigms since they constituted the theoretical framework I moved in, dealing with the issues raised by my fieldwork in Syria and Tunisia; furthermore, they have been developed or implemented by scholars with fieldwork and experience in the Middle East: Clifford Geertz, Pierre Bourdieu and Lila Abu-Lughod. Geertz's fieldwork in Morocco was fundamental for his *Interpretation of cultures*; though Bourdieu was not an anthropologist, his interests and

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<sup>3</sup> A. Salvatore, 'Only a Question of Time? From Connectedness to Mobilization in the Public Sphere', in *Culture and Society*, 11/3/2011, <http://theoryculturesociety.blogspot.it/2011/03/armando-salvatore-on-egypt-facebook-and.html?m=1> (last access 22/5/2015).

methods in *Outline of a Theory of Practice* are evidently influenced by anthropology, and his concept of *habitus*, explained in this book, thoroughly influenced the later debates about such basic concepts in anthropology as culture and society; American-Palestinian anthropologist Lila Abu-Lughod did not define her approach as 'reflexive', although *Veiled Sentiments* is constructed around the observation of the ways the Bedouin culture and subcultures 'reflect' on the anthropologist: she shows that this reflexive process is basic for the understanding of the 'other' culture, whose 'otherness' is toned down as it becomes part of the anthropologist's identity.

### **Interpretivism**

In Geertz's approach, culture is understood as a web of meaning whose knots are unwound by the socio-cultural analyst; like language, social action is intended as a complex of symbols that anthropologists get to know and interpret through the ethnographic experience. Since people interpret these symbols in their daily interactions, the observation of social action is aimed at grasping their interpretation. The first step of fieldwork is the description of such symbolic interactions, what Geertz terms 'thin description'; the following step is the ethnographer's interpretation of these interactions. Since the latter includes people's interpretations, the ethnographer's work is meant as an interpretation of interpretations; this is achieved through 'thick description', which includes the observation of interactions, the account of people's interpretations and the ethnographer's interpretation of interpretations. Ethnography is not intended as 'grasping the natives' point of view', but as narrowing the gap between the anthropologist's and his/her interlocutors' points of view.

In the interpretive perspective, participant observation is experienced as meeting halfway between two subjects' worldview. This is pursued by balancing between experience-near and experience-distant concepts, namely the ideas people draw from to interpret their daily interactions (near to their experience) and the anthropologist's intellectual background (distant from people's experience). Ethnography is not meant as a collection of bizarre ideas and practices, but rather as the construction of a common ground between different cultures. This leads the anthropologist to counter the perception of otherness when describing cultures. This is particularly fruitful for the anthropological study of Middle Eastern cultures, since the latter concentrated for decades on those traits and worldviews liable to

reproduce their exoticism and otherness. Lila Abu-Lughod criticized this clustering of ethnographic researches about what she terms the ‘zones of theory’: *harem* theory (dealing with gender segregation), segmentarian theory (dealing with tribalism and conveying the image of Arabs as *homines segmentarii*), Islam (intended as a theoretical metonym for a world where everything is influenced by religion). These zones cover the anthropological study of the Arab cultures, whereas other ‘gatekeeping concepts’<sup>4</sup> concern Turkish (despotism) and Persian (*bazaar* economy) contexts.

Directing my research mainly within the interpretive paradigm, I put much of my effort into balancing the experience-distant concepts of political-anthropological analysis with the experience-near concepts of Tunisian social actors involved in the revolutionary process. In particular, I followed the meetings of one youth Islamic association, Ash-Shabab ar-Rissali (‘The young messengers’) which formed part of the Tunisian civil society<sup>5</sup> that gained visibility after the ‘14<sup>th</sup> January revolution’ and was close to the Muslim Brotherhood network. I also had several conversations with some representatives of Ennahdha, the Tunisian party that constitutes the political branch of the Brotherhood. The league (*rābiṭa*) Ash-Shabab ar-Rissali was founded right after the revolution, since such associations were prohibited or strictly controlled by the police during the Ben Ali’s regime. The ‘young messengers’ promote both *da’wa* in the narrow sense of the term (inviting non-practicing Muslims to pray) and the knowledge of Islam from the historical and educational perspective.

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<sup>4</sup> A. Appadurai, ‘Theory in Anthropology: Center and Periphery’, in *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 28/2 (April 1986), pp. 356-361.

<sup>5</sup> ‘Civil society’ itself could be analysed as an experience-distant concept, on the background of ethnographic research among such Islamic association. Indeed the concept has been thoroughly debated in anthropology, and studies from North African and Middle Eastern contexts have contributed to the deepening of its complex definition. Although several studies about North African civil societies focus mainly on the activities and discourses of secularist organizations, and Tunisian public debate is currently caught into a sharp polarization opposing the political parties, in crisis of legitimacy and consensus, to the most influent association of what is commonly referred to as the Tunisian civil society (Ugta, Utica, the National Bar Association, the Human Rights League), I rather focus on the activities of democratic participation of Islamic associations engaged in spreading pious practices among the population, what is commonly known as *da’wa*.

I tried to locate the analytical concept of democracy against the background of the ideological and practical tools of these protagonists of the revolutionary process. This was meant as a contribution to the debate within the anthropology of democracy, a field of interest whose borders and subjects are currently being defined, following a seminal article by Julia Paley.<sup>6</sup> The main aim of this debate is comprehending current understandings of democracy, through both cross-cultural comparison and reference to global discourses that inform the conceptualization and shaping of practices of democratic participation in different contexts across the world.

Indeed, different forms of democratic participation shape the public debate in contemporary Tunisia. The post-revolution Tunisian public space is open to extremely different political activities and discussions, showing the complexity of the historical change for which the revolutionary phase of December 2010/January 2011 was but the tinder. Scholars are tracing a frame of the complex landscape of the contemporary Tunisian public sphere through reference to different forms of democratic participation, such as the youth activism in social media debates, street demonstrations, the struggle for political freedom conducted by traditional secularist and Islamic political parties, the middle-classes' involvement in the movements for change, the popular struggles for labour rights, social justice and equity, and the role of the army in the revolutionary process. Furthermore, the anthropological perspective analyses concepts and practices which, starting from a narrow definition of democracy, could appear as antithetical, such as the participation of the army in the democratic process, and the post-revolutionary hegemony of the Islamic movement and party Ennahdha.

Through comparison and categorization of these practices under the broader category of democracy, the latter is being deepened in its complexity. 'Democracy' in the anthropological perspective is used as an analytic category quite distant from the explicit formulation of social actors, that in some cases refuse this concept or discard it as a Western neo-colonial ideology. According to Tunisian intellectual Hakim Ben Hammouda, the idea of the Arab revolutions as a major project of democratization, modernization and emancipation from dictatorship, carried on in the name of the 'post-national power of

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<sup>6</sup> J. Paley, 'Toward an Anthropology of Democracy', in *Annual Review of Anthropology* 31 (2002), pp. 469-496.

freedom', is affected by a euro-centric perspective, that identifies the movement toward modernity with societies' common evolution into a 'shared universe of freedoms and human rights'.<sup>7</sup> Anyway, the sub-categories covered under the broader concept of democracy are closer to social actors' own experience: I refer to such concepts as *hurriya* (freedom), *karāma* (dignity), '*adāla ijtīmā'iyya* (social justice), that are analysed with reference to both their explicit formulation and implicit understandings by the individuals and groups involved in the revolutionary process.

Probably the most outstanding achievements of the Tunisian revolution were those related to the major ideal of political freedom (entailing freedom of expression and association), gained within the space of just a few weeks: the tyrant's hasty escape; the creation of the Higher Authority for the Realisation of the Objectives of the Revolution, Political Reform and Democratic Transition; the suspension of the 1959 Constitution; the first democratic elections in the history of the country. The opening preamble of the new Constitution, passed on 27<sup>th</sup> January 2014, lists among its objectives the end of tyranny, injustice and corruption and the pursuit of freedom and dignity. Indeed, the official political map of Tunisia soon after January opened up to all those parties that were excluded from it; the regime's opponents were freed from prison or returned from exile.

Besides freedom, the Tunisian revolution has been celebrated for fostering the value of *karāma* (often translated as 'dignity'), a concept the Islamic movement conceived of mainly as social justice. According to Ennahdha MP Osama al-Saghir, with whom I had several conversations from 2013 to 2015, *karāma* means first of all equality, resulting in a project aimed at reducing the socioeconomic gaps among Tunisians, improving the material conditions and fostering the social advancement of unemployed or underemployed people. This aim is strictly related both to that of freedom and to another meaning of *karāma*, namely the idea of a national stance against international political and economic interference. Though the Islamic movement since its beginning has fought against Western economic and political domination, after the revolution it has been facing the prospect of a flight of European capital; as a ruling party, it has been concerned with how to keep multinational corporations in the country, whilst at the same time trying to keep their power of people

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<sup>7</sup> Ben Hammouda, « Le printemps arabe et l'effet kaleidoscope ».

and capital management from ignoring or breaching the laws of the State. As al-Saghir told me,

In the past, when Eni or Benetton did business in Tunisia, they spoke with some regime's official and the deal was made; their investment cost was minimal; the local manpower was underpaid; the previous regime found it all good clean fun. Nowadays deals are made abiding by laws, openly. Tunisian workers earn treble what they did before. That's how the concept of *karāma* is translated into practice.<sup>8</sup>

The third experience-distant concept I drew on is Foucauldian governmentality,<sup>9</sup> tested against the background of the experience-near concept of Islamic rule. The latter was controversial over the three years of Ennahdha majority in the National Constituent Assembly (NCA), when the Islamic party ruled the country through several cabinets. The debate was first of all about the reference to *sharī'a* in the new Constitution and was enlivened by Tunisian secularist circles, accusing the Islamists to aim at the foundation of an Islamic state.<sup>10</sup>

In fact, the debate in Tunisia did not lead to a total opposition between the secularists and the Islamists about the latter's alleged project to bind the new Constitution to *sharī'a*. For instance, the acknowledgement of Islamic conduct as a basic unifying value of Tunisian society was the subject of some discourses of the President of the Republic Beji Caid Essebsi, whose election was celebrated by some observers as the victory of the secularist world terminating the 'Islamic autumn' that followed the 'Arab spring'. Furthermore, the Islamic movement was not unanimous in arguing that *sharī'a* should inform the Constitution. As Osama al-Saghir told me,

What's the point of referring to *sharī'a* in the Constitution? *Sharī'a* doesn't exist in itself, it's not a book: have you ever seen a book titled

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<sup>8</sup> Interview with the author, Tunis, September 2013.

<sup>9</sup> M. Foucault, 'La gouvernementalité', in *Aut-aut* 167/168 (1978), pp. 12-29.

<sup>10</sup> S. Labat, *Les islamistes tunisiens entre l'état et la mosquée*, Demopolis, Paris, 2013; A. Meddeb, « La défaite des islamistes et l'alliance occidentale », *Leaders* 10/2013, p. 6; H. Hkima, « De quelle démocratie parle-t-on? », in *La Presse*, 14/4/2015; N. Benazouz, « De quelle union nationale parles-tu, 'ayouhal-ablah' ? », *La Presse* 8/4/2015; L. Blaise, « Le projet de la nouvelle Constitution tunisienne en 10 questions », 15/5/2013, <http://nawaat.org/portail/2013/05/15/tunisiela-constitution-en-10-questions/> (access 16/12/2016).

*The Sharī'a* ? We were planning to put it into one of our Constitution drafts, as an opening-up factor: it would have been a positive value to refer.<sup>11</sup>

This draft, presented in March 2012, mentioned *sharī'a* as one source of the law and provided for a specific board (*majlis 'alā lil-iftā'*) to check the compliance of laws with Islamic norms.<sup>12</sup> The following debate led the Islamic movement to reconsider this plan, since the reference to *sharī'a* would come to constitute a rift factor in the society, producing an effect opposite to what was intended. Osama told me:

We realized that the Constitution didn't need to be checked against the background of *sharī'a*. If misinterpreted it could create division, as if in our society there were people for or against Islam. The Tunisian society had joined together for the revolution and we didn't want to fragment it. Therefore, in our second draft we took off the reference to *sharī'a*.<sup>13</sup>

This was Rached Ghannouchi's (2012) idea as well:

Nous ne voulons pas que la société tunisienne soit divisée en deux camps opposés idéologiquement, l'un pro-charia et l'autre anti-charia. Cela ne nous réjouit pas et c'est très grave. Nous voulons plutôt une Constitution qui soit pour tous les Tunisiens quelles que soient leurs convictions. (...) L'essentiel, c'est que les Tunisiens sont aujourd'hui unis autour de l'islam et de la démocratie. (...) L'islam n'autorise pas de traiter autrui de mécréants.<sup>14</sup>

Indeed, the following constitutional draft presented by the Islamists did not mention the *sharī'a*. They found it was enough not to amend the first article of the 1959 Constitution, that recognized Islam as the official religion of the country. Such broad reference to Islam was accepted by the NCA and written in the preamble of the current

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<sup>11</sup> Interview with the author, Tunis March 2015.

<sup>12</sup> Y. Ben Achour, 'Religion, Revolution, and Constitution: the Case of Tunisia', Yadh Ben Achour Blog, 26/10/2012, in [http://yadhba.blogspot.it/2012/10/religion-revolution-and-constitution\\_6573.html](http://yadhba.blogspot.it/2012/10/religion-revolution-and-constitution_6573.html) (last access 6/12/2016).

<sup>13</sup> Interview with the author, Tunis, March 2015.

<sup>14</sup> P. F. Naudé, « Tunisie : Ennahdha renonce à introduire la charia dans la Constitution », 27/3/2012, in <http://www.jeuneafrique.com/Article/ARTJAWEB20120327091704/> (access 6/12/2016).

Constitution, that expresses the Tunisian people's 'commitment to the teachings of Islam, to their spirit of openness and tolerance', and to 'the foundations of our Islamic-Arab identity'.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, Article 1 reads: 'Tunisia is a free, independent, sovereign state; its religion is Islam, its language Arabic, and its system is republican. This article may not be amended'.<sup>16</sup>

It could be argued that supporting the reference to Islam in the Constitution was part of the Islamic movement's search for a moral principle to credit the post-revolutionary ruling class with the authoritativeness it still lacks, having inherited the governmental structures from the previous regime. In other terms, from 2011 to 2014 the Islamic movement has been trying to strike a balance between such structures and a sovereign principle - Islam - to legitimize itself as the ruling party. Having gained the NCA majority, Ennahdha was invested with the task of leading the transition from Ben Ali's autocratic power to democracy, in a complex phase for the country. Indeed, besides economic stagnancy, the country was in the sights of the growing international Islamic terrorism, that struck Tunisia with violent attacks with few precedents in the country. Well before the tragic massacres of Bardo and Sousse (2015), the Islamic majority cabinets had to face dozens of jihadist attacks against military and police targets (the worst in Chaambi on 29<sup>th</sup> July 2013 and in Sidi Bouzid on 23<sup>rd</sup> October of the same year) and several political homicides (the most notorious being those of Chokri Belaid and Mohamed Brahmi, on 6<sup>th</sup> February and 25<sup>th</sup> July 2013).

The Islamist cabinets thus focused on the technocratic character of the executive, focusing on security policies, more and more detached from society and from the control of other powers, a crucial aspect of governmentality. According to Butler,<sup>17</sup> who effectively summed up Foucault's reasoning, governmental power is exercised through regulations that replace the State laws and are not bound by international law. Power is thus delegated to civil servants that act as managers with limited sovereignty, interpreting and enforcing the regulations unilaterally. Sovereignty is thus understood as an 'extra-legal authority that may well institute and enforce law of its own

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<sup>15</sup> Tunisian Constitution of 2014, Full Text, in [https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Tunisia\\_2014.pdf](https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Tunisia_2014.pdf) (access 6/12/2016).

<sup>16</sup> *Ib.*

<sup>17</sup> J. Butler, *Vite precarie. Contro l'uso della violenza in risposta al lutto collettivo*, Meltemi, Roma, 2004.

making'.<sup>18</sup> Such delegation of power is justified by a state of emergency, as in Tunisia in the decade before revolution, when the struggle against terrorism was a power strategy of the regime, aimed officially at protecting the West and the secular elites from jihadism. Under such cover the Ben Ali's regime prohibited any kind of political opposition and reduced the media to silence. The anti-terrorism law issued in December 2003 gave full governmental power to the security forces, legitimizing arbitrary arrests, torture, rough trials and the suppression of opponents.<sup>19</sup> Countering the 2011-2013 jihadist attacks, the Islamist cabinets stressed their governmental features – e.g. former Minister of the Interior Ali Laarayedh was appointed as Prime Minister in reply to the complications of the Belaid affair – and strengthened the security apparatus, that despite the regime change was inviolate after the revolution.<sup>20</sup>

Furthermore, the new Tunisian Constitution does not define the power balance between governmentality and the law: convicts' rights are stated in the abstract and the constitutional structure of police and security forces is not well defined.<sup>21</sup>

The draft counterterrorism law, discussed in 2014 and 2015, was criticized by Tunisian public opinion; Human Rights Watch warned that it confirms the police's arbitrary power, and 'contains a broad and ambiguous definition of terrorist activity that could permit the government to repress a wide range of internationally protected

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<sup>18</sup> *Ib.*, p. 60.

<sup>19</sup> Nawaat 2008, « La torture en Tunisie et la loi «anti-terroriste» du 10 décembre 2003 », <http://nawaat.org/portail/2008/07/10/la-torture-en-tunisie-et-la-loi-anti-terroriste-du-10-decembre-2003/> (last accessed 29/11/2013). The article 48 for instance provided for the protection of the identity of the judges and policemen in charge of establishing and punishing terrorist crimes, delivering them from the limitations made by the Convention against torture, though both president Bourguiba and Ben Ali signed it in 1987 and 1988.

<sup>20</sup> According to Bel Hadj Amor, the security apparatus, the main expression of the State, is legitimized by the 'plenty of regulations, procedures, authorizations and agreements (...) that invest civil servants discretionary power, which causes abuses, injustice and corruption. Administration thus becomes the law'. W. Bel Hadj Amor, « Mais que savent donc les Américains? », in *Leaders* 29 (2013), pp. 40-41, p. 41.

<sup>21</sup> K. Roach, 'Security Forces Reform for Tunisia', in Z. Al-Ali - R. Stacey (eds.), *Consolidating the Arab Spring: Constitutional Transition in Egypt and Tunisia*, Stockholm - New York, International IDEA & The Center for Constitutional Transitions at NYU Law, 2013.

freedoms'.<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, against the grain of Human Rights concerns, it introduces the death penalty. It is possible that the counterterrorism law provided the tinder for the tragic attack at the Bardo Museum on 18<sup>th</sup> March 2015, the same day the draft was discussed in Parliament, the centre of which adjoins the Museum.

In Foucault's theorization, governmentality is the power of regulation rather than the law, and it pertains to the executive rather than the sovereign. The latter's moralizing orientation is excluded from the 'governmentalized' State, which does not need any ethical principle to accomplish its ruling tasks. At the same time, governmentality retrieves sovereignty and the law as tactics of self-legitimization.<sup>23</sup> Therefore, in Foucault's reasoning governmentality does not exclude sovereignty and discipline: Foucault does not foresee a linear evolutionary process among these forms of power. He detects a relationship of complementarity (or triangulation) among them instead, since the management of population (the task of governmental power) involves its disciplining, and the disciplining of the population involves in turn the question of the authorizing principle that underpins sovereignty.

Though the Islamic movement in Tunisia does not claim the sovereign power of some moralizing institution, as could be the case with some '*ulamā*' cabinet in an Islamic form of State, it has been looking for a balance between a moral principle (Islam) and the governmental power inherited from the autocratic regime. Indeed, the shift from opposition to power entailed the movement's shift to the governmental techniques, as expressed by the technocratic character of the Islamic cabinets from 2011 to 2013. The governmental techniques of the previous regime are seen as the despotic aggravation of the modern disciplinary power, yet the Islamic movement is not aiming at replacing it with some sovereign power with the Islamic law at its core. It is looking for a triangulation among these forms of power instead; the reference to religion in the Constitution is aimed at the quest for the sovereignty of the law, whose authority in this case is linked to the divine message, as the foundation of power despite the plight of the governmental fragmentation of the State powers. The religious reference in other terms is a tactic inside the quest for an

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<sup>22</sup> Human Rights Watch, 'Memo on Counterterrorism Law in Tunisia', 8/4/2015, in <https://www.hrw.org/news/2015/04/08/memo-counterterrorism-law-tunisia> (access 6/12/2016).

<sup>23</sup> Butler, *Vite precarie*.

authorizing principle of sovereignty. One may consider *sheikh* Rachid Ghannouchi's refusal of any institutional post as part of this tactic; the President of Ennahdha preserved his role as a moral, political and strategic guide for the activists and the Islamist representatives in the NCA and later in the Parliament elected in 2014. This helped to keep both the balance between the secular and religious forces, and the triangulation of the forms of power.

Rather than considering democracy and authoritarianism as radically opposed, the comparative analysis of experience-near and distant concepts of governmentality, Islamic rule and *sharī'a* show the convergences between such political systems. Governmentality represents the continuity existing between the authoritarian rule in Tunisia and the emerging forms of power.

### **Reflexivism**

The major historical dimension of change, introduced - quite suddenly, one might say - in the Middle Eastern scholarship by the so-called Arab springs, directly influenced my own minor story as an anthropologist with a Middle Eastern ethnographic pedigree and much hoped-for academic career. Indeed, at the beginning of December 2010 I was granted by Milan-Bicocca University a four-year contract as a researcher, on the basis of a project aimed at studying the 'patrimonialization' of Syrian cultural heritage, following the main topic I had been developing during the previous seven years. After a few days, the self-immolation of Mohamed Bouazizi gave rise to the Tunisian revolution; in just a few weeks the revolutionary wave expanded to Egypt and in a few months it inflamed other Arab countries. In Syria, the violent reaction of the establishment provoked the civil war that had been avoided in Tunisia and Egypt thanks to the cautious behaviour of the local armies that did not act as the watchdogs of antisestablishmentarianism. The Syrian plight forbade the prosecution of my fieldwork there, whereas the revolutionary process in Tunisia was stimulating for my anthropological interests; furthermore, after a few months of fieldwork there, I started to cope with the dimension of change in my main anthropological paradigms, introduced by the hermeneutic and existential condition that anthropologists term 'being there', namely the ethnographic experience that shapes the researcher's theoretical concerns and fieldwork itself.

The reflexive approach in the anthropological study of cultures disseminated the idea that the deeper the involvement of the

researcher in the reality s/he is studying, the more comprehensive is the understanding of that culture and society. Thus the presence of the researcher in the field, far from being considered a misleading interference in the setting of fieldwork, that could distort the results of research, is enhanced by this approach. The description of one's involvement in the studied context is fundamental to introduce convincingly to that culture the readers of the final essay. Explaining this involvement, bringing it from the personal experience of the researcher to the public presentation of his/her methodological tools, allows the anthropologist to keep the needed balance between immersion and detachment.

Immersion in the post-revolutionary Tunisian context was easy for me, as an ethnographer that had spent already several years of fieldwork in other Arab countries. This is likely to be due to the compelling wave of freedom of expression in Tunisia after the revolution, which makes that context attractive for anthropologists and researchers in Middle Eastern issues. Had I to compare the troubles I faced in Syria (strangers' suspicion, control by the security service), though studying an apparently apolitical issue (the patrimonialization of cultural heritage), to my ease in conducting an inquiry on a topic – the Islamic youth associations – considered sensitive in Tunisia until just a few months before my stay there, I would stress how research practices have been influenced by historical change. This would be no patchwork comparison, if one considers the similarities between the Tunisian and Syrian autocratic regimes during the last 20 years.<sup>24</sup> Speaking freely about Islam and how this religious tradition influences politics, daily life, and people's social interrelationships

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<sup>24</sup> F. Rizzi, *Mediterraneo in rivolta*, Castelvecchi, Roma, 2011; M. F. Corrao (ed.), *Le rivoluzioni arabe. La transizione mediterranea*, Mondadori, Milano, 2011; M. B. Ayari - V. Geisser, *Renaissances Arabes. 7 questions clés sur des révolutions en marche*, Les Editions de l'Atelier, Paris, 2011; Council on Foreign Relations, *The New Arab Revolt. What happened, what it means and what comes next*, Council of Foreign Relations, Lexington, 2011; J. A. Goldstone, *Understanding the Revolutions of 2011: Weakness and Resilience in Middle Eastern Autocracies*, Council of Foreign Affairs 90/3 (May-June 2011); J. P. Filiu, *The Arab Revolution*; M. Campanini (ed.), *Le rivolte arabe e l'Islam: la transizione incompiuta*, Il Mulino, Bologna, 2013; S. Mehli, «La Syrie, deux siècles de révolutions», in *Revue Averroès* 4/5 Spécial Printemps arabe (2011), pp. 1-8; C. Ryan, 'The New Arab Cold War and the Struggle for Syria', in *Middle East Report* 262 (Spring 2012), <http://www.merip.org/mer/mer262/new-arab-cold-war-struggle-syria>; A. Cantaro (ed.), *Dove vanno le primavere arabe*, Ediesse, Roma, 2013.

and worldviews, in particular, was one right claimed by the revolution and gained through the liberation from a totalitarian regime that forbade the public expression of religious conviction and belonging, under the guise of a modernist and secularist ideal.

The reflexive approach pursues one of the aims of cultural anthropology, that is bridging the gap between different cultures, by stressing the similarities existing beside differences; the researcher in this approach becomes the living proof of continuity between cultures, rather than the external observer of the Other. The presentation of the anthropologist's life-story during fieldwork shows how the society and the culture s/he studied reflect on his/her subjectivity as a Western or Westernized researcher; Abu-Lughod's *Veiled Sentiments*, a complex work that opened several horizons to the anthropological study of the Middle East, among other things is the story of the progressive tuning between the researcher's and the researched's emotions, sentiments, interpretations of relationships, and subsequent behaviours and worldviews. This approach is particularly fruitful for the study of the Arab world and the Middle-East, since it is liable to tone down the sense of otherness spread by the traditional ethnographic descriptions of these cultures. Indeed, reflexivity in anthropology shows how the Western self-changes through the prolonged contact with the others.

As a consequence, the description of the anthropologist's positioning in the studied field is not pushed into the background as a methodological aside; it is rather conceived of as an authoritative part of the account, key to the author's reasoning and understanding of the other culture. The sense of freedom researchers experience doing fieldwork in post-revolutionary Tunisia is related to the historical change and conquered freedom of expression. Researchers are likely to work without obstacles in such a context; as social actors living in the field they are working in, they are likely to act at ease. Those studying the political movements that fostered freedom of expression during the revolutionary process cannot help dealing with the climate of their stay in the studied field. The reluctances of my Syrian informants (at least in the first part of my fieldwork there) and, on the contrary, the openness of Tunisians steered my research towards different directions. The caution my Syrian acquaintances often showed speaking with me and, on the other side, the flood of information that often overwhelmed me during my conversations and interviews in Tunisia (in a few weeks, I filled almost half the number of notebooks I had filled in over two years in Syria) drove me to different ways of

conceiving the ethnographic fieldwork and understanding these cultures. In Syria, my undesired encounters and forced rendezvous with security service officers and would-be informers, acted as wake-up calls which served me to overcome naivety in relationships and taught me caution and endurance in my methods. Furthermore, on the one hand I noticed that sometimes it was me who was perceived as a potential informer for the authorities, especially when my participant observation included following practices that did not abide strictly by the law (such as some loose restorations of ancient private houses); on the other hand, sometimes my relational skills (part of the anthropologist's tool kit) were exploited by social actors to communicate with each other despite the different socio-economic status and position in the arena of the patrimonialization of cultural heritage.<sup>25</sup> This led me to observe the ethnographic encounter (the observation of participation in Tedlock's terms)<sup>26</sup> as one between different subjects (the anthropologist and the informants) who were likely to convey information to other people and whose identities were the product of mutual negotiation.<sup>27</sup>

The choice of the very subjects of my research was influenced by the different climate of my fieldwork. The topic of Islamic activism was peripheral in my Syrian research, since it was surrounded with general suspicion there and concerned small niches of the population. Mosque discussions were always controlled by security officers; only one of my informants was a frequenter of such meetings, from whom he drew his worldview and behaviour patterns. On the contrary, in Tunisia my understanding of Islamic activism was influenced by the fact that it was victorious in the post-revolutionary Tunisian society.

As an aside, both the extraordinary historical circumstances and the suitability of Tunisia as an ethnographic field are pushing many Middle Eastern anthropologists to move there from other troubled contexts in the area. This is likely to lead to the construction of a new

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<sup>25</sup> D. Copertino, 'The tools of the Trade: The materiality of Architecture in the Patrimonialization of "Arab houses" in Damascus', in *Journal of Material Culture* 19/3 (2014), pp. 327-351.

<sup>26</sup> B. Tedlock, 'From Participant Observation to the Observation of Participation: The Emergence of Narrative Ethnography', in *Journal of Anthropological Research* 47/1 (Spring 1991), pp. 69-94.

<sup>27</sup> U. Fabietti, *Antropologia culturale. L'esperienza e l'interpretazione*, Laterza, Roma-Bari, 2005; R. Wagner, *The Invention of Culture*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago & London, 1981.

'zone of theory', in Abu-Lughod's terms (1989): besides being the anthropologists' preferred conceptual frameworks, the zones of theory are also the most frequently chosen geographic areas for ethnographic fieldwork. Noting that Geertz chose Morocco – as many other anthropologists – for his fieldwork and likened it to the American Far West, Abu-Lughod stated that the Middle Eastern anthropologists' preferred geographic zones were the peripheries of the Arab world, the farther from the central areas, often at war or in political turmoil, the better.

### **Praxiology**

The main contribution of Bourdieu's theory of practice to the current debate in anthropology is the redefinition of culture by means of the concept of *habitus*. Through the notion of *habitus* as related to specific social classes, Bourdieu added new layers of complexity to both the Marxist notion of class and the anthropological notion of culture: class structures play a role in people's life, though they do not determine social action; they activate systems of permanent dispositions (*habitus*) that in turn generate practices or social action. Therefore, people's practices, acts, thoughts, perceptions, expressions and utterances emerge in Bourdieu's theory as regulated improvisations produced by *habitus*; they are limited by the material, historical and social conditions under which they are produced. Practices generated by *habitus* reproduce such objective conditions. Regularities in social action are due to these permanent dispositions that people internalise as a form of ingrained knowledge rather than a set of cultural rules. Thanks to Bourdieu's formulation, anthropologists no longer do not need to write lists of the norms people follow in their daily behaviours, activities and interrelationships; getting to know people's *habitus* and sharing it with them provides the researcher with a framework within which to locate and understand both cultural regularities and exceptions, improvisations, and the violation of rules. Some Islamic activists, for instance, though promoting the norm of gender segregation, do not always observe it strictly; but they are nonetheless not considered bad practitioners of the principles they promote. Indeed, rather than a norm, Islamic activists' ideas of gender are part of their wider *habitus* of homosociality, understood as a framework according to which they act in their daily interrelationships and interpret other people's positioning, interactions, distancing from the rules. One day, while I

was having a conversation with two young activists about their ideas of proper gender interactions, they spotted two friends of theirs in the same coffee bar where we were sitting, one boy and one girl, both members of their association, sitting at a table. Although gender promiscuity is avoided in their activities, after some momentary surprise, they said it was alright, since they were sitting in a public venue and they were not doing anything on the sly.

Islamic activists gained freedom of expression by taking part in the revolution, though acting as individuals rather than movements. Living in a secularized society, they sense secularization in their daily lives, activities and interrelationships. Their project of spreading the Islamic tendency in politics and society is not in contradiction with the secularization of Tunisian society and the State. Rached Ghannouchi often referred to the concepts of ‘procedural secularism’ (*‘almāniyya ijrā’iyya*) and ‘partial secularism’ (*‘almāniyya juz’iyya*), to explain that the separation of powers in the State is not in contrast to its fundamental religious convictions. In other terms, the Islamic movement rejects reducing the different meanings of secularization – separation of powers, decline of the levels of belief, disenchantment of the conditions of belief – to the simple exclusion of religion from the public sphere, what Ghannouchi terms ‘integral secularism’ (*‘almāniyya shāmila*).<sup>28</sup>

Tunisian Islamists see their activism as a contribution to the pluralist public sphere in the post-revolutionary Tunisian society. Among the goals of ash-Shabab ar-Rissali is ‘Fostering the logic of dialogue (*manṭiq al-ḥiwār*) and the value of coexistence (*at-tā’ish al-mushtarek*)’. Young engineer Yahia Kchaou, an activist from the association I met in 2013, explained to me that

Tunisian Islam is tolerant: that’s why we organize open discussions, with believers and nonbelievers. This is secularism: it’s a framework of respect for difference. Dialogue is different from tolerance, though the Islamic State safeguards non-Muslims and the Coran protects nonbelievers.<sup>29</sup>

The Islamist discourse about pluralism covers the active confrontation with people who do not share religious convictions, pregnant with meaning in Tunisia, considering the scope of the

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<sup>28</sup> C. Taylor, *L’età secolare*, Feltrinelli, Milano, 2009.

<sup>29</sup> Interview with the author, Tunis, September 2013.

secularist world in Tunisian society, inside which the Islamist discourse involves but a limited part of the population. Ash-Shabab ar-Rissali activists' daily interrelationships involve mainly people who do not share the Islamist discourse; the neat distinction between secularists and Islamists, often stressed by both Tunisian and foreign observers, is sometimes the subject of the *shabāb*'s jokes. Once Yahia, asking me how my research was getting along, said: 'So? Did you meet any *'almāniyyīn* (secularists)?'.<sup>30</sup>

Besides personal interrelationships, in the last decades there has been a political and intellectual convergence between Tunisian secularists and Islamists, what Yadh Ben Achour<sup>31</sup> termed 'the Islamization of the democrats and the democratization of political Islam'.<sup>32</sup> The opposition movements have combined their efforts against the regime since 2015, when they formed the 18<sup>th</sup> October Committee, a trans-ideological movement composed by personalities from the Congrès pour la République (CPR),<sup>33</sup> the Parti démocrate progressiste,<sup>34</sup> activists from the Islamic movement,<sup>35</sup> secularist<sup>36</sup> and Islamist<sup>37</sup> journalists. The Committee rejected the regime's anti-Islamic rhetoric, shared by part of the opposition (e.g. Et-Tajdid party).

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<sup>30</sup> Interview with the author, Tunis, September 2013.

<sup>31</sup> Ben Achour, 'Religion, Revolution, and Constitution: the case of Tunisia'.

<sup>32</sup> *Ib.*

<sup>33</sup> Among whom Abderraouf Ayadi e Fethi Jerbi; CPR was founded in 2001 by Moncef Marzouki, former President of the Republic.

<sup>34</sup> Among whom the leader of the party, Nejjib Chebbi.

<sup>35</sup> Such as Ziad Daoulatli and Samir Dillou.

<sup>36</sup> Such as Lofti Hajji, director of the magazine *Leaders*.

<sup>37</sup> Such as Mohamed Fourati, who was imprisoned several times because of his adhesion to Ennahdha (V. Geisser - E. Gobe, « Des fissures dans la « Maison Tunisie ? » Le régime de Ben Ali face aux mobilisations protestataires », *L'Année du Maghreb II Dossier: Femmes, famille et droit* (2005-2006), pp. 353-414). Furthermore, 18 October Committee brought together the opposition parties and organizations represented in Paris (V. Geisser - E. Gobe, « La question de « l'autenticité tunisienne » : valeur refuge d'un régime à bout de souffle? », in Y. Ben Achour - E. Gobe (eds), *Justice politique et société au Maghreb. L'Année du Maghreb III*, CNRS Editions, Paris, 2007, pp. 371-408), such as the CPR itself, the Forum démocratique pour le travail et les libertés, Ennahdha, the Tunisian Workers Communist Party, the Nasserist Union, the Association of political prisoners' families and relatives, the Tunisian Committee of Human Rights, Solidarité tunisienne, Voix Libre.

Thus the Islamic movement has practiced pluralism over the last decade. As MP Meherzia Labidi told me in March 2015,

It's intellectual pluralism. This was one of the first issues Ennahdha dealt with, since it was founded: we were aware we didn't represent the whole Tunisia. Pluralism emerged in the movement's mentality and action: in 2015 we joined the 18<sup>th</sup> October coalition, with personalities from the centre, the left, liberals and communists, about the core issues in building the new Tunisia: democracy, citizenship, change in power, opposition to Ben Ali.<sup>38</sup>

Nonetheless, the Islamic discourse is hegemonic, in Gramsci's terms (1966).<sup>39</sup> Bourdieu's praxiological approach provides the conceptual tools to interpret Gramsci's idea of hegemony from an anthropological perspective. Hegemony indeed does not describe people's coercive abidance by norms and ideology; it accounts for the spontaneous prevailing of consensus about certain shared ideas and behavioural patterns. Drawing on Campanini and Mezran's work,<sup>40</sup> I analysed Gramsci's theory of hegemony as part of the Tunisian *du'āt's* (those who pursue *da'wa*) practices and ideas of Islamic social and political activism. In Gramsci's reflection, hegemony implies the complex ways coercion and consensus interact to maintain the domination of the masses; the Italian intellectual shows the overlapping of forms of power exerted by the political society, institutions and government on the one side (coercion), and those wielded by civil society, private citizens and intellectuals on the other side (consensus). Hegemony is thus the way power relationships are produced and reproduced, sustaining social inequalities.<sup>41</sup> As a 'complex interlocking of political, social and cultural forces',<sup>42</sup> hegemony covers the social process through which the dominant ideology (as an articulate, conscious and formal system of values, meanings, ideas and convictions) is lived and practically organized through dominant meanings and values. Besides indoctrination and exploitation, it covers a whole system of practices,

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<sup>38</sup> Interview with the author, Tunis, March 2015.

<sup>39</sup> A. Gramsci, *Quaderni dal carcere*, Einaudi, Torino, 1966.

<sup>40</sup> M. Campanini - K. Mezran (eds.), *I Fratelli musulmani nel mondo contemporaneo*, Utet, Torino, 2010.

<sup>41</sup> A. F. K. Crehan, *Gramsci, cultura e antropologia*, ed. it. a cura di Giovanni Pizza, Argo, Lecce, 2010, p. 114.

<sup>42</sup> R. Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, Oxford University Press, London, 1977, p. 108.

expectations, and the ways people perceive themselves and their world. Like religion in Durkheim's<sup>43</sup> and Geertz's<sup>44</sup> view, hegemony is a lived system of meanings and values that confirm each other, being experienced practically.

The Islamic movement in Tunisia is trying to produce its hegemony in society, having developed its counter-hegemonic discourse for decades under the secular regimes. It covers both political and civil society, that in the Islamic hegemonic project do not appear as separated universes, but rather as a weaving of interests and interrelationships. The ethnographic glance shows the continuities existing between Islamic political representatives and *du'āt*; in my research I got to know both thanks to their mutual acquaintance. Though some young *du'āt* accept the *islāmī* (Islamist) designation, others refuse such self-identification. Achref Wachani, a computer engineer in his twenties and an activist from the Shabab ar-Rissali youth association, once told me:

I hate the term "Islamist"! For me, my Muslim belonging descends from tradition. Islam invites to be active citizens rather than activists! Problems get solved through commitment, not through Islamic slogans. Many call themselves Islamists, but they don't do anything but waving their flags to attract people. Furthermore, those involved with the recent terrorist attacks call themselves Islamists, which scares people.<sup>45</sup>

Achref had followed a course in Islamic finance and wished to work for Zeytouna, the only Tunisian bank inside the financial circuit observing the shariatic rules concerning credit. Though holding ambitions of changing the Tunisian banking system following Islamic rules, in 2013 he was working for a bank that did not practice them. In mid-2014 he decided to change jobs and got a job in a technology development company; though earning less, he was happier, having followed his conscience. Furthermore, for *du'āt* pursuing the rituals is not enough to live in accordance to Islam; one day in March 2015 I was walking with Achref in Bourguiba ave, in Tunis, which was packed with people going to the mosques for the Friday prayer (*al-*

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<sup>43</sup> É. Durkheim, *The Forms of the Elementary Religious Life*, Translated from the French by Joseph Ward Swain, Collier Books, New York, 1961.

<sup>44</sup> C. Geertz, *Interpretazione di culture*, Il Mulino, Bologna, 1998.

<sup>45</sup> Interview with the author, Tunis, April 2015.

*jumū'a*); the crowd was such that many were praying in the street. Achref said:

They hardly give over one hour per week to religion: they rush to the city centre, they pray and then go back to their daily activities. They separate religion from life. For me and my friends it's different. Islam gives us a model to live an engaged life and work hard for our society. Islam counters easy money and invites to work hard.<sup>46</sup>

Indeed, for Tunisian *du'āt* Islam is not just an intellectual conviction nor a belief to be lived inwardly. Achref told me:

We don't agree with those who say that Islam is only an inner dimension of the heart, as religion is conceived of in the European or American tradition.<sup>47</sup>

Islam for them is a framework showing how to be active in society, not as activists but as citizens. Islamic education, the main aim of Shabab ar-Rissali, is intended as an invitation to young people to live as active Muslims. This is how they construct their hegemonic discourse, aimed at making Islam a spontaneous inclination in daily life.

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# Islam and Citizenship in Tunisia after the Yasmine Revolution. The Debate over the Law of *Awqāf*

Pietro LONGO

## Abstract

Tunisia has been the engine of those awakenings that, collectively known as Arab Springs, shook several countries of the MENA region (Middle East and North Africa) between 2010 and 2011. As in Egypt, the victory of the most prominent Islamic party, *al-Nahḍa*, raised ancient debates on the compatibility of Islam, citizenship and democracy, both at a scholarly and civil society level. During the constitutional drafting, *al-Nahḍa*'s behavior was cautious even if several of its members defended proposals commonly judged to be at odds with the liberal conception of citizenship. These discrepancies between declarations and praxis can be observed in many occasions and, as a consequence, *al-Nahḍa* has been accused of double standards. This could be the case of the project of law (no. 55/2013) on the restoration of *awqāf*, issued on November 2013. According to the Islamic law, *awqāf*, sometimes called *ḥabūs*, are 'pious foundations' independent from the State and owned by the Muslim community. This paper analyzes the draft law proposed by the Islamists and explores its consequences over the Tunisian society. If, on the one hand, having *awqāf* restored could be a matter of identity for the Tunisians and part of their religious freedoms, on the other side, which is the impact of restoring *awqāf* on the empowerment of citizenship rights and the process of democracy building? Discussing this controversial project law, I support the thesis that, during the first four years after the revolution, Islamists of *al-Nahḍa* deliberately issued controversial draft laws in order to 'test' the societal reaction, and thus modifying their agenda. Under this light, restoring *awqāf* could be conceived as part of *al-Nahḍa*'s political strategy.

## Introduction

Tunisia has been the engine of those awakenings that, collectively known as Arab Springs, shook several countries of the MENA region (Middle East and North Africa) between 2010 and 2011. As in Egypt, the victory of *al-Nahḍa*, the most prominent Islamic party at the first democratic elections, raised ancient debates on the compatibility of Islam, citizenship and democracy, both at a scholarly and civil society

level.<sup>1</sup> During the constitutional drafting, *al-Nahḍa*'s behavior was cautious even if several of its members defended proposals commonly judged to be at odds with a liberal conception of citizenship. Alleged discrepancies between declarations and praxis can be observed on many occasions and, as a consequence, *al-Nahḍa* has been accused of 'two sidedness'.

This has been the case, for example, with the proposed law no.55/2013 on the restoration of *awqāf*, forwarded by *al-Nahḍa* and issued on November 2013.<sup>2</sup> According to Islamic law, *awqāf*, sometimes called *ḥabūs*, are 'pious foundations' independent from the state and owned by the Muslim community. The secular opposition reacted by arguing that the restoration of the *awqāf* could be detrimental for the concept of citizenship in different ways. For example, while the 2014 Constitution proclaims equality between men and women, restoring *awqāf* could maintain the traditional discrimination of women concerning inheritance, prescribed by the Personal Status Code.<sup>3</sup>

This paper argues that the restoration of *awqāf*, while representing a sensitive issue for the Islamists, could indeed affect the modern conception of citizenship. The first part describes the *awqāf* from the point of view of Islamic law. Knowledge of the functioning of pious foundations, as codified by medieval jurisprudence, is necessary to understand their tentative application today.

The second section analyses the development of citizenship in the Muslim world since the fall of the Ottoman Empire and the formation of national states in the Mediterranean basin. According to western scholars, citizenship rights developed in Europe due to an 'incremental approach'. Not only civil and political rights were acquired before social rights, but they also allowed the implementation of the latter.

The third paragraph explains how pious foundations and citizenship rights are related in the Muslim world. The rise of

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<sup>1</sup> F. Gerges, 'The Islamist Movement: from Islamic State to Civil Islam?', in *Political Science Quarterly* 128/3 (2013), pp. 389-426. On the Arab Springs see E. Bellin, 'Reconsidering the Robustness of Authoritarianism in the Middle East: Lessons from the Arab Spring', in *Comparative Politics* 42/2 (2012), pp. 127-149.

<sup>2</sup> For the draft law: <http://www.anc.tn/site/main/AR/docs/projets/projets.jsp?n=55&a=2013> (access 12/9/2014).

<sup>3</sup> A. Ghribi, 'Will Tunisian Women Finally Inherit What They Deserve?', in *Foreign Policy*, 07/02/2016, [http://transitions.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2014/02/07/will\\_tunisian\\_women\\_finally\\_inherit\\_what\\_they\\_deserve](http://transitions.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2014/02/07/will_tunisian_women_finally_inherit_what_they_deserve) (access 2/12/2016).

secularist regimes in the MENA region, starting from the Second World War, passed through the nationalization of *awqāf*. In order to fight against political Islam, Muslims were taken out of their traditional spaces of socialization such as mosques or *madāris*. This, in turn, obstructed the development of citizenship rights, because *awqāf* played a huge role in providing social care and services. Pious foundations could be detrimental for certain categories of civil rights and the final part of this essay points out that revitalizing *awqāf* in today's Muslim world could produce consequences mainly with main to gender issues.

The principle of *awqāf* as defined by the Sunni schools of Islamic law is an Islamic specific kind of almsgiving. *Waqf* word means 'immobilization' because constituting a *waqf* causes the inalienability of its assets once they are turned into pious foundations. Generally, scholars distinguish between two kinds of foundations: charitable *waqf*, which include commodities at the disposal of the community such as hospitals, mosques, schools, fountains etc., and civil *waqf* which is a kind of legal contract neither encouraged nor discouraged by the *shari'a*, employed primarily to protect private property. Turning assets into pious foundations immunizes them against occupation or expropriation.

Beneficiaries of *awqāf* could be individuals or specific groups (such as the poor of a given city). Every kind of movable and immovable property could be turned into *awqāf*.<sup>4</sup> In the oldest Islamic jurisprudential sources, the discipline of *waqf* was included under the general category of almsgiving (*ṣadaqa*).<sup>5</sup> According to some scholars, *waqf* is an institution that did not exist in pre-Islamic Arabia

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<sup>4</sup> On *awqāf* in general see: A. A. Islahi, *Waqf: a Bibliography*, Scientific Publishing Center, King Abdulaziz University, Jeddah, 2003.

<sup>5</sup> The word *waqf* is often replaced by *ḥubs/hubus*. Verbs *waqafa* and *ḥabasa* express the same idea of 'to bind or immobilize'. The difference between the two words is only geographical, *waqf* being mainly in use in the near eastern countries while *ḥubs/hubus* is more frequent in North Africa. The Ḥanafī and Mālīkī schools have developed a more detailed case law in this regard. For a Ḥanafī perspective on *waqf* see: Al-Shaybānī, *Aḥkām al-Awqāf*, Maktaba al-Thaqāfa al-Dīniyya, Cairo, 1965, pp. 1-5. For Mālīkī school see: Saḥnūn ibn Sa'īd, *al-Mudawwana al-kubrā li'l-Imām Mālīk riwāya Saḥnūn*, 4 vol., Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, Beirut, 1994; J. Schacht, 'Early Doctrines of Waqf', in Fuad Köprülü Armagani, *Mélanges Fuad Köprülü*, Osman Yalçın Matbaası, Istanbul, 1953, pp. 444-452.

and was introduced by Islam.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, its implementation dates back from immediately after the death of Muḥammad, as the Prophet frequently invited believers to perform charitable works and to use their property for actions pleasing to God.<sup>7</sup>

With the rise of national states in the Arab-Islamic world, after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, it is estimated that about three quarters of the land in Turkey, half in Algeria and a third in Tunisia were established as *waqf*. This helps to illustrate the importance that this institution has maintained over the centuries, although it was not ordered explicitly in the Qur'an. Initially the *waqf* acted as a way to encourage good behavior and balance social inequalities.<sup>8</sup> According to a tradition, 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb asked the Prophet to recommend a way to do something worthwhile. Muḥammad then advised him to sell a piece of land and give alms with the funds acquired.

The *waqf* has been practiced since the second century of the *hijra*, and, according to historical sources, the Caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd pushed the Ḥanafī jurist Abū Yūsuf to regulate in detail this institution in his famous essay titled *Kitāb al-Kharāj*.<sup>9</sup> Even the University of al-Azhar, founded by the Fatimid Caliph al-Mu'izz in 970 AD, was equipped with a heritage constituted as *waqf*, the proceeds of which were employed to pay maintenance fees and teachers' salaries.

Islamic jurisprudence has codified two types of *waqf*: the first is the *khayrī* and the second *ahlī*.<sup>10</sup> The first is the public *waqf*, established for the general welfare of the community and the primary purpose of providing services. Since the start of Islamic history, in fact, this institution held a social purpose: *waqf* were set up as schools,

<sup>6</sup> D. Santillana, *Istituzioni di diritto musulmano malichita, con riguardo anche al sistema sciafiita*, Istituto per l'Oriente, Roma, 1925, vol. 2, p. 414.

<sup>7</sup> A. Cilardo, 'Waqf', in C. Fitzpatrick - A. Walker (eds.), *Muhammad in History, Thought, and Culture: An Encyclopedia of the Prophet of God*, ABC-CLIO, Santa Barbara, 2014, vol. 2, pp. 677-681; W. F. Fratcher, 'The Islamic Wakf', in *Missouri Law Review* 36/2, 1971, University of Missouri School of Law, pp. 153-166. See on that point, Cor. II, 215: 'They ask you what you have to give away from their property. Reply: "what you give away your substance is for parents, relatives, orphans, the poor, the wayfarers; all that you do for good, God will know"'.  
<sup>8</sup> A D'Emilia, *Scritti di Diritto Islamico*, ed. Francesco Castro, Istituto per l'Oriente, Roma, 1976, p. 237.

<sup>9</sup> Abū Yūsuf, *Kitāb al-Kharāj*, Dār al-Ma'rifa li'l-Tibā'a wa'l-Nashr, Beirut, 1979. See also one of the oldest and accurate translations: E. Fagnan (ed.), *Le livre de l'impôt foncier*, Librairie Orientaliste Paul Geuthner, Paris, 1921.

<sup>10</sup> P. C. Hennigan, *The Birth of a Legal Institution. The Formation of the Waqf in Third Century Hanafi Discourse*, Brill, Leiden, 2004, pp. xiii-xiv.

mosques, public fountains, hospitals, depots and similar facilities. Because the *waqf* was configured as an act of charity, it usually accomplished a charitable purpose and resulted from an act of selfless generosity. Muslims who decided to set up a *waqf*, from a property or an asset, should not expect anything in return, if not the reward of God after death.

The *waqf ahli*, however, is significantly different. This type of foundation was used to please those who constituted the pious foundation. This is true in the case of real estate, where the owner could employ *waqf* to distribute his inheritance to his heirs in the form of donations carried out according to his own will, following an arbitrarily established line. The descendants were called *'aqib*, a term that includes the male and female offspring in the first degree of kinship but is limited to males in the successive degrees, though some scholars also admitted females. In fact, if the foundation was donated to benefit all the descendants (*awlād*), then it regarded both men and women.

The *waqf ahli* was often employed to circumvent the succession rules imposed by the Qur'an that caused a fragmentation of inheritance among a large number of heirs. However, it also served to protect the assets from dissipation and to avoid expropriation by the political authority. In fact, the will of the *waqf* owner prevailed over the judiciary and the Caliph, except when the purpose for which the foundation was created was at odds with the *sharī'a*.

The first aim of civil *waqf* was, thus, to evade the strict rules the Qur'an imposed in the field of inheritance.<sup>11</sup> In pre-Islamic Arabia, there was no equal right for inheritance: women were not entitled to inherit anything at all. Islam ascribed to women the capacity to inherit, even though they could receive less than men. The civil *waqf*, which is not prescribed by the sources of Islamic law but was elaborated by the jurisprudence of the scholars, sometimes allowed the restoration of pre-Islamic customs. Constituting a pious foundation, a man could decide the lineage of succession in heritage, for example, in favor of his sons, by wholly excluding daughters. It is important to underline, however, that there are also records of *waqf* being used to ensure equal

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<sup>11</sup> J. Schacht, *An introduction to Islamic Law*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1964, p. 161.

inheritance for males and females. In short, the usage of *waqf* depends only on the will of its founder.<sup>12</sup>

In Islamic law, both types of *waqf* require a formal act of creation, signed by the *wāqif* or *muḥabbis*. The constituent can be an individual or a community. The *wāqif* must possess the legal capacity to dispose of his assets and must have the following requirements: freedom; legal age; rationality; physical integrity. In addition, the *wāqif* must possess the assets he wants to immobilize and should have full contractual capacity. The *dhimmīs* are able to create pious foundations provided that their purposes are not in contrast with Islamic law. Even in this case, it is required that the *waqf* fulfills charitable purposes and is aimed at producing services in the interest of the community.<sup>13</sup> The *wāqif* is not obliged to set up a foundation in his own name but he can also do it on behalf of another person or in execution of the decision of the latter.

The beneficiary of the *waqf* (*mawqūf ‘alaihi*) can be an individual or a particular group of people, such as a disadvantaged social class. It can also be a non-profit organization or a work of public utility. If the recipients are citizens, they can also include non-Muslims as long as they are legally able to receive a donation. The following categories are unable to be the recipients of a *waqf*: non-Muslims who do not reside in the Islamic state and slaves, because by law they are unable to acquire assets. Revenues should be divided among the beneficiaries, regardless of age and sex, except when the *wāqif* has decided otherwise in the act of establishing the foundation, especially if it is a *waqf ahlī*. Only the beneficiaries can have access to the fruits of the *waqf* and everyone else who benefits, legally or illegally, from them can be accused of usurpation or misappropriation (*ghaṣb*).

The substance (*mawqūf*) of the foundation can be any movable or immovable property, except in the case of goods prohibited by law. They also include all of the property owned by the settler. Besides being a good permitted by the law, however, it must be a precise object, well-defined but not necessarily present in the moment of institution of the *waqf*. The asset must be possessed before the formation of the *waqf* and it is not possible to constitute an asset which is still under construction. In the case of movable property, a group of witnesses must certify its possession by the *wāqif* and the

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<sup>12</sup> Santillana, *Istituzioni*, p. 412.

<sup>13</sup> *Ib.*, p. 420.

latter's intention to create a foundation. All the schools of law consider the following assets permissible to set-up a *waqf*: lands, weapons, camels, horses, cattle, seeds, copies of the Qur'an.

The purpose of the *waqf* must comply with the principles of Islam and must not contravene the sources of Islamic law. It is forbidden, for example, to establish a *waqf* that aims at the production and trade of wine or weapons to be used against Muslims. Constituting a *waqf* is an act to please God. Any public work which is considered legal is also grateful to God, according to the law: the maintenance of a mosque; the construction of a school or a public fountain; the creation of bridges, roads and hospitals; providing alms to the poor and needy. Moreover, a *waqf* that aims at benefiting a social class or a well determined family is also not permissible.<sup>14</sup> Islamic law recognizes the following as charitable purposes: 1) providing alms to the poor; 2) developing education; 3) improving the health conditions of the population; 4) pursuing objectives related to local governance; 5) adopting policies that bring benefit to the community; 6) promoting the advancement of the Islamic religion. The latter includes the subsidies given to the maintenance of public goods, subsidies to pay teachers of Qur'anic schools and the fees intended for those who do not have the resources to perform the pilgrimage. Foundations which are established in order to foster a religion other than Islam are not valid and should be dissolved.

The creation of a *waqf* is made legally valid through its acceptance by the beneficiary. This act may be implicit and may result from the mere possession of the asset. The beneficiary may refuse the donation and that decision is irrevocable. When a *wāqif* lists several beneficiaries, the rejection is valid only for those who have openly refused it and the fixed asset is donated to the second line of beneficiaries. Finally, it is required that the beneficiary takes possession of the asset, in either a factual or symbolic way. The administration of *waqf* should always take into account the will of the *wāqif*, expressed at the time of the constitution of the *waqf*. The beneficiaries are obliged to maintain the *waqf* and can enjoy their rightful part of its total income.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> H. Cattani, 'The Law of Waqf', in M. Khadduri - H. J. Liebeseney (eds.), *Law in the Middle East*, The Middle East Institute, Washington, 1995, vol. 1, p. 203.

<sup>15</sup> E. Clavel, *Droit musulman. Le wakf ou habous d'après la doctrine et la jurisprudence (rites hanafite et malékite)*, vol. 2, Imprimerie Diemer, Cairo, 1896, p. 4.

All the schools of law agree that the *wāqif* must appoint a manager (*nāzir*, also called *mutawallī*) who is responsible for its administration. It is possible to appoint more than one manager and, in this case, all managers are given equal powers. In fact, they are obliged to make decisions by consensus. According to one doctrine, however, there is a hierarchy among managers and usually only the first one is entitled to supervise the *waqf*. If the *wāqif* has not appointed a manager, this task must be performed by a judge. Anyone who is considered honest and of sound mind may be appointed as manager. Even *dhimmi*s can hold this task. A manager may also have a physical disability, as long as it does not preclude the administration of *waqf*. It is uncertain, however, if women can become managers. Lastly, the manager is required to be an adult.<sup>16</sup>

### **Being Citizens in the Muslim World: From *Dhimmitude* to Citizenship**

There are few academic studies on citizenship in the Muslim world. While there are several works on democratization, the ‘citizenship perspective’ has been introduced only recently.<sup>17</sup> The discourse on democracy and good governance in the Arab and Muslim world is typically dominated by questions pertaining to the role of the state in the economy, models of political participation, rule of law, and so on.<sup>18</sup> These are fundamental issues that, as Butenshon stresses, must be discussed only when there is already an agreement on who legitimately constitutes the society that is the citizenry. But if citizenship is the ‘right to have rights’, then it is possible to conceive of it as an empty box to be filled by different perceptions of what is a right. Moreover, the ‘politics of citizenship’ must be analyzed on a double-track: on the one hand, it is true that citizenship, being issued by the state, is a mechanism of societal control which regulates the distribution of rights and obligations in a given society. This aspect

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<sup>16</sup> Clavel, *Droit musulman*, p. 14.

<sup>17</sup> T. H. Marshall, *Citizenship and Social Class, and Other Essays*, Cambridge University Press, London, 1950; N. Butenshon - U. Davis - M. Hassassian (eds.), *Citizenship and the State in the Middle East. Approaches and applications*, Syracuse University Press, New York, 2000.

<sup>18</sup> See for example: G. Salamé (ed.), *Democracy without Democrats?: The Renewal of Politics in the Muslim World*, I. B. Tauris, London 1994; L. E. Miller, *Democratization in the Arab World*, The RAND Corporation, Santa Monica, 2012; B. Cheryl, *Civil Democratic Islam: Partners, Resources, and Strategies*, The RAND Corporation, Santa Monica, 2004.

must be underlined when studying the post-awakening Arab societies, because the Islamists' participation in politics could shape a new conception of citizenship. On the other hand, citizenship, through the struggle for civil, political and social rights, is shaped by society and must interpret its demands and aspirations.

Looking at the extension and reduction of citizenship in the Arab world (i.e. within societies where religious, ethnic and social cleavages are present) implies studying which citizens are demanding which kinds of rights and, above all, if these requests are issued for the benefit of specific (religious, ethnic or social) groups or whether the whole citizenry will benefit from them.

Rediscovering citizenship in the Arab world could help to revisit the Marshallian 'incremental approach'. According to this theory, social citizenship is inconceivable without an established political citizenship while political citizenship presupposes civil citizenship.<sup>19</sup> In the Arab world, the three groups of citizenship rights have been, more or less officially, granted since the age of independence. However, people continue to struggle for them and, it is broadly accepted, the Arab uprisings erupted because of the lack of appropriate welfare systems, in the face of the international economic turmoil. This is the consequence of the failure of 'revolutionary' regimes (Nasserism, Ba'athism, Ghaddafiism) as they were primarily concerned with the protection of their own power base.

Citizenship, in its western conceptualization, supersedes all other patterns of authority, holding this principle as a prerequisite for an all-inclusive and democratic citizenship. Thus, in the Arab world, citizenship must not reflect the state apparatus (regardless from its ideology) or the 'majoritarian' understanding of democracy, as purported by some Islamic theoreticians. Even when Muslim scholars underline the fact that Islam, being a universal religion, aims to create 'the' more equal society, some discriminations persist, especially in the field of political rights as in the case of Tunisia where non-Muslims are not allowed to run for presidency of the state, or in the field of gender issues. This situation bears parallels with the tension that exists between social and human rights because, as Turner

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<sup>19</sup> Marshall is quoted in N. Butenshon, 'State, power and citizenship', in Butenshon - Davis - Hassassian, *Citizenship and the State in the Middle East*, p. 8.

stresses, social rights are national, whereas human rights are global.<sup>20</sup> Moreover Turner adds that Marshall, in his conceptualization of modern citizenship, failed to incorporate ethnic and religious differences. As for the case of the Muslim world, the variables include not only the national understandings of rights, more or less completely inspired by universal human rights, but also the Islamic conceptions of rights that lack a unique interpretation. One should notice an important difference between citizenship, human and Islamic rights: citizenship rights are rights and obligations that attach to members of formally recognized nation-states and correspond to legal membership of a specific nation-state. Human rights are conceived as the core rights that belong to all the human beings *per se* while the Islamic set of rights belongs to Muslims and to the protected faiths in the framework of an Islamic state.

The problem of the relationship between Islamic law and rights is addressed in works that usually seek to show as the *sharī'a* does not constitute an insurmountable obstacle to the application of the latter, except in a few cases (such as some rules of Islamic criminal law that are highly detrimental to fundamental human rights). It was only during the 20<sup>th</sup> century that *sharī'a* was codified into single national systems, opening up the problem of merging secular and religious laws. This topic has been discussed by An-Na'im, a prominent Muslim scholar who, being critical of the traditional Islamic system of law, offered a middle path based on the necessity for a religious reform under the influence of international covenants.<sup>21</sup> Similarly, Baderin explains that although there are differences of scope and application, there is no fundamental incompatibility between International and Islamic law, and that their differences could be better addressed if the concept of human rights were positively established from within the themes of Islamic law, rather than by imposing it upon Islamic law as an alien concept.<sup>22</sup>

Citizenship, as mentioned above, is a bilateral relation where civil society shapes several demands, of which some are satisfied by the

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<sup>20</sup> B. S. Turner, 'Islam, Civil Society and Citizenship. Reflections on the Sociology of Citizenship and Islamic Studies', in Butenschon - Davis - Hassassian, *Citizenship and the State in the Middle East*, p. 37.

<sup>21</sup> A. An-Na'im, *Toward an Islamic Reformation: Civil Liberties, Human Rights and International Law*, University of Syracuse Press, Syracuse, 1990.

<sup>22</sup> M. A. Baderin, *International Human Rights and Islamic Law*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2003.

state. In this perspective, the study of citizenship is also the study of the behavior of civil society and, at the same time, the study of the policies adopted by the state to face the growth of autonomous voluntary associations, as underlined by Ibrahim.<sup>23</sup> In the post-awakening Arab world, the new role of the Islamists in power could favor the emergence of Islamic associations that push for more religiously oriented understandings of citizenship, re-opening a harsh debate with secularist or non-partisan associations.

This seems to be in line with Turner's explanation of the gradual expansion of citizenship. According to him, citizenship expands when hierarchical and particularistic dimensions of social stratification are destroyed by violent or traumatic historical events and social movements.<sup>24</sup> The political liberalization that followed, in certain countries, the Arab awakening, and which gave voice to the Islamists, could be thus taken to constitute the engine for the enlargement of citizenship. At the same time, however, the rise of the Islamists is perceived as a threat to its western liberal conception. This ambivalence is well described by Davis when he underlines that the imperative of secular democratic citizenship (i.e. equality before the law) in the Middle East conflicts with two well-established and entrenched interrelated political traditions, the first claiming the supremacy of one chosen confession over the state (fundamentalism) and the second proclaiming the supremacy of one chosen nation (sectarianism).<sup>25</sup> Both fundamentalism and sectarianism represent gross violations of the universalist secular value of political freedom and, as a consequence, are perceived as tyrannical.

As I argued above, citizenship is an empty shell, a legal device to which civil, political and social rights are attached. Being a citizen is a neutral condition that overcomes gender, ethnic and linguistic differences. The starting point for the analysis of citizenship in the Muslim world is the concept of *dhimma*. *Dhimma* is the specific instrument by which, historically, Islamic institutions have offered a regime of protection to members of recognized monotheistic faiths

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<sup>23</sup> S. E. Ibrahim, *The New Arab Social Order. A Study of the Social Impact of Oil Wealth*, Boulder, Westview, 1992.

<sup>24</sup> B. S. Turner, *Citizenship and Capitalism. The Debate over Reformism*, Allen & Unwin, London, 1986.

<sup>25</sup> U. Davis, 'Conceptions of Citizenship in the Middle East. State, Nation and People', in Butenschon - Davis - Hassassian (eds.), *Citizenship and the State in the Middle East*, p. 69.

(mainly Jews and Christians), in the *Dār al-Islām*. The enjoyment of this status was subject to the payment of a specific poll tax (*jizya*) (Cor. 9: 29) and it defined a category of rights and duties for the members of the *ahl al-kitāb* permanently residing in Muslim territories.

*Dhimmīs* have therefore traditionally been considered proper subjects of the Islamic state and their status is kept distinct from that of both Muslims and idolaters. In addition, *dhimmīs* were distinguished from *ḥarbis* who, while professing the same faith, did not live in territories under the jurisdiction of Islam. Finally, *dhimmīs* also differed from *musta'mīns*, i.e. aliens who are granted the right to live in an Islamic territory for a short period (for most jurists, a year at most) mainly for economic reasons. Originally, only Jews and Christians fell into the category of *dhimmīs*. Soon, however, given the expansion of the Muslim empire under the 'Abbasids, Zoroastrians too fell into the group of *dhimmīs*, and later, especially in Central Asia, even other minor faiths not mentioned in the Qur'an.<sup>26</sup>

The transformation that took place in the Islamic Mediterranean area during the Ottoman Empire is closely tied to the idea of citizenship, national identity and the culture of belonging. With the adoption of the structural reforms known as the *Tanzīmāt* (between 1829 and 1876), several Islamic institutions were abandoned and replaced with western juridical devices. Among them, the notion of citizenship, as sanctioned by the Ottoman Constitution. The Ottoman Constitution was adopted in 1876, and, although partially recalling the classical Islamic doctrine of the Caliphate and Sultanate, it transplanted civil law institutions and ascribed the legislative power to an Assembly, (forerunner of the modern Parliament). Moreover, the Constitution, itself an act of codification, stole the role of hermeneutics of the main sources of Islamic law (Qur'an and *sunna*) to the jurists (*fuqahā'*) and, most importantly, it identified new sources

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<sup>26</sup> Academic literature about the *dhimma* is huge. A good starting point is the voice *dhimma* in the *Encyclopaedia of Islam* published by Brill, Leiden. See also Rāshid al-Ghannūshī, *Ḥuqūq al-Muwāṭana. Ḥuqūq ḡayr al-muslimīn fī'l-mujtama' al-islāmī*, al-Ma'hd al-'arabī li'l-fīkr al-islāmī, Beirut, 1981; al-Jawziyya, Ibn Qayyim, *Mukhtaṣar aḥkam ahl al-dhimma*, Dār al-Qāsim li'l-Nashr wa'l-Tawzī', Riyadh, 2004; N. Anderson, 'Islamic Law in Africa', in *Journal of African Law* 21/2 (1977), pp. 137-138; N. Coulson, *A History of Islamic Law*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 1964; P. Crone, *Medieval Islamic Political Thought*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 2004; B. Lewis, *Islam and the West*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1993.

for the law, namely the Sultan and Parliament. This ‘legal revolution’ was transmitted rapidly from the center to the periphery of the Empire, as demonstrated by the 1882 Egyptian Constitution.<sup>27</sup>

The legal origin of citizenship in MENA countries is also rooted in the Ottoman citizenship law of 19<sup>th</sup> January 1869. The so-called ‘Nationality Law of 1869’ created a common Ottoman citizenship irrespective of religious or ethnic divisions. This law introduced the ideas of citizenship and nationality into the Muslim world. At the time, tensions were erupting among the different ethnicities comprising Ottoman society, which was a complex mix of social, cultural, and religious communities. The crisis of the *millet* system, based upon the *dhimma*, was a sign of these tensions, particularly when set against the emerging system of foreign privileges, immunity, and interventions. This question was further complicated by the growth of new forms of national awareness and ‘identities’ which found a large audience among the different elites in Ottoman territories.<sup>28</sup> For the Ottoman communities (*millet*), particularly those that were non-Muslim, these measures were understood as an application of the right to equality, while non-Turkish ethnicities and nationalities saw them as an opportunity to achieve a measure of participation. This was true even before secessionist demands began to spring up within the Ottoman Empire.

The progressive abandonment of the Islamic traditional legal system across the Muslim world was preceded by a theoretical debate over the possibility, from the point of view of *sharī‘a*, to borrow western legal devices. Throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century, scholars such as Rāfi‘ al-Taḥṭāwī or Khayr al-Dīn al-Tūnisī struggled to demonstrate how principles of equality, justice, participation and civil citizenship were not at odds with Islamic tradition.

At the same time, the codification of Islamic law in the Ottoman context was particularly influenced by the French and Swiss models, and it produced a syncretism between the Islamic and the European legal and political cultures. Muslim scholars never agreed on the full compatibility of liberal philosophy with Islam and simply postponed

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<sup>27</sup> About the reforms adopted in the Ottoman Empire, see N. Berkes, *The Development of Secularism in Turkey*, McGill University Press, Montreal, 1964.

<sup>28</sup> B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origin and the Spread of Nationalism*, Verso, London, 1991.

the debate. This emerges clearly when reading the minutes of the Cairo conference on the Caliphate held in Egypt in 1926.<sup>29</sup>

Following the defeat of the Ottoman army in the First World War, scholars from several Muslim countries agreed not on the absolute impossibility of restoring the universal Caliphate but on the necessity to accept the rise of nation states prompted by the ‘new nationalist forces’. The debates over the nature of the ‘Islamic state’ and, then, those about citizenship within such a state remained unresolved. In the absence of a new and conclusive *ijtihād* (juridical effort to produce regulations in accordance with the Qur’an but also in touch with the spirit of the time) in the spheres of politics and citizenship, an interpretation that could make the status of *dhimma* more inclusive, some Muslim thinkers continue to sustain the idea that *dhimmitude* does not give full citizenship to non-Muslims inside the Islamic polity.<sup>30</sup>

After the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, by the 1930s, the emerging nation-states adopted different constitutional texts. Almost all national Constitutions, while indicating *sharī‘a* as ‘one’ or ‘the’ source of legislation, refused the ancient Islamic legal approach and defined national identity according to citizenship rather than the religious affiliation of the individual.<sup>31</sup> Such national identity was referred to as *muwāṭana* (which recalls *waṭan*, the national homeland).<sup>32</sup> However, it is important to point out that citizenship is also translated with *jinsiyya*, which is more strictly associated with the connotation of nationality. While nationality is commonly defined as the legal relation between the individual and the state, citizenship is conceived of as a specific juridical, but also social and cultural,

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<sup>29</sup> A. Sékaly, *Le Congrès du Khalifat et le Congrès du Monde Musulman*, Éditions Ernest Leroux, Paris, 1926.

<sup>30</sup> It is to be underlined here that in the Sunni Muslim world, a ‘conclusive’ *ijtihād* is almost impossible given the fact that there is not a conclusive authority for the Sunnis. During the centuries, *ijtihād* came to mean the progressive accordance of scholars under certain solutions for specific legal cases. Anyway, differences always persisted between different schools of law as well as inside each of them.

<sup>31</sup> K. A. Faruki, *The Evolution of Islamic Constitutional Theory and Practice*, National Publishing House, Karachi, 1971, p. 78.

<sup>32</sup> B. Lewis, *The Political Language of Islam*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1988, p. XXX.

condition that, simultaneously, gives citizens a set of duties and rights.<sup>33</sup>

In modern times, Muslim scholars have not been able to reach a consensus over a single meaning of citizenship in the light of Islamic tradition. However, we can identify a continuum of stances between a radical scholar such as the Pakistani Abū al-A‘lā al-Mawdūdī (1903-1979) and a more moderate one such as the Tunisian scholar Rāshid al-Ghannūshī. According to al-Mawdūdī, the Islamic state should include four categories of people: male Muslims, female Muslims, *dhimmīs* and non-Muslims. While *dhimmīs* are conceived, as in classical times, as the believers of ‘protected’ religions, non-Muslims are those who do not belong to the first two categories. In practice, al-Mawdūdī only accepted those who fit into the latter as proper citizens of the Islamic state, with men enjoying full citizenship rights and women only partial rights.<sup>34</sup>

On the other side, al-Ghannūshī dedicated a short essay to this topic, developing a middle way between Islamic traditional views and the western liberal concept of citizenship. According to him, the truest Islamic state, in order to fulfill its functions, must guarantee rights and freedoms to the community and the individual. Among these freedoms, the freedom of religious belief is the most important, legitimized by the well-known verse Cor. II, 256, ‘there be no compulsion in religion’. The Tunisian scholar distinguished also between a ‘general citizenship’ (*muwāṭana ‘amma*), and a ‘special citizenship’ (*muwāṭana khāṣṣa*): Muslims, to which certain behaviors are prohibited (i.e. eating particular foods or drinking alcohol), enjoy general citizenship while the *dhimmīs*, to which the access to major public offices is forbidden, enjoy special citizenship. It is up to human beings to decide, by professing the religion of Islam or not, which kind of citizenship, and therefore rights, they may enjoy.<sup>35</sup> Here citizenship seems to be a flexible idea, providing freedoms and prohibitions in accordance with religion.

Al-Ghannūshī recognizes also a set of core rights, pertaining to every human being, which shapes the meaning of citizenship: rights of

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<sup>33</sup> G. Parolin, *Citizenship in the Arab World. Kin, Religion and Nation State*, Amsterdam University Press, Amsterdam, 2009.

<sup>34</sup> V. R. Nasr, *Mawdudi and the Making of Islamic Revivalism*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1996, p. 99.

<sup>35</sup> R. al-Ghannūshī, *The Right to Nationality Status of Non-Muslim Citizens in a Muslim Nation*, without editor [U.S.A.], Islamic Foundation of America, 1990.

equality, freedom (which also encompasses freedom of thought, freedom of belief and freedom of worship), and freedom of movement, including the right to establish schools and religious institutions. Even if al-Ghannūshī minimizes the difference between the two kinds of *muwāṭana*, he is keen to point out that the purpose of these restrictions is to safeguard the state and to protect the freedom of citizens, as well as the right of the majority to ‘impart on public life a color of their choosing’.<sup>36</sup> Moreover, in a recent essay, published after the Tunisian uprisings, al-Ghannūshī modified his ideas, leaning toward a more inclusive conception of citizenship.

### **Citizenship rights in practice: The Tunisian and Egyptian Constitutional traditions<sup>37</sup>**

Despite the above-mentioned theoretical conceptualizations of the Islamic state, historical experiments, such as the 1861 Tunisian Constitution, demonstrate that fundamental liberal rights were guaranteed after occasional struggles, not in a dissimilar way to the aftermath of 1848 revolutions in Europe. The Tunisian Constitution was adopted as part of a project to reform the country, formally still a province of the Ottoman Empire. Its main purposes were to enhance the administrative control of the peripheral zones and prevent the decline of the ruling dynasty. The event that fostered the adoption of the Constitution was the escalation of tensions between the Jewish minority and the rest of the Muslim population.<sup>38</sup> This pushed for the development of a statute regulating relations between confessions. The twelfth chapter of the Constitution thus included a set of rights and freedoms officially guaranteed to all, regardless of faith. This list did not include freedom of association or freedom of expression, but the rights to inviolability of the person, honor and property were proclaimed. The Constitution extended the military service to all faiths, with the exception of Jews.

The first Egyptian Constitution, adopted in 1883, regulated the functions of a consultative assembly (devoid of real legislative

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<sup>36</sup> A. Tamimi, *Rashid Ghannouchi: A Democrat within Islamism*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2001, pp. 76-77.

<sup>37</sup> This paragraph is only a short account of the development of citizenship and citizenship rights as conceived by the Tunisian and Egyptian Constitutions drafted by the Muslim Brotherhood. Therefore, the final 2014 Egyptian Constitution is not taken into account.

<sup>38</sup> Coulson, *A History of Islamic Law*, p. 150.

power). This Constitution, unlike that of Tunisia, introduced instruments of checks and balances between state powers. However, it failed to proclaim the principle of political representation, as the assemblies that the Constitution created were composed only of members of the upper classes and were given merely advisory powers. In so doing, the Charter did not produce a strong empowerment in the field of citizenship rights.<sup>39</sup>

In Tunisia, the French protectorate ended in 1956 and in the same year Tunisians elected their first Constituent Assembly. This process was influenced by the nationalist leader of the Neo-Dustur party who led the country's struggle for independence, Habib Bourghiba (1903-2000). The 1959 Constitution established a presidential Republic, where parliamentary powers were significantly weaker than presidential powers, even though article 3 proclaimed the principle of popular sovereignty stating that 'the sovereignty belongs to the Tunisian people who exercise it in conformity with the Constitution'. Thus, relying on its unchecked nature, the executive, by adopting emergency laws, was able to restrict the rights and freedoms proclaimed in the Constitution. Only the amendments of the 1971 Constitution introduced some devices for balancing the executive and making it accountable.

Moreover, citizenship rights, as contained in the Tunisian Charter, were weak: this text, while proclaiming the equality of the people on the basis of citizenship (art. 6), stated (art. 5) that inviolability of the human being, freedom of conscience and protection and exercise of beliefs were guaranteed by the state with as long as exercise of these rights did not disturb the public order. Article 7 added several 'legal' provisions to decrease the scope of the same set of rights and freedoms ensured by Constitution as citizens could exercise the plenitude of their rights only 'in the forms and conditions established by the law'. Stating that 'the exercise of these rights cannot be limited except by a law enacted for the protection of others, respect for public order, national defense, the development of the economy, and social progress', the state was given the discretionary power to interfere in the sphere of citizens' prerogatives.

The Tunisian Constitution did not provide for a specific chapter where fundamental rights and freedoms were grouped: they were

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<sup>39</sup> B. L. Garcia - C. F. Suzor, *Introducción a los regímenes arábes y constituciones árabes*, Centro de Estudios Constitucionales, Madrid, 1985, pp. 28-31.

declared at the very top of the charter under the label of ‘general provision’. As demonstrated by article 8, the state could legitimately restrict those rights that normally most Constitutions define as ‘absolute’. This article stated that liberties of opinion, expression, the press, publication, assembly, and association were guaranteed but could be exercised only within the conditions defined by the law.<sup>40</sup>

In the field of social rights, the Constitution was really weak and did not contain any specific articles instituting social services or a healthcare system. At the same time, article 70 created the Economic and Social Council, a consultative assembly deputed to the elaboration of laws and regulations in economic and social matters. Its composition and its relations with the National Parliament were determined by law. Thus this council was not an independent institution but was controlled by the state.

As for political rights, the Constitution extended the right to participate in politics to all the citizens, without discrimination based on gender, ethnicity or religion. At the same time, art. 40 fixed a set of conditions that were detrimental for spreading access to certain public offices, thus restricting political rights. For example, only Muslims were eligible for the Presidency of the state. Passive and active rights to vote were regulated by articles 20 and 21. According to article 20, the right to cast a ballot was given to every citizen who had held Tunisian nationality for at least five years and attained at least twenty years of age. According to article 21, any voter, born of Tunisian father, who was at least twenty-five years of age on the day of submission of his candidacy, could be eligible for election to the National Parliament. Both of these articles linked active and passive political rights to the law of citizenship, possession of which was regulated by a law that could be easily modified, due to the submission of the Parliament towards the executive.

Egyptian constitutional history is much more fragmented than its Tunisian counterpart. During the early years of Nasser’s regime (1952-1970) the country was governed through Constitutional Declarations, quasi-constitutional documents that, without fixing the constituted powers once for all, maintained the powers in the hands of the military junta. The revolution of the Free Officers ended the

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<sup>40</sup> Even article 9 stated that the inviolability of the home and the secrecy of correspondence must be guaranteed by the state, save in exceptional cases established by the law.

'liberal' era of Egypt, characterized by the liberal Constitution of 1920. Under this perspective, the 1952 revolution weakened some of the liberal principles that had dominated the Egyptian monarchy in the first half of the XX century.<sup>41</sup> Only in 1956 a permanent Constitution was adopted: it was composed by a Preamble and six chapters related to the form of the state, to the basic principles of the state, rights and duties of the citizens, the rules for ensuring national defense. The first chapter declared Egypt as an 'Arab and democratic Republic' whose nation, qualified as 'Arab', was composed of the Egyptian people, the sole holder of sovereignty. In addition, the Arabic language was referred to as the official language while Islam was settled as the official religion. The second chapter defined the rules related to the preservation of the family, whose pillars were religion, ethics and patriotism.

On the economic side, private initiative was encouraged, providing that its outcomes contributed to social wellbeing. The text allowed ownership of the land but its subdivision was forbidden. The third chapter of the Constitution listed a number of freedoms, such as equality, regardless of sex, race, language, religion, and personal freedoms like the inviolability of private property, freedom of belief, freedom of opinion and press, freedom of association, freedom of education and right to work. Another Charter was adopted in 1962, which stressed the necessity for the state to be based on a new philosophy that mixed Arab nationalism, the ideal of pan-Arab unity, socialism and democracy. The Constitution nationalized the entire economic system and gave greater representation to the weaker classes of the society, stating that half of the MPs had to be chosen among the workers and peasants. These articles were maintained also by the 1972 Constitution.

Article 3 ascribed sovereignty to the people defined as the source of authority and not of executive powers. The people were vested with the duty of exercising and protecting this sovereignty, safeguarding national unity in the manner specified in the Constitution. Articles 8 to 11 provide the bases for ensuring citizenship rights. The state had to guarantee equality of opportunity to all citizens and had to protect the family as the basis of society. Family must be founded on religion,

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<sup>41</sup> Garcia - Suzor, *Introducción a los regímenes árabes y constituciones árabes*, pp. 38-63.

morality and patriotism.<sup>42</sup> According to article 10, the state had to guarantee the protection of motherhood and childhood, take care of children and youth and provide suitable conditions for the development of their talents. As for article 11, the state provided for the harmonization of the duties of women towards the family and their work in the society, ensuring women's equal status in political, social, cultural and economic life without violating the rules of Islamic jurisprudence.

While these articles sanctioned a strong set of social rights, which they inherited of the Nasserian regime, article 12 showed a clear Islamic imprinting. This article gave society the duty of safeguarding and protecting morals and promoting genuine Egyptian traditions. The state was committed to abiding by these traditional principles and promoting them even if no direct references to Islam were made.

The Egyptian Republic, as defined in the 1972 Constitution, also inherited from the Nasserian regime a strong commitment in the field of social rights. Article 16 gave the state the duty of guaranteeing cultural, social and health services, and of working to make sure they were regularly respected particularly in rural villages, so as to raise living standards. According to article 17, the state had to guarantee social and health insurance services and all citizens were given the right in accordance with the law to receiving a pension in cases of injury, unemployment and old age. Article 15 of the Constitution gave 'war veterans, those injured in or because of war, and the wives and children of martyrs killed in war' priority in work opportunities.

As for political rights articles 62 and 63 contained some advanced provisions: citizens were given the rights to vote and express their opinion in referendums according to the provisions of the law. Their participation in public life was defined as a national duty. The Constitution gave ordinary law the task of regulating the right of candidacy to the People's Assembly and the Shura Council (the two chambers of Parliament). Even though the same article allowed the electoral law to adopt a system combining the individual and the party-list systems, such a system was supposed to include a minimum quota for women's participation in both councils. Article 63 ascribed

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<sup>42</sup> According to the same article, the state is keen to preserve the genuine character of the Egyptian family-together with the values and traditions it embodies-while affirming and developing this character in the relations within the Egyptian society.

to every individual the right to address public authorities in writing and under his or her own signature.

All Constitutions adopted in Tunisia and Egypt were presented to the citizenry as 'advanced' legal documents because they contained provisions recognizing the universality of some rights (in the Tunisian case, political rights were restricted as we have seen). In practice, in both countries, the various Constitutions aimed to keep all prerogatives in the hand of the executive. This produced important consequences in the sphere of citizenship rights: despite their proclamation, their enjoyment was restricted by the adoption of emergency laws, justified by a state of necessity.

The enjoyment of citizenship rights, in both countries, was also restricted by the endemic weakness of the judiciaries. Far from being independent, judges were subjugated by the executives and could not play the role of guarantors of freedoms. The Egyptian 1972 Constitution contained a set of principles (articles 64-72) to ensure sovereignty of law. According to article 65, the rule of law was a supreme principle of the state. The independence and immunity of the judiciary were proclaimed as two basic guarantees for the safeguard of rights and freedoms (articles 65, 165 and 166).<sup>43</sup> The organization of the courts, the judiciary authorities and their functions, as well as the conditions and procedures for the appointment and transfer of judges were defined by ordinary law. Despite the declaration of such principles, the enslavement of Parliament by the executive consequently weakened the independence of the judiciary. Even the composition of the Supreme Constitutional Court was left undefined by the Constitution that ascribed this task to the ordinary laws (article 176) thus affecting its proclaimed independent nature (article 174).

Also the Tunisian Constitution of 1959 provided for a set of similar articles affecting the independence of the judiciary. According to article 65, the Tunisian judiciary was made independent and the magistrates exercised their functions being subject only to the law. The following article 66 stated that judges were nominated by decree of the President of the Republic upon recommendation of the Supreme Council of Magistrates. The Constitution did not add anything else in support of the independence of the judiciary, and also the procedures framing the Council of Magistrates were defined by ordinary laws (art. 67).

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<sup>43</sup> According to article 166 judges must be independent, subject to no other authority but the law. No authority may intervene in cases or in justice affairs.

### The Impact of *Awqāf* over Citizenship Rights: Are They Compatible?

Promoting the *awqāf* while encouraging the empowerment of social rights could be detrimental in the sphere of gender equality, thus affecting two of the three classes of citizenship rights. *Awqāf*, for example, could influence the right of inheritance, preventing women from being eligible to inherit and thus bypassing the positive law of the state.

With regard to the Tunisian case, *al-Nahḍa* leader al-Ghannūshī emphasizes that former Presidents Bourghiba and Ben Ali did not employ *awqāf* for their proper ends.<sup>44</sup> An imposed secularism provoked disaffection among Tunisians for religious spaces, as public manifestations of Islam were prohibited. Mosques – a typical example of *waqf* that was for a long time controlled by the state – should now be given back to the community to allow freedom of religion, a cornerstone of any democracy. Al-Ghannūshī argues that the relation between state and religion must be built upon mutual respect: the problem is not freeing the state from religion but freeing religion from the strict control of the state, starting from the necessity to allow the community to practice religious freedom.<sup>45</sup>

Historically, as *awqāf* were directed to the Muslim community or to a specific group of beneficiaries, public authorities did not have any power over the foundation and they had to respect the will of the owner. This means that if *awqāf* are to be restored, a strict regulation by the state is needed otherwise foundations will remain uncontrolled institutions, placed above the law, where violations of citizenship rights may take place under the banner of empowering religious freedom. In the field of gender issues, the Qur'an, stressing the physical differences between men and women, ascribes different social roles to them. As for political rights, women are not denied participation in politics but, at times, are forbidden to exercise authority as the capability of deciding over common interests. Certain fundamentalist scholars still deny the possibility for women to cover the highest political roles. Other moderate scholars, such as Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī and Rāshid al-Ghannūshī, agree on a gender practice of

<sup>44</sup> R. al-Ghannūshī, *al-'Almāniyya wa-'alāqa al-dīn bi'l-dawla min manẓūr ḥaraka al-Nahḍa*, CSID lectures, Tunis, 2012, p. 9.

<sup>45</sup> A. Stepan, 'Religion, Democracy and the Twin Toleration', in *Journal of Democracy* 11/4 (2010), pp. 37-57.

*ijtihād*, allowing women to interpret the sources of the law. Giving women full rights to legislate, these scholars pave the way for a comprehensive political equality between the sexes. However, they believe that political activism can be exercised by women in accordance with their fulfillment of traditional feminine roles, being women above all mothers and wives.

The last point to be stressed here is the difference of approach between the Islamic constitutional philosophy and its western counterpart toward the ideas of ‘common good’ and individual rights. The medieval scholar Abū Ishāq al-Shātibī (1320-1388) developed the doctrine of the so-called ‘aims of the *sharī‘a*’. According to his view, Islamic law provided the protection of several aspects of the believer’s life. Five elements, conceived as being necessary for people, enjoy the highest protection: religion, life, intellect, progeny and property. In second rank, the law safeguards whatever produces benefits for the community and, accordingly, its moral values. But in the name of the *maṣlaḥa* (public good), which is a legal hermeneutical device employed to approach the Islamic sources of law, the welfare of the community must be prioritized over individual good and enjoyment. This fact is also offered up by contemporary Muslim scholars as further evidence of the superiority of Islamic democracy over that of the West.

Adopting traditionally western concepts of citizenship would be problematic in the Arab world, as it is characterized by ongoing political transitions in the region, involving contingent social, religious, and political aspects. The most striking difference with mainstream conceptions derived from Islamic Constitutionalism is the western individualistic ethos as compared to a more collective one espoused by most Muslim thinkers. While not denying this very significant difference, it is also true that also within western thinking there are elements calling for a greater attention towards collective interests, vis-à-vis individual ones and that within the Islamic constitutional tradition there are calls for greater attention to the dimension of individual rights, without necessarily adopting universalist conceptions. It is within these contested notions of rights, at both ends of the spectrum, that the debate about revitalizing *awqāf* took place in many Muslim countries after the Arab awakening. Mainly with reference to the Tunisian case, this debate could reverberate over to the conception of citizenship in the Muslim world and could deteriorate the principle of equality in the field of civil

rights. The following section, then, explains how restoring *awqāf* in Tunisia was perceived as a threat against the future of the democratic transition and the build-up of a new legal order based on liberal philosophy.<sup>46</sup>

### Restoring *Awqāf* in Tunisia

On 17<sup>th</sup> October 2013, a bloc of MPs, belonging not just to *al-Nahḍa*, proposed a controversial law that aimed to restore *awqāf*.<sup>47</sup> This proposal faced the harsh opposition of Tunisian secular parties that consider *awqāf* to be at odds with the relations between state and Islam that they in turn propose.

When *awqāf* were done away with in Tunisia in late 1956, one-third of agricultural land had been until then managed through this system.<sup>48</sup> These lands became unproductive and could not contribute to the economic and social development of the country in any way. In fact, according to some historians, Habib Bourghiba, the founding father of Tunisia, did not decide to dismantle the endowments system because he wanted to establish a secular state.<sup>49</sup> The decision was instead motivated by purely economic reasons and, in addition, Tunisia followed a regional trend in this regard. Several other Muslim countries were convinced of the outmoded nature of constituting property as *awqāf*, including Turkey, Lebanon, Syria and Egypt.

The proposed law on *awqāf* would have explicitly restored the endowments, as public, private, or mixed *awqāf*.<sup>50</sup> All the

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<sup>46</sup> On the development of citizenship rights in Tunisia, mainly with regard to gender issues, see for example: S. E. Marshall - R. G. Stokes, 'Tradition and the Veil: Female Status in Tunisia and Algeria', in *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 19/4 (1981), pp. 625-646; M. Charrad, *States and Women's Rights: The Making of Postcolonial Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 2001; M. Charrad, 'Tunisia at the Forefront of the Arab World: Two Waves of Gender Legislation', in *Washington and Lee Law Review* 64/4 (2007), pp. 1513-1527.

<sup>47</sup> S. Bulaq, 'Mashrū' al-awqāf fi Tūnis bayna al-maṣlaḥa wa'l-tajadhdhubāt al-idiulūjiyya', in *Babnet Tunisien*, 14/11/2013, <http://www.babnet.net/festivaldetail-74665.asp> (access 2/12/2016).

<sup>48</sup> C. Moore, *Tunisia since Independence*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1965, pp. 34-35.

<sup>49</sup> 'Ennahda pushes further Islamization of Tunisia', in *al-Monitor*, 19/11/2013. <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/culture/2013/11/ennahda-endowments-islamization-tunisia.html> (access 2/12/2016).

<sup>50</sup> Public *awqāf* are constituted for public wellness such as schools, hospitals, fountains, mosques, and so forth. Private foundations are established only for

endowments would have enjoyed economic and financial independence and would have been controlled by an institution created *ad hoc* by the same law (article 3). Finally, article 8 of the same proposed law explicitly settled the conditions the endowments had to respect in order to be legally valid. Among them, the proposed law provided that any private *awqāf* employed to discriminate between male and/or female heirs was rendered invalid. Under this condition, the law seemed to forbid any attempt at weakening citizenship rights.<sup>51</sup>

Apart from its formulation, the law draft provoked a fierce debate in Tunisian society. Economic expert and former Finance Minister Houcine Dimassi (formally belonging to the opposition party *Nida Tunis*) argued that instituting *awqāf* could be one of the most dangerous things to happen to Tunisia, because this system would create a state within the state, whereby properties would be under the control of entities other than the state authorities.<sup>52</sup> Moreover, under the law of *awqāf*, while it is true that the Muslim community would gain public spaces for religious practice and education, on the other hand preaching, teachings and proselytism will be controlled by the *awqāf* themselves, circumventing the regulation of the state. The problem with *awqāf*, then, is that they undermine the rule of law and give certain actors a huge power in defining social identity. After decades of dictatorship, promoting self-determination by different social groups is questionable unless it can be ensured that no specific group may prevail over the others. What provoked criticism of the proposed law reintroducing *awqāf* is the fact that restoring endowments could be considered as one of the elements of an overall project for the progressive Islamization of Tunisian society after the revolution. The idea of restoring endowments seems to be in line with other projects that *al-Nahda* launched since 2011, such as promoting Islamic finance, creating the Zakat funds, establishing Qur'anic schools all over the country, and spreading religious studies through the famous Islamic University of al-Zaytuna.

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specific groups, enlisted by the owner of the assets. Mixed *awqāf* are constituted for public purposes but could be restricted to specific social classes or groups.

<sup>51</sup> See Project law no. 55/2013, article 8.

<sup>52</sup> H. Keskes, 'Tunisians Debate Proposed Reintroduction of Habous', in *Tunisia Live*, 13/11/2013, <http://www.tunisia-live.net/2013/11/13/tunisians-debate-proposed-reintroduction-of-habous/> (access 2/12/2016).

Ferjani Doghmane, National Constituent Assembly (NCA) member for *al-Nahḍa* and chairman of the Committee of Finance, Planning, and Development, claimed that the project of restoring *awqāf* should not constitute a cause for concern, because its purpose is to reinforce the role of civil society. Foundations would simply sponsor cultural and educational projects which would otherwise lack funding. From this perspective, *awqāf* is merely a means for fundraising and self-financing for those services that the state cannot manage properly.<sup>53</sup> Endowments, it is true, could certainly reinforce the funding allocated to charity and civil society and fill the legal gap in supporting civil society.

Moderate voices, between these opposite extremes, have argued that *awqāf* are not a bad idea *per se* but they need severe regulation and independent control. If institutionalized in Tunisia, *awqāf* risk to be left unchecked and could be employed for political purposes, playing in favor of the Islamists. That this is a plausible argument is quite clear considering that Nouredine Khademi, former Minister for Religious Affairs of the second *al-Nahḍa* government, stated that the law on *awqāf* is one of the aims of the revolution.<sup>54</sup> Islamists underline the fact that Bourghiba's decision to suppress *awqāf* (decree 31<sup>th</sup> May 1956) was linked to his personal struggle to challenge Islamism, adding that the new state, born after the revolution, needs to restore and reform this system.

Restoring *awqāf* in Tunisia could reverberate also on the empowerment of women's rights, because the implementation of *waqf* endowments may well forbid the former's enjoyment of several rights. In the first draft of the Constitution, issued in August 2012, Islamists tried to propose articles minimizing the role of women in society, despite their official statements on the subject. The majority of female deputies in the NCA were elected in the lists of *al-Nahḍa* (26% of the 217 elected members). On the other hand, Islamists tried to pass the 'complementarity law', an article of the Constitution which denied full

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<sup>53</sup> « Ferjani Doghmani: La Loi sur les habous n'a aucun rapport avec Ennahdha », in *African Manager*, 12/11/2013, <http://www.africanmanager.com/157886.html> (access 2/12/2016).

<sup>54</sup> « Nouredine Khademi: Le projet de loi sur les habous ne menace nullement la civilité de l'Etat », in *Directinfo*, 16/11/2013, <http://directinfo.webmanagercenter.com/2013/11/16/nouredine-khademi-le-projet-de-loi-sur-les-habous-ne-menace-nullement-la-civilite-de-letat/> (access 2/12/2016).

equality between men and women.<sup>55</sup> Indeed equality was not clearly marked and the use of terms such as ‘complementarity’ suggests that there was a desire to change the status of women. Criticism and pressure from civil society and part of the other MPs led to backtracking and to inscribing equality clearly in the final draft, adopted in January 2014. The final Constitution insists that all citizens (females and males in the Arabic text) are equal. In this framework, restoring *awqāf* may open up to discretionary practices that challenge substantial equality.<sup>56</sup>

### Conclusions

Citizenship is not a new idea in Tunisia but, of course, it is evolving according to the actions of the new actors that gained space in the political arena after the revolution. Citizenship, being a neutral device, bears a set of rights and freedoms that are inscribed onto it, commonly known as citizenship rights. The debate on the rights of citizenship in the MENA region has always been dealt with in many ways and with different approaches. There are at least three main approaches: the first, which can be defined as culturalist, is based on the analysis of the relationship between Islam and democracy and is rooted in the idea that Islam, like every religion, might represent an obstacle for the practical application of some liberal ideals. Fundamentally, however, some of these studies start from the assumption that secularism is a precondition for democracy.

The second approach, based on the methodologies of the political sciences and on the transitological paradigm, attempts to illustrate the processes of democratization, in the wake of the third wave of democracy suggested by S. Huntington.<sup>57</sup> In this context, the rights of citizenship are relevant because the liberalization of national political

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<sup>55</sup> M. Marks, ‘Speaking on the Unspeakable: Blasphemy & the Tunisian Constitution’, in *Sada. Middle East Analysis*, 04/09/2012,

<http://carnegieendowment.org/2012/09/04/speaking-on-unspeakable-blasphemy-tunisian-constitution/drca> (access 2/12/2016).

<sup>56</sup> Article 21 Constitution: ‘All the citizens, male and female alike, have equal rights and duties, and are equal before the law without any discrimination’.

<sup>57</sup> For a confutation of Huntington’s theory see: K. Dalacoura, *Islam, Liberalism and Human Rights*, I. B. Tauris, London, 2007 (third edition); J. L. Esposito - J. Piscatori, ‘Democratization and Islam’, in *Middle East Journal* 45/3 (1991), p. 427-440; J. L. Esposito - J. O. Voll, *Islam and Democracy*, Vol I, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1996; G. Salamé (ed.), *Democracy without Democrats?: The Renewal of Politics in the Muslim World*, I.B. Tauris, London, 1994.

systems requires the strengthening of these rights which, in turn, help to create a kind of substantial democracy that is not merely procedural and based on free and fair elections.

The last approach to the study of citizenship rights is based on a critique of gender. A strong role of religion in society is often perceived as a pre-modern factor, opposed to the concept of modernity. Moreover Islam, by its very nature of constituting both religion and law, contains a set of rules which, if codified in national constitutions, can be detrimental to some civil rights ascribed to women, such as those relating to divorce, polygamy and inheritance. For this reason, the critique of gender represents another important theoretical key for analyzing the status of citizenship rights in Arab/Islamic societies, before and after the Arab Spring.

Islamists could have different perceptions of citizenship rights, and the debate around the law of *awqāf* is a good example through which to highlight these differences. From a purely political point of view, *al-Nahḍa* is a highly pragmatic party and in many occasions it has seemed to be keen to reach a consensus, even if this means putting aside its initial goals. Indeed, a huge part of the secular opposition thinks that *al-Nahḍa*'s double discourses are a matter of strategy and through them the Islamic party usually tests the reaction of society at large in order to orient future political behaviors. The law on *awqāf* could be seen under this light as a way to disclose the societal reaction toward a sensitive project that could be seen 'ideological', as the opposition marked it. At the same time, we ought to take into account the fact that restoring *awqāf* could produce positive outcomes, too: endowments could formally replace the state in providing for social services. They could facilitate fundraising needed to finance new infrastructures. In this respect *awqāf* could diversify the Tunisian economic system and boost its development.

Moreover, endowments could favor the rise of NGOs or grassroots associations for the benefit of the community as a whole, not just Muslims. This aspect recalls the difference between the conception of citizenship rights in the western and Islamic traditions. In the western tradition, a right is primarily an individual affair. Thus, in Europe social and welfare rights were born later than rights that belong to individuals. In the Islamic tradition, the relation is quite the opposite: being a 'social religion' (more than the other Abrahamic religions), Islam gives great importance to the believers as a group whose existence is necessary for the existence of the religion itself. In the

balance between community's rights and individuals' rights (such as women's or minority rights), the latter may be restricted if this restriction produces advantages for the community at large. In this regard, restoring *awqāf*, if not properly controlled, could be detrimental in the path of the assurance of citizenship rights for all Tunisians.

Endowments were abolished over fifty years ago and it is difficult to imagine which impact their restoration could produce on the post-revolutionary society. The proposed law, advanced in November 2013, has been put aside for the moment. But its proposal raised some questions, such control over the endowments' activities or the possibility of creating a totally unchecked state inside the state. In conclusion, the opposite reactions the draft law on *awqāf* caused in the Tunisian society, ranging from a radical refusal to more optimistic positions, demonstrate the uncertainty raised by the question.

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**Part 2**  
**Gender Dynamics**



# Mapping the Forms of Women's Activism and Leadership in Post-Uprising Arab Countries

Aitemad MUHANNA MATAR

## Abstract

This article is based on empirical field-based research conducted in five Arab countries (Egypt, Tunisia, Morocco, Yemen and the occupied Palestinian territory) in 2013.<sup>1</sup> The research aims to map the diverse spectrum of newly emerging forms of women's Activism and leadership in post-uprising countries and their effect on the process of gender transformation. Given the complex Islamist-secular identity divided context of women's political participation in post-uprising Arab countries, the research focuses on how the newly emerged young female leaders - ordinary educated women with no specific feminist consciousness or previous political involvement - succeeded to shape a new form of women's activism. The main argument of this research is that the newly emerged non-feminist women's leaders, especially those who represent Islamist parties and their conservative gender agendas, have the potential to re-signify their gender norms within the moral framework of Islamic tradition and to transform their political leadership into a new model of feminist leadership. This happens through women's discursive habituation of non-stereotypical gender roles and relations regardless of ideological framework or references.

## Introduction

Since the outset of the Arab Uprisings, women have actively engaged in the changing politics of their countries. Women in Tunisia, Yemen, Morocco and Egypt, amongst others, have contributed

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<sup>1</sup> This article is drawn upon data and analysis compiled through a regional research project implemented by the Middle East Centre (MEC) at London School of Economics and Political Sciences (LSE) in 2013. The project was jointly funded by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) and Oxfam. The views expressed in the report are solely the views of the author. The present article does not in any way represent the views of LSE, SIDA or Oxfam-GB. The findings presented should not be interpreted as SIDA, Oxfam, or its partners' position. Any errors are the responsibility of the author alone. This article is a revised version of a working paper published by the MEC in November 2014, available online at <http://www.lse.ac.uk/middleEastCentre/publications/Paper-Series/WomenActivismAMM.pdf>.

significantly through protests, demonstrations, lobbying and advocacy. Yet, women activists, and their voices and networks, remain fragile and divided due to an ostensibly Islamic-secular division of identity. Political polarisation and the resulting division between Islamic women's organisations and secular feminist organisations characterises post-uprisings transitions.

This is illustrated in the mutual suspicions between the key Islamic and secular political actors and the persistent tension between the two groups with regard to their different ideological interpretation of women's rights (between *sharī'a* and universal international laws). Both Islamist women and feminist activists, particularly the elites, enhance the binary between Islamic culture and feminism. They assume there is no way to reconcile universal feminist principles based on international laws with local religious and cultural values and practices that have historically been distorted and misinterpreted by dominant male religious and political authorities.<sup>2</sup>

However, the fragmented political context after the uprisings has witnessed the emergence of a new trend of women's activism that may be called a new wave of feminism. This has challenged the Islamic-feminist binary and the elitist character of the Arab feminist movement.<sup>3</sup> After the Arab uprisings, Muslim women have become widely engaged in grassroots youth and women's activism, advocating not only for their civil and political rights but also for the civil rights of all marginalised social groups. Both religious and non-religious young educated women have created a public space for communicating their ideas and beliefs and arguing and debating with other generations and the older political and feminist leadership to affirm their belonging to their community and nations.

The new trend of mass women's activism and leadership has challenged the Western and national secular feminist assumption that women are the biggest losers of the Arab uprisings because their political representation in formal politics has not met the international criteria of gender equality and also because of the essentialist feminist

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<sup>2</sup> M. Badran, *Feminism in Islam: Secular and Religious Convergences*, Oneworld, Oxford, 2009; and Z. Salime, *Between Feminism and Islam: Human Rights and Sharia Law in Morocco*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 2011.

<sup>3</sup> N. Sika - Y. Khodary, 'One Step Forward, Two Steps Back? Egyptian Women within the Confines of Authoritarianism', in *Journal of International Women's Studies* 13/5 (2012), pp. 91-100, <http://vc.bridgew.edu/jiws/vol13/iss5/9> (access 2/12/2016).

view that Islamist political parties' acquisition of power is the major threat to women's equal rights.<sup>4</sup> This assumption is arguably mistaken when we look comprehensively at the newly emerged map of women's and youth activism, beyond the singular normative liberal feminist view that restricts women's empowerment to women's representation in formal politics in accordance with universal international laws and through gender quotas. However, a gender quota, although a facilitating mechanism for women's political empowerment, also entails the risk of serving masculinised patriarchal political agendas, as happened with the previous Arab authoritarian regimes.<sup>5</sup>

Thus, the understanding of women as winners or losers of the Arab uprisings has to be defined not just on the basis of the immediate outcome of their political and civil engagement during transition periods, or of electoral results achieved through institutional alliances at formal political levels. It also has to be based on a nuanced understanding of the process and dynamics women develop and redevelop through experiencing political and social engagement and the reflection of these in the forms of power they gain. Being a loser or a winner is also determined by women's capacity to create and develop popular constituency to be the major source of legitimacy of their leadership and empowerment.<sup>6</sup> Otherwise, Arab women leaders (whether Islamist or liberal) will remain hostage to the patriarchal authoritarian political agendas and at risk of being instrumentalised to serve the interests of the State's political elites.

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<sup>4</sup> See the article in *France News*, 'Women among the Biggest Losers in Arab Spring', <http://www.france24.com/en/20131112-women-arab-uprising-violence-sexual-abuse-egypt-syria-saudi-arabia> (access 2/12/2016); also the article in *Qantara.de*, Commentary by Moha Ennaji 'Arab Women's Unfinished Revolution', <http://en.qantara.de/content/commentary-by-moha-ennaji-arab-womens-unfinished-revolution> (access 15/10/2015).

<sup>5</sup> K. Goulding, 'Unjustifiable Means to Unjustifiable Ends: Delegitimizing Parliamentary Gender Quotas in Tunisia', in *Al-Raida*, Issue 126-127 (2009), <http://www.alraidajournal.com/index.php/ALRJ/article/view/83/82> (access 2/12/2016); H. Seniguer, « Au Maroc, les Islamistes ont bien pour mission de relégitimer le roi », *Liberation Monde*, 2/12/2011, [http://www.liberation.fr/monde/2011/12/02/au-maroc-les-islamistes-ont-bien-pour-mission-de-relegitimer-le-roi\\_778844](http://www.liberation.fr/monde/2011/12/02/au-maroc-les-islamistes-ont-bien-pour-mission-de-relegitimer-le-roi_778844) (access 2/12/2016), translated by the project Moroccan researcher, Hanane Darhour, Sika, Nadine - Khodary, Yasmin, 'One Step Forward, Two Steps Back?'

<sup>6</sup> G. Waylen, *Engendering Transitions: Women's Mobilization, Institutions and Gender Outcomes*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2007.

This article aims to map the diverse range of women's activism and leadership in post Arab uprising countries. It also aims to understand how the process of women's political participation during and after the Arab uprisings creates opportunities for the emergence of new forms of women's activism that challenge the elitist ones. It examines how women learn and experience their gendered self differently reflecting on their own experiences and understanding of the local context. Through their involvement in the process of social and political change for different intersectional factors (religious, sectarian, territorial, socio-economic and others), women learn and develop their manoeuvring and leadership skills and become critical of the actuality of gender and gender relations in their society. The article also reflects on the new form of women's leadership and how it could contribute to redefining and re-strategizing women's activism and empowerment for the longer term effect of social and gender transformation in Arab countries.

This article draws on the analysis and findings of five empirical country-level reports conducted in Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen, Morocco and the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT) in 2013. While neither Morocco nor the OPT experienced an uprising, they provide case studies which complement the research by examining the effect of the Arab uprisings on the models of Moroccan and Palestinian women's activism and leadership. The country research adopted qualitative research methodology, generating in-depth diverse analysis using multiple qualitative methods, namely: workshops with policy and law makers; focus groups (FGs) with women's and human rights civil society organisations and Community Based Organisations (CBOs), as well as poor women from urban and rural communities; individual key informant interviews with representatives of government and non-government feminist organisations to cross-check and triangulate data and analysis; and semi-structured individual interviews with women and men representing the different political and women's actors who influence women's political participation and empowerment.

In each country surveyed, field work was conducted in two major sites and in each site two local rural and urban communities were studied. In the five countries studied, the research team managed to conduct FGs with: 474 poor women in poor urban and rural communities; 203 Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) and CBOs working on women's issues, development, human rights and youth matters – including CSOs working at either the national or local

levels; and 117 individual interviews with government and civil society representatives (including men and women). Five workshops were also held with policy- and law-makers in the different countries.

### **Emerging Forms of Women's Activism and Leadership in Post-Uprising Arab Countries**

Multiple forms of women's activism and leadership have emerged during the Arab uprisings; some forms are new, while others are older and more established. As a result of these engagements, many Arab women played a key role in the different political, youth, labour, development and religious societal entities that all struggled against authoritarian regimes and their oppressive economic policies and security systems. For scholar and activist Rabab El-Mahdi, the diversity of women's activism in post-uprising Arab countries challenges the hegemonic essentialist understanding of liberal feminism that sees itself as 'the one way to women's progress and betterment'. For El-Mahdi, a women's movement 'is not only determined as such through the sex of its constituency and participants, but also through its goals and declared consciousness'.<sup>7</sup> The diversity in Arab women's activism also challenges the Middle Eastern liberal feminism that presents Islam as particularly sexist and anti-feminist.<sup>8</sup>

Based on this understanding, this article will shed a light on the map of women's activism emerging in the five Arab countries studied, specifying the most influential forms of activism that women have undertaken through: well established feminist and Islamist women's organizations; political parties; community-based organisations; individual actions; and unregistered youth, women's, organised labour or professional initiatives. Regardless of the nature of the different politics driving women's activism, this difference arguably provides a fertile ground for various groups of women to create a wider space for civic engagement: by influencing, complementing and strengthening each other to achieve their specific goals and interests.

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<sup>7</sup> R. El-Mahdi, 'Does Political Islam Impede Gender-Based Mobilization? The Case of Egypt', in *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* 11/3-4 (2011), pp. 379-396, p. 380.

<sup>8</sup> S. Shaikh, 'Transforming Feminisms: Islam, Women, and Gender Justice', in O. Safi, *Progressive Muslims*, OneWorld, Oxford, 2003, pp. 147-162, p.148.

### **Old Established Women's Activism: The Feminist-Islamic Binary and the Question of Feminist Legitimacy**

Most old established feminist organizations in the studied countries view international law as the only reference for: protecting and safeguarding women's rights in the constitution and legislation for ensuring gender equitable representation of women in formal politics through gender electoral quotas; and for countering the threat of Islamisation and its conservative cultural heritage. At the same time, however, based on both the literature and empirical evidence, many Arab feminist organisations shared three major characteristic shortcomings, namely: elitism and failure to develop a public constituency; being misled by state feminism,<sup>9</sup> and driven by donor agencies' policies and agendas.<sup>10</sup>

The Islamist parties' rise to formal political power after the Arab uprisings appears to have prompted an awakening of old feminist organisations, which have been accused by local people of being radical secular and/or elitists opposed to religion. The field work in Tunisia and Morocco and to a lesser extent in Egypt and the OPT, shows that after the Arab uprisings feminist organisations are divided into two groups: radical and pragmatic feminists. The first group tend to focus on women's individual liberties and seeking full gender equality. These feminists make an appeal for a cultural revolution, explicitly identifying Arab and Islamic culture as the source of misogyny in the region. The latter group has developed its pragmatic feminist vision reflecting on the historical expansion of Islamic women's activism and they are more concerned about reconciling universal feminist principles with local cultural values and practices.

In Tunisia and Morocco, there are an increasing number of feminist activists who have developed a pragmatic feminist approach vis-à-vis religion and encouraged dialogue with moderate Islamist women.

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<sup>9</sup> B. Mhabeni, 'Arab Women/Arab Culture(s): Reflections on Feminist Multicultural Discourse in the Wake of Mona Eltahawy's "Why Do They Hate Us?"', in *Trans-Scripts* 3 (2013), pp. 242-258, [http://sites.uci.edu/transcripts/files/2014/10/2013\\_03\\_17.pdf](http://sites.uci.edu/transcripts/files/2014/10/2013_03_17.pdf) (access 2/12/2016); Sika - Khodary, 'One Step Forward, Two Steps Back?'; N. Al-Ali, *Women's Movements in the Middle East: Case Studies of Egypt and Turkey*, United Nations Research Institute for Social Development, Geneva, 2002, <http://eprints.soas.ac.uk/4889/> (access 2/12/2016).

<sup>10</sup> I. Jad, 'The NGO-isation of the Arab Women's Movement', in *IDS Bulletin* 35/ 4 (2004), pp. 34-42.

Against radical elitist feminist discourse in Tunisia, some AFTURD<sup>11</sup> board members have realised the importance of focusing on outreach to poor and rural women in interior marginalised regions and to build up popular constituencies with poor and rural women, rather than only focusing on legal reform pursuing the universality of women's rights.

Despite the disappointing constitutional reform process regarding women's rights in Egypt, feminist organisations' activism flourished following the Uprising. During the drafting of the new constitution in 2011-2012, a coalition of more than 70 secular and liberal organisations working on gender issues convened to struggle against the Islamist President's Constitution.<sup>12</sup> These organisations called for increased women's representation on both the National Council of Women and the constitution drafting committee. The coalition incorporated old and new women's rights' groups such as the Women and Memory Forum,<sup>13</sup> Nazra association, Fouada Watch, the National Front for Egypt's Women, and Baheya Ya Masr. These coalitions have managed to attract large number of ordinary women who participated in protests against the Morsi government for failing to protect women's rights. Baheya Ya Masr coalition for instance encompasses youth (men and women) from different backgrounds willing and capable of reaching out to various segments of society. Recognizing the increasing importance of Islamic groups in power,

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<sup>11</sup> AFTURD is the Association of Tunisian Women for Research and Development whose members were interviewed during the field research in Tunisia. AFTURD is one of the old leading liberal feminist organization that was established in 1998 and was involved in research and training activities, and advocacy and lobbying for legal reform on women's rights under Ben Ali's regime.

<sup>12</sup> The coalition was formed in the early days of the revolution and worked to formulate a united stand representing predominantly-secular feminist organizations in Egypt regarding various political developments. See, for example, the press release issued by the coalition against the National council of women and their refusal for its continuity: 'Coalition of Women's NGOs in Egypt: National Council of Women Doesn't Represent Egyptian Women - Call for Rapid Dissolution', Nazra for Feminist Studies (2011), available at <http://nazra.org/en/2013/07/exclusion-women-political-process-and-constitutional-declaration-should-be-treated>, (access 15 May 2014).

<sup>13</sup> Established in 1995, the Women and memory forum is a leading women's NGO. The Forum convened women's activists representing different women's groups, institutions and initiatives to discuss the draft constitution and to propose a new draft more consistent with international law. The working group included women's rights groups such as 'Come to write our Constitution'; and 'the Popular committee for writing the Constitution'.

Baheya members adopted a pragmatic feminist approach by showing interest in listening and debating with religious scholars about Sharia and women status and rights.

Despite the efficacy of advocacy and lobbying strategies by well-established feminist organisations and coalitions, particularly in Morocco and Tunisia, according to the narratives of large number of poor women interviewed, old feminist organisations in general still lack popular constituency amongst the masses of poor and rural women, particularly in remote regions, and their feminist language is still not relevant, as well as not understandable by poor uneducated women in rural areas. The work of most feminist organisations has remained concentrated in urban areas and targeting educated middle class women. Most old feminist organizations have failed to adapt their liberal feminist discourse into a relevant local discourse that resonates with the socio-economic, political and cultural context of masses of women.

Discussions and interviews with liberal feminists reveal that many still perceive themselves as the only legitimate feminist group, who genuinely defend women's equal rights based on the universal concept of gender equality. The rejection of some radical feminists to integrate religion and cultural specificity into their analysis of women's subordination and power relations has narrowed and reduced their feminist understanding to a singular notion of women's rights.<sup>14</sup> This is illustrated in the narrative of number of liberal feminists interviewed who advocate for full gender equality regardless of cultural specificity in Arab societies. For example, Saïda Bajjou, a Moroccan feminist at the YTTO Foundation, explained: 'today, the Constitution does not really guarantee women's full equality with men as it places the *sharī'a* above international conventions'. This conceptualisation progresses accordingly along a linear pathway of women's empowerment based on individual freedom and autonomy within the international universal framework.

On the contrary, before and after the uprisings, Islamist women managed to expand their political engagement in formal and informal politics; some have succeeded in articulating a moderate gender agenda and discourse that is complementary to the liberal feminist

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<sup>14</sup> Mhabeni, *Arab Women/Arab Culture(s)*.

discourse, which has become commonly called Islamic feminism.<sup>15</sup> Most importantly, they succeeded in generating a solid constituency in poor local communities. Islamic women's activism and community-based engagement appears as an important complement to liberal feminism's legislative reform project; in many cases, Islamic women's activism operates at a popular level and enjoys wider local legitimacy although both forms of activism are necessary for securing and protecting women's rights. Accordingly, Islamic women activists constitute key women players in enhancing women's political participation and empowerment. Except the case of Yemen which has not experienced secular-Islamist binary within established women's organizations, this binary exists and is reiterated discursively by and among radical liberal feminists and some conservative Islamist women's activists in Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt and the OPT, and in the process, each group homogenises the other. However, the field work for this study demonstrated that Islamist women leaders, particularly those represent moderate Islamist views, are more tolerant and subtle than radical feminists when it comes to discuss the possibilities of dialogue and negotiation, and to reconcile on common women's issues such as education, employment, child care and reproductive health.<sup>16</sup>

The difference between the various Islamist-secular feminist approaches is concentrated in framing the understanding of women's rights, development and empowerment. Islamist women leaders in Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt and the OPT emphasize the legitimacy of the women's empowerment approach comes out of a respect for the socio-cultural specificity of their countries, and by questioning and challenging the constructed socio-cultural specificities. On the other hand, secular liberal feminists generally consider universal human rights conventions and norms such as CEDAW as their source of legitimacy. Yet, there is no homogeneity among these two broad

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<sup>15</sup> Moderate Islamist women follow the discourse of Islamic feminism. This discourse pursues the liberation of Muslim women from the traditional patriarchal interpretation of the Qur'an. Islamic feminists believe that the women are an equal partner of men in society through a gender sensitive re-reading of the Quranic text. See more details in Badran, *Feminism in Islam*; and J. Crétois, 'Muslim Women Redefine Feminism', in *Al-Monitor*, 4/4/2013,

<http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/culture/2013/04/muslim-feminists-activism.html> (access 2/12/2016).

<sup>16</sup> Evidence of liberal feminists' intolerance is the unwillingness of radical feminists in parts of North Africa to even meet and be interviewed with Islamic feminists during the research process.

clusters, as each has both radical and pragmatic interpretations of women's rights.

Throughout discussions with Islamist women in the five countries, they clearly downplay the ideological debate on women's issues and prefer instead to be involved in more concrete action and voluntary work on the ground. Despite the limitation of the Islamist family centred approach in relation to controversial issues such as inheritance laws, public-domestic work, sexuality and family planning, the trend of pragmatism among moderate Islamist women leaders towards encouraging the interpretation of Islam gives a space for developing their approach to be more compatible to the universal women's rights. For example, with regard to one of the controversial issue of equal rights for women, a female representative of Ennahda Islamist party in Tunisia expressed a flexible view towards single mothers by saying:

Secular feminists think that we are against the protection of the rights of single mothers. This is not true. Our approach towards single mothers is that this social phenomenon is not a free choice taken by women...We need to work together to reduce this social problem by providing poor women with the material and technical resources they need to avoid them being vulnerable.

The feminist rejection to the Islamist women's discourse is obvious in Tunisia and Morocco more than in Egypt, Yemen and the OPT. However, more conciliatory feminist voices that encourage dialogue and cooperation between Islamist and liberal feminists are often faced with considerable ostracism by radical feminist actors who do not trust the Islamist political project. Nadia Abu-Nahla, a prominent liberal feminist leader in the OPT shared the same view with her counterpart liberal feminists in Tunisia, Morocco and Egypt that: 'There is no way to work together, we don't agree on the basics'. Moderate or pragmatic feminists on the other hand encourage dialogue with moderate Islamist women considering religion as an important element for strategizing women's struggle for their rights. Radia Belhaj Zekri, former president of AFTURD in Tunisia, for instance stated:

Tunisian progressive feminists should deal with religion in a resilient and tactical way, as a sign of respect to Tunisian society. We need to encourage the reinterpretation of religion, to avoid leaving the Islamists to manipulate the field of religious interpretation.

Islamist women's leaders in Morocco and Tunisia consider the lack of dialogue between Islamist and secular liberal women, coupled with the unfamiliarity of secular liberal feminists with Islamist women's perspectives and actions on women's rights and empowerment, as the only reason for such disparity.

The analysis of the various narratives of both Islamist women and liberal feminists provokes a middle ground understanding based on the experiences of Islamic and non-Islamic women's activism for their rights. Following the concept of 'plural autonomy' used by Monica Mookherjee (2009),<sup>17</sup> Arab women may autonomously utilize diverse forms of agency (including non-liberal ones) based on their position vis-à-vis cultural structures. Individual women do not only act their agency according to liberal standards of self-interest and reason, but they are also motivated by the desire to attain certain cultural identity that enhances their agency and positionality within their cultural context. Within this understanding of how the agency of women is multiply constitutionalised, both Islamist and liberal feminists can find a way to avoid Islamic-feminist binary and find a common ground to reconcile between universal rights and cultural specificity.

## **The Newly Emerged Forms of Women's Activism**

### ***Emergence of young 'ordinary' women's leaders***

Against the mainstream Islamist-feminist binary at macro political level, large numbers of young 'ordinary' women, defining themselves neither as 'Islamists' nor 'secularists' or 'feminists' but as 'activists', have participated in changing the politics of their countries. They have become conscious and enthusiastic about the meaning and the practice of democracy and citizenship and they have become involved in civil society organisations, political parties and popular protests. 'Ordinary' women are defined as those women who had no knowledge or institutional experience of feminism and had also not been involved in politics prior to the uprisings. They are neither influenced by the feminist discourses used by the old established liberal and socialist feminist non-government organisations, nor by state-sponsored feminism, which is narrowly linked to serving the autocratic authoritarian regimes. By contrast, the 'ordinary' women interviewed,

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<sup>17</sup> M. Mookherjee, 'Plural Autonomy - Force, Endorsement and Cultural Diversity', in M. Mookherjee, *Women's Rights as Multicultural Claims: Reconfiguring Gender and Diversity in Political Philosophy*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 2009, pp. 61-95.

including educated, uneducated, rural, urban, poor and middle class, expressed that they were excluded by the two groups.

‘Ordinary’ women include those who had suffered daily from their state’s neoliberal economic policies and oppressive police and security sectors. From the early days of the uprisings, particularly in Tunisia, Egypt, Morocco and Yemen, these women acted voluntarily as political agents aiming to change the politics of their countries. They organised collective actions, but not necessarily on the basis of ‘feminist’ values, or through advocating for women’s rights. Their demands went beyond gender (albeit they may affect women and men differently) and included political reform, defence of human rights and freedoms, advocacy of religious and ethnic communal rights and demands for improving working conditions. According to Diane Singerman, ordinary people, particularly young women and men, revolted against neoliberalism and corruption ‘that transcends national boundaries and links young people and other activists, cross-nationally’.<sup>18</sup>

The Arab uprisings created public spaces where those ordinary women had access to newer and wider audiences who welcomed their voices. In Yemen, a traditional tribal society, one of the biggest surprises of the peaceful protests that swept the country in 2011 was the visibility and participation of women.<sup>19</sup> The research in Yemen found that women see their participation as part of a wider struggle against broader systems of oppression and in support of justice and equality for all Yemeni citizens. Issues of livelihood and insecurity emerged at the top of their agendas, along with the poor state of the economy, unemployment, inflation and the lack of basic social services, such as health care and education.

Wardah Al-Hashdi, a woman in her early thirties, is strong example of how the Yemeni uprising has produced new women’s leaders. Al-

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<sup>18</sup> D. Singerman, ‘Youth, Gender, and Dignity in the Egyptian Uprising’, in *Journal of Middle East Women Studies* 9/3 (2013), pp. 1-27, p. 4.

<sup>19</sup> See ‘Strong Voices: Yemeni Women’s Political Participation from Protest to Transition’, Saferworld Report, May 2012, <http://www.gaps-uk.org/docs/Strong-Voices-Yemen.pdf> (access 17/11/2014). Estimates suggest that of the protestors in Yemen, 30% were women; also see Hakim Almasmari and Mohammed Jamjoom in ‘Women march in Yemen’s capital’, CNN (17/10/2011), <http://edition.cnn.com/2011/10/17/world/meast/yemen-unrest/index.html?iref=allsearch> (access 2/12/2016).

Hashdi is from a tribal family and participated in the uprising by providing first aid to injured protestors. She said:

I was a housewife before but I had to go out and help injured youth because it is safer for me as a woman, in Yemeni culture that respects the presence of women in the conflict areas.<sup>20</sup>

Today she is one of the leaders of the Raqeeb organization for human rights and her life has completely changed. A reflection of the new model of women's activism and leadership was also illustrated in Hajja Governorate, a northern mountainous area near Sana'a. A highly unusual incident occurred when a group of rural uneducated women decided to block the main road to protest against frequent fighting and the widespread availability of guns amongst the rivals, Houthis and Islah groups.

In Egypt, the blogger Asmaa Mahfouz became a key figure in 6 April Youth Movement, which has played an important role in shaping Egyptian politics. She re-interpreted the culture of patriarchy - honour and manhood - to encourage Egyptian men to join her in protests against dictatorship. She defended her right to protest, saying:

If you consider yourself a man, come with me on 25<sup>th</sup> January. Instead of saying that women should not come, because they will be beaten, let's show a bit of honour, be men, come with me on 25<sup>th</sup> January.<sup>21</sup>

Mahfouz was also one of the founders of a group called Egypt's Coalition of the Youth of the Revolution in June 2012. This is one of a large number of coalitions that were initiated and led by ordinary Egyptian women, religious and non-religious, who had no public profile before the uprisings.

In addition, women's collective actions against sexual harassment in Egypt, Yemen, Tunisia and Morocco are good examples of how women contributed to awakening women's consciousness of their gender and sexuality, and their advocacy against exclusion from the public sphere. For example, 'Shoft Taharoush' (observe sexual harassment) is a women's coalition initiated by young women in

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<sup>20</sup> An interview conducted by Wameedh Shakir, the Yemen country researcher in June, 2013.

<sup>21</sup> The YouTube video of Asma Mahfouz is available at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SgjIgMdsEuk> (access 7/9/2014).

Egypt. It organised several sit-ins protesting against sexual assault in Tahrir Square. Samira Ibrahim<sup>22</sup> is a good example of an ordinary woman who resisted victimisation by the military dictatorship and acted as a publically recognised leader without labelling herself ‘feminist’. Samira Ibrahim raised a court case against the Virginity Test (VT) imposed by the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF). She advocated against the VT not in the name of freedom of sexuality from a western feminist perspective, but as a refusal to be subjected to a test imposed by dictators that violates her authentic social norms and tradition. In Morocco, female teenagers, who were not been involved in feminist movement before the uprisings, have initiated an adapted Moroccan version of the Canadian slut-walk, called ‘Woman *Choufouch*’ (You don’t see). The walk fights sexual harassment against women and draws attention to the daily hardships women experience in the Moroccan public space.<sup>23</sup>

Other examples of women’s activism from Tunisia should also be cited. Five ordinary women participated in a focus group conducted in Douar Heisher, a poor neighbourhood in Tunis.<sup>24</sup> These women used to be inactive members of the main Tunisian General labour union, the *Union Générale Tunisienne du Travail* (UGTT). Since the Tunisian revolution, these women assert that they have become widely engaged in the organised protests and demonstrations led by the UGTT, as well as being involved in organising and mobilising political and human rights campaigns led by the UGTT. Their engagement in the protests allowed them to realise their influential role in changing the gender politics of society institutions. Women in the UGTT started to advocate for gender quotas within the union hierarchy. A woman teacher from Tunis and active union member for years noted:

The Tunisian uprising has woken us up to our leadership position within the union. We are the ones who mobilise the workers and do

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<sup>22</sup> See Samira Ibrahim’s story of her struggle against the virginity test, available in this link: <http://www.globalpost.com/dispatch/news/regions/middle-east/egypt/120731/samira-ibrahim-virginity-test-freedom-fighting> (access 2/12/2016).

<sup>23</sup> See M. Lahdidi, *Woman Choufouch, une marche contre le harcèlement sexuel dans nos rues* (2012), <http://www.maghress.com/fr/albayane/12258> (access 15/12/2013).

<sup>24</sup> A focus group organized and facilitated by the author in Douar Heisher, a poor neighbourhood in Tunis, the capital, in 17/4/2013.

everything on the ground, but when it comes to political decisions, we are ignored.

An unemployed woman from Douar Heisher, who became an active member of the union after the uprising, said:

I was only registered in the union to find a job. Now I have become so active. So, the union opened a door for me to be involved in other organisations and to create a very good network with other activists in youth and women's groups.

Through these different forms of public participation, Arab women learnt how to construct the meaning of citizenship, and as a result to construct their gender identity and status. This cannot be fulfilled without the protection of their socio-economic and political rights. Through women's intensive participation in protests and demonstrations, ordinary women explored, discovered and experienced the power of their new voices and influence in their countries' politics. They enjoyed their influential role in everyday life encounters. According to the many young women interviewed for this project, through their participation in protests they gained greater moral and social respect from their male partners, colleagues and family members, without publically advocating to transgressing existing gender norms. These individual and collective actions undertaken by women with no prior normative feminist consciousness have encouraged them to question existing gender norms, whether by resisting, or by redefining and re-signifying them in a way that restore their sense of human dignity.<sup>25</sup>

### ***Non-feminist women's leadership in political parties and the dynamics of power manoeuvring***

Arab women have also increased their role in political parties, particularly Islamist parties. The field research in the various countries shows that both moderate and radical Islamist parties have efficiently facilitated the political participation of their female members, especially in rural and poor communities. This is for several reasons.

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<sup>25</sup> N. Pratt, 'Egyptian Women: Between Revolution, Counter-Revolution, Orientalism, and "Authenticity"', in *Jadaliyya*, 6/5/2013, available at [http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/11559/egyptian-women\\_between-revolutioncounter-revoluti](http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/11559/egyptian-women_between-revolutioncounter-revoluti) (access 2/11/2016).

First, not unlike the previous secular ruling parties, moderate Islamist parties such as Ennahda in Tunisia, the Justice and Development Party (PJD) in Morocco, and to a lesser extent, the Islah party in Yemen, Hamas in the OPT and the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, were keen to gain international legitimacy for their moderate Islamist discourse used by their secular counterparts.<sup>26</sup> Second, these parties have historically relied on women to mobilise local communities, to generate a public constituency and more recently, to mobilise voters during elections – all of which enabled them to come into political power.<sup>27</sup> Third, the governing Islamist parties in Morocco, Tunisia and Yemen have encouraged women’s political participation as a means to strategise their disputes with both secular and radical Salafi opponents. Research in Yemen found that the conservative opposition Shi’a Houthi movement is more active in instrumentalising their women’s participation in public protests than the leftist Yemen Socialist Party (YSP). That being said, this strategy used by both the Houthis and the Islah party in Yemen does not necessarily mean that they support equal rights for women. Rather, the two conflicting Islamist groups recruited women to publicly advocate for their political agendas. In Tunisia, Ennahda has also encouraged many women members to work in local communities to teach people about moderate interpretations of Islam and undermine the political power of radical Islamists.

With the acknowledgment that women were instrumentalised by the political parties in general and by Islamist parties in particular,<sup>28</sup> this instrumental dynamic of women’s engagements in political parties has opened an opportunity for some individual women’s activists to be critical of the conservatism of their political parties, especially with regard to women’s rights. Nawal al-Kebsi, a Houthi supporter, noted

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<sup>26</sup> M. Mohanad - Y. Ayman, ‘The Interaction of Political Islam with Democracy: The Political Platform of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt as a Case Study’, in *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science* 3/11(2013), pp. 144-154.

<sup>27</sup> P. E. Pruzan-Jørgensen, ‘Islamic Women’s Activism in the Arab World’, *DIIS*, February, 2012, available at [http://subweb.diis.dk/graphics/Publications/Policybriefs2012/PB-Islamic-Womens-Activism\\_web.pdf](http://subweb.diis.dk/graphics/Publications/Policybriefs2012/PB-Islamic-Womens-Activism_web.pdf) (access 2/12/2016).

<sup>28</sup> F. S. Kassem, ‘A Cup Half-Full or Half-Empty: Is a “Women’s Spring” Inevitable in Democratic Transitions?’, in *Is the Arab Awakening Marginalising Women?*, Middle East Program Occasional Paper Series, Wilson Center, Summer 2012, available at

[http://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/-Arab%20Awakening%20Marginalizing%20Women\\_0.pdf](http://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/-Arab%20Awakening%20Marginalizing%20Women_0.pdf) (access 2/12/2016).

that most of the Houthi leaders are socially conservative towards women's political participation and activism. A similar situation applies to Islah women representatives who also affirmed that conservative views against women are due to certain religious leaders who affect the institutional decisions of the party.

However, women's relative positions of power within the different Islamist political parties vary. Interviews with Islamist women's leaders in Ennahda and the PJD, and to a lesser extent in Hamas, reveal that they relied on their male political leadership to manoeuvre for power and to negotiate on gender- and non-gender-related issues. Although Islamist women interviewed refuse to call themselves feminists, many of them use the women's human rights discourse similar to their feminist counterparts. A woman's leader in the PJD said,

We avoid conflicts by initiating dialogue. We agree on common things. We fight for women's rights and dignity. We call for their equal access to decision-making positions, and we combat all forms of violence and discrimination against women.<sup>29</sup>

Yemen's case differs slightly. Women Islah members have prioritised their loyalty to the Islah party over any other institution they are involved in. Nabila Saeed, Islah's media officer, defends the importance of her party for achieving her political goals. She views her party as the only institution within the Yemeni political and tribal context that provides her with social security and also encourages her to have access to power dynamics and political leadership. Islamist women's leaders such as Saeed, living in a predominantly tribal and patriarchal society and culture, bargain with patriarchal structures to achieve their goal of generating their public constituency and representation in local communities.

The trajectory of women's activism in post-uprising countries has been largely influenced by the changing political context of post-uprising Arab countries and by the changing regional political alliances.<sup>30</sup> Women's leaders in political parties (both Islamist and secular) have tended to reshape their political and social alliances to

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<sup>29</sup> An interview conducted with Aicha Kendsi (a representative of the PJD) by the Morocco country researcher, Hanan Darhour, in 22/04/2013.

<sup>30</sup> L. Khatib - A. Lust (eds.), *Taking to the Streets: The Transformation of Arab Activism*, John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 2014.

remain in power. Examples include the Islamist women's leaders representing the PJD alliance with the Monarchy in Morocco<sup>31</sup> and the alliance which some liberal feminists made with the military in Egypt.<sup>32</sup> In most of the studied countries, these alliances have been enacted at the expense of consolidating an independent women or feminist agenda and voices based on building public constituency among women's masses. However, the example of Egyptian liberal feminists' alliances with masculinised political forces raises a fundamental and critical question: on what political, economic and social basis should women shape their political alliances and strategize their struggle for their rights?

Bargaining with patriarchy may be a necessary strategy during the process of women's empowerment in a certain context. However, the legitimacy of this strategy is only proven when women leaders, whether secular or Islamist, demonstrate their political willingness and capacity for power manoeuvring to dismantle such tribal and patriarchal structures, and to act as representatives of the masses of women rather than the political masculinised elites. Women's popular constituency is the major source of legitimacy for women's political participation and representation both at national and local levels. It is this constituency that gives women actual power for political manoeuvring with and within state institutions.<sup>33</sup> Otherwise, Arab women (whether Islamist or liberal) will reproduce their previous experience of state feminism and will remain under the control of the authoritarian masculinized agendas of political elite.

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<sup>31</sup> M. Musbah, 'Islamist and Secular Forces in Morocco: Not a Zero-Sum Game', in *Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (SWP) comments 51*, November 2014, [https://www.swp-berlin.org/fileadmin/contents/products/comments/2014C51\\_msb.pdf](https://www.swp-berlin.org/fileadmin/contents/products/comments/2014C51_msb.pdf) (access 12/12/2014).

<sup>32</sup> S. Abdel Kouddous, 'What Happened to Egypt's Liberals After the Coup?', in *The Nation*, 1/10/2013, <http://www.thenation.com/article/176445/what-happened-egypts-liberals-after-coup#>; J. Traub, 'The Liberal Dark Side: Why Rationalizing Egypt's Coup as a Necessary Evil is so Self-Destructive', in *Foreign Policy*, 9 August 2013,

[http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles-/2013/08/09/the\\_liberal\\_dark\\_side\\_egypt\\_morsy](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles-/2013/08/09/the_liberal_dark_side_egypt_morsy) (access 2/12/2016).

<sup>33</sup> Waylen, *Engendering Transitions*.

***Women's and youth community-based activism challenges old elitist feminism***

As the political spaces opened up for civil society during the Arab uprisings,<sup>34</sup> middle-aged educated women and educated youth were among the first social groups to establish community based organisations (CBOs) aimed at providing emergency material services, as well as awareness raising for poor women and unemployed youth living in marginalised slums, neighbourhoods and rural areas. In contrast to some old feminist organisations working at the national level, the major concern of the newly emerged community-based organisations is to focus on and represent the socio-economic problems and needs of poor women and families and to build up the capacity of marginalised groups to manage their livelihood. Activists in these organisations rarely describe issues of legal reform and representation in macro-politics as priorities.

Another interesting finding related to recently-emerged CBOs is that few of them are registered as women's organisations. They are led by educated middle-aged women, young women and men and the major focus of their work is poor families and unemployed youth. There are two explanations for this. First, middle-aged religious educated women were involved in charity-based activities before the uprisings. They then exploited the civic freedom of the uprisings to establish their charity-based organisations, as witnessed in Tunisia, Egypt and Yemen. Second, new youth leaders embrace the transferring of the collective sense of activism from the protests to local communities, where concrete forms of activism can be more visible and recognised.

Many youths in Tunisia, Egypt, the OPT and Yemen have managed to move beyond ideological, political and gender disparities to focus on issues of unemployment, poverty and insecurity and social disintegration. A young female representative of a CBO from the West Bank emphasised that women's CBOs are more cooperative with each other and they are less influenced by political and ideological division between Hamas and Fatah than the big women's NGOs, Islamist and secular feminist alike, working at the national level. For her, CBOs' work requires field activities and daily interaction with poor women and their actual needs.

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<sup>34</sup> Khatib - Lust, *Taking to the Streets*.

The majority of the newly emerged CBOs lack institutional and human capacity and work on an *ad hoc* basis, reflecting the desire and willingness to voluntarily serve their local people and community. Nevertheless, CBOs have not escaped from the influence of key Islamist and secular political players whether discursively or on their work. Therefore, CBOs are also polarised, reflecting the broader national political and ideological polarisation. They may be grouped into two major clusters: the majority are charitable, faith-based associations affiliated to Islamist political parties and/or movements; the others are development and youth CBOs that belong to secular political parties, or old feminist and human rights organisations. However, the second group appears less concerned about ideological labelling than the first group.

Despite their different political affiliations, the two groups of CBOs work in multiple development sectors such as education, environment, health, cultural activities, vocational training and job creation in addition to humanitarian assistance. Few, particularly those that have relationship with old well established feminist organisations, or leftist political parties, work on advocacy, lobbying or awareness-raising of women's rights. The majority of newly-emerged CBOs in the five countries surveyed are led by local women and men, who draw on their familial, tribal and political networks in local communities to generate resources to operate their CBOs.

Due to the persistence of centralised models of local governance, CBOs, and particularly their youth leaders, are excluded from decision- and policy-making processes and positions by both national and local governance institutions and political parties, and are rarely consulted in policy development or planning processes. Some Yemeni and Tunisian women community activists intimated that CBOs' lack of financial and institutional capacity has forced some community leaders to jeopardise their institutional autonomy by linking up with political or tribal community leaders to gain material support for the continued operation of their small associations. One woman who chaired a newly emerged CBO in Tunis said: 'All these CBOs that you found operating properly and they provide material support to poor people, they are supported by political parties in order to be their mobilising arm in local communities'.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> An interview conducted by the author in 7 May 2013 with Dura, the director of MA'AN organisation based in Tunis.

Within the prolonged context of insecurity, particularly in the OPT and Yemen, for young women's activists working in CBOs, being affiliated to political parties provides them with a source of legitimacy and security, although it undermines their effective participation, autonomy and empowerment. A female community activist from Gaza said: 'We can't avoid political party frameworks – anything we do should be done within a certain political framework. If we start any initiative as non-partisan, it will end up under a political party in one way or another'.<sup>36</sup> In Yemen, lack of access to influential institutional tools, social insecurity, political conflict, and the exclusive tribal culture in political parties have all had a devastating effect on women-focused CBOs. Because of this, these organizations have failed to remain independent and establish their own civil institutional performance and professional careers.

The field research shows that some CBOs which managed to secure funding from donor agencies or large feminist and development NGOs, have become more concerned about professionalizing their organizations, (i.e. searching for funding to recruit professional staff and develop institutional structure and network with donor agencies), than working voluntarily in and with poor communities. This trend among newly emerged CBOs in post uprising countries, is similar to the history of CBOs in the OPT, entails the risk of NGOization of CBOs,<sup>37</sup> which undermines the voluntary and representational spirit of youth activists, and reproduces the elitist discourse of development and women's empowerment.

Despite the criticism of some Islamist women's community activists of their political parties, they prefer to keep their CBOs connected to the Islamist parties in order to legitimise their social interventions in local communities. Abeer Abdulrahman, a member of the *Iṣlāḥ Shūrā* Council in Aden, claimed that: 'Women's CBOs are affected by the agendas of various political forces, either Islamist or secular'. Najla Al Houthi, a leading member of the Houthi group,

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<sup>36</sup> A quotation selected from a focus group with women's activists in Gaza and facilitated by Maisa Shquir in April 2013.

<sup>37</sup> NGOization in the Palestinian context refers to focusing on professionalising women's institutions to meet the institutional requirements of donors, which limits the influence of women's institutions at the local level. *Islah Jad* (2004) argues that NGOization limits the struggle for national causes to projects geared to priorities established by international actors and fragments the accumulation of forces for social change.

admitted that Houthi CBOs are established to serve the political agenda of the Houthi movement. Nevertheless, these women argue that for women community activists to be affiliated to political parties provides them with greater space to work in local communities, generating social recognition for their work.

This is, however, a subtle strategy used by Islamist women to mobilise for the political agendas of their political parties. As stated by some of the interviewees in Yemen, this strategy gives women a wider space to challenge the societal patriarchal and tribal gender norms, and create an opportunity to help women to improve their education, work and reproductive health, and to fight against domestic violence and early marriage. For example, Nabila Saeed of the Islah Party in Yemen, and president of a newly emergent women's CBO called *Fikrah* (thought), declared that after the 2011 revolution tribal sheikhs contacted her and other women leaders to discuss political issues.

In the OPT, Tunisia and Egypt, some respondents indicated that their CBOs act merely as implementers of development projects and programmes for big women's NGOs that are neither designed by them, nor represent the prioritised needs and issues of their local communities. However, these larger national organisations, Islamist and feminist, are often the only material funding sources available to CBOs to operate in the local communities. Although CBOs in Morocco face the same institutional problems, the fieldwork shows that some of them have developed a different experience. In a focus group discussion conducted with representatives of newly emerged CBOs in the Sidi Mamoun neighborhood of Casablanca,<sup>38</sup> women leaders talked about the experience of the newly established coalition of the women's associations of Sidi Mamoun. One said:

The coalition helps us a lot in this respect (means securing funding and institutional management) because we'll be able to do training together and learn from each other on many levels. This is how we keep our sisterly relations.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Sidi Moumen is one of the research sites and it is an urban suburb located in northeast Casablanca.

<sup>39</sup> This Focus Group was conducted in Sidi Mamoun-Casablanca in 26 April 2013 and it was facilitated by the Morocco country researcher, Hanan Darhour.

Through this coalition, local CBO women activists plan to get the necessary support and training through sharing their experiences together.

***Unregistered politically independent youth and women's community initiatives***

Beyond the formally-registered Islamist and non-Islamist CBOs affiliated to various national parties and institutions, a small number of youth and women's groups and initiatives emerged which are opposed to the widespread political polarization of society institutions. These groups and initiatives focus on the actual socio-economic problems of their local communities. The fieldwork found that this is attractive to many young women and men, who are fed up with the Islamist-secular polarization and its socially fragmenting effects.

This form of activism relies on the individual capacities, commitments and contributions of group members, as well as some donations from local people. It purposely avoids relying on actors and resources from beyond the community, and hence, the activists think that this form of activism is the most sustainable because it relies on the community's existing financial, human and institutional capacities to organize collective actions. However, in really poor, isolated neighborhoods and communities, the resources which can be mobilized may be quite scarce – so, the capacity to provide large-scale services to many people is severely limited.

These community-based initiatives tend to be grounded in a moderate Islamist, or moderate secular, mindset and they avoid factional politics and religion in their civic work. Youth initiatives such as 'Young leadership entrepreneurs' in Tunisia and the '15<sup>th</sup> March: Youth against Division' movement in the OPT are important examples of young men and women exercising their agency in a critical and constructive manner by resisting the fragmentation, polarisation and elitism fuelled by the traditional political parties and big feminist and human rights organisations.

These youth activists are critical of sex-segregated forms of women's activism and they asserted during the fieldwork that they prefer working with youth and development organisations than in separate women's organisations, where they have common issues of concern. Young men and women are also critical of the generational gap between older political and women's organisations and youth and the centralised form of leadership. Ahlam of the 'Young Leadership Entrepreneurs' in Tunisia noted:

Old feminist organisations do not create a new generation of leaders who may threaten their power. These organizations are led by old feminists who have a strong network with the international world, but they still do not know how to give us, young men and women, a space to learn and to develop our skills of leadership.<sup>40</sup>

A Palestinian female member of the 15<sup>th</sup> March initiative said: ‘We should have a youth quota... to guarantee our right to political participation’. Another Palestinian woman activist criticised political parties: ‘Old political leaders are the ones who taught youth intolerance... in order for them to remain in power at the expense of our actual needs and problems’.<sup>41</sup>

Another unregistered community initiative led by middle-aged women comes from Egypt. Um Ziad belongs to a group of middle aged religious women activists who initiated a community-based project in Saft Laban, a poor neighbourhood in Cairo. She was motivated by her religiosity to serve her local community. She had suggested collecting an Egyptian pound each day from small shops for repainting the school walls. Men were responsible for distributing plastic bags to households and gathering cans and plastics for recycling; the money generated from the sale of the recycled materials was used to rebuild local community infrastructure. Also, sexual harassment of women has become increasingly worrying and disturbing in post-uprising Egypt. In the same area of Saft Laban, an initiative was developed by local women to fight against sexual harassment through religious education. Middle-aged religious women talked to teenagers and educated them about how to use the moral virtues of Islam to confront such disrespectful practices against women.

As the field research in these five countries indicates, the traditional political parties and the large organisations, whether Islamist or secular, fail to provide a constructive, conducive atmosphere or leadership for aspiring men, women and youth who are interested in becoming more politically engaged and often tired of divisive identity politics that fragments their society. As a result, these

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<sup>40</sup> A Skype interview conducted between the Tunisian researcher and Ahlam on 29 April 2013.

<sup>41</sup> These quotations are selected from the participants of a focus group conducted with youth activists in Gaza City on 7 April 2013 by Palestine Country researcher, Maisa Shquir.

activists seek out and create other more politically constructive spaces and initiatives in their own communities where their efforts can counter polarisation, fragmentation and exclusion. In so doing, they learn to mobilise local resources, work with others, develop, practise and shape more accountable and representative forms of leadership while contributing to their own community's development.

### **Re-Defining and Re-Strategizing Women's Leadership and Empowerment**

The Arab uprisings' new forms of women's activism and leadership challenge the essentialist feminist argument that women's activism and leadership has to be framed within a common united goal of gender equitable social transformation.<sup>42</sup> I argue that mobilising women's leadership in the specific context of post-uprising Arab countries may need to go beyond the normative ideological framing of feminist leadership because there are large numbers of women's activists who consciously and freely prefer to practise their leadership beyond the standardised criterion of feminism that is confined to the goal of gender equality. Some Islamist women's leaders rely on their religion as a source of reference to struggle against all forms of aggression and violence that dehumanize women.

Within the political, religious, sectarian and territorial divisions in the post-uprisings context, the process of women's political participation creates opportunities for women activists to challenge stereotypical gender performance. They learn and experience their gendered self differently, and as a result, they adapt the performance of their gender to respond to the changing context. Many young Muslim women activists in the countries studied have demonstrated a high capacity to create their own understanding and enactment, and to act autonomously and critically. Some young women's leaders learn feminism through their experience of political and social activism. This involves understanding the local context and its diversity and reflecting on their actual exercise of political agency, where they can meet their interest and desire for social and political recognition in the local community and/or at the national level. In this context, women's leaders freely and willingly shape the gender goals behind their

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<sup>42</sup> S. Batliwala, 'Feminist Leadership for Social Transformation: Clearing the Conceptual Cloud', in *CREA-Creating Resources for Empowerment in Action*, <http://web.crea-world.org/files/fl.pdf> (access 15/12/2015).

activism and leadership through their everyday experience, whether they believe in gender equality as an ultimate goal of their exercise of agency or not.

The research also reveals that the legitimacy of any women's empowerment or feminist discourse must be based on how poor women think of their rights, empowerment and leadership. Interviews with poor women show that they understood their equal rights as inseparable from the socio-economic context and in connection to their socio-economic well-being, as stated by poor women is 'to live in dignity and earn enough money for decent living'. They actually linked their individual rights to rights available to men and other members of the family, which make poor women more attracted to the Islamist women's discourse. These gender relational dynamics that poor women prioritize should be of major concern to all women's organizations, secularist and Islamist – provided that their discourse and strategies of women's empowerment be responsive to poor women's preferences and gender dynamics in their day-to-day life.

The contextual understanding of women's empowerment and leadership revealed in this empirical research appears inconsistent with the normative feminist understanding of leadership that draws upon a particular political standpoint, which basically aims to challenge patriarchy. Feminist leadership is concerned about achieving gender equality and justice, and it requires leaders 'to undergo a process of personal transformation, consciousness-raising, and internalization of feminism'.<sup>43</sup> Yet, in the context of post-uprising countries, internalising feminism is not necessarily a condition for women's exercise of their agency and leadership, and for building their capacity to make social and political change.

However, feminist leadership is possibly achieved as an outcome of non-feminist women's activists' habituation or performance of non-stereotypical gender roles that are situationally encouraged and recognised by the public at a certain time and in a certain place. Some other women's leaders may also choose freely to exercise their leadership to advocate for 'authentic' gender symbolism (norms), which are morally defined against 'western' gender norms.<sup>44</sup> As revealed in this research, non-feminist leaders, such as Islamist

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<sup>43</sup> P. Antrobus, 'Transformational Leadership: Advancing the Agenda for Gender Justice', in *Gender and Development* 8/3 (2000), pp. 50-56, p.52.

<sup>44</sup> Pratt, 'Egyptian Women'.

women activists, as well as ordinary women practice non-stereotypical gender norms and act equally with men in several domains for the purpose of mobilizing Islamist or traditionalist ideology, or meeting their personal goals, that do not call for gender equality. According to Judith Butler this is 'a dynamic used by agents to legitimize the authority of a certain ideology'.<sup>45</sup> Although the performance of non-feminist leaders does not operate within Butler's post-structural framing of resistance against patriarchy, it successfully contributes to redefining and re-signifying gender norms within the moral framework of Islamic tradition, as Muslim women consider religion and tradition an important source of their empowerment.<sup>46</sup>

The Arab uprisings have taught us that non-feminist women's leaders have the potential to transform their political leadership. Women's practice of power manoeuvring within patriarchal and tribal society institutions has succeeded in constructing new gender practices (roles and relations) that challenge the social and political exclusion and marginalisation of women. By focusing exclusively on feminist leaders, and on more experienced feminist organisations, one risks missing the opportunity of working and building relations with these equally important non-feminist women leaders and fostering a better and more localised meaning of feminist leadership and empowerment.

The broad spectrum of women's organizations (faith-based or secular), except few of radical elitist feminist groups, agrees on the priority of working with and for poor, illiterate and rural women to end poverty and socio-economic marginalization. This consensus provides an important opportunity for re-framing the approach to women's empowerment. The full spectrum of women's organizations needs to develop a holistic approach where women's individual socio-economic, civil and political rights are not perceived as separate from the rights of men, children and the elderly within households, local communities or at the national level. Focusing exclusively on women's rights in an isolated manner leads to decontextualizing the process of women's empowerment and failing to shape interventions that are responsive to local women's preferences and dynamics of action in their day-to-day lives.

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<sup>45</sup> J. Butler, *Undoing Gender*, Routledge, New York, 2004, p. 42.

<sup>46</sup> L. McNay, *Gender and Agency: Reconfiguring the Subject in Feminist and Social Theory*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 2000.

## **Conclusion**

While the various post-uprising Arab political contexts required women to change the regular performance of gender norms and to act differently (for specific contextual political reasons), the new performance of gender has the potential to transgress social and cultural norms within male dominated political parties and other tribal and patriarchal societal institutions. This is illustrated in the repetition of the non-stereotypical gender practices and the knowledge and capacity women acquire throughout their social and political engagement in the public domain. Yet it remains to be seen whether the new generation of youth and women activists will manage to continue their organizing and mobilizing efforts and build a genuine, organic women's movement which better responds to women's lived realities and their actual socio-economic problems and needs. However, the real danger is that the new trend of women activism and leadership is easily coopted and instrumentalized by the larger political actors and state elites.

In the specific context of post-uprising Arab countries, I argue that to effectively recognise and build women's leadership capacity and an independent women's agenda, one needs to move beyond the normative measures of feminist leadership and to focus on the actual experiences and dynamics of activism undertaken by women to gain social and political recognition, both in formal and informal politics. This approach has the potential to provide a wider space for newly emerged women's leaders to become critical of their individual gender histories and their ideological/political orientations. This approach also enables women to resist patriarchal gender norms from within tribal and male dominated political institutions to meet their interests of power and desires for being socially and politically recognised in their local communities.

A focus on gender legislative and policy change at national macro-political levels risks excluding the important new women's leaders and their community organisations and initiatives. These play a crucial role in reconfiguring gender relations in traditional local communities that are barely reached by elitist feminist organisations. It is the local constituency that new women's activists and leaders generate through working in and with their local communities that gives women actual power for political manoeuvring with and within state institutions.

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## **Le regard libéré. La militance féminine dans le cinéma tunisien postrévolutionnaire**

Gina ANNUNZIATA

### **Abstract**

With the fall of President Ben Ali in January 2011, Tunisia regains a liberating momentum that involves different aspects of society including the practice of cinema, for years subject to constant censorship. Several women filmmakers – as Nadia El Fani, Sonia Chamkhi, Hinde Boujemaa – have used this space of freedom to tell and describe reality through the stories of women who for various reasons can be called militant.

Après trois ans et demi de gouvernement sous le signe du provisoire et du transitoire, en janvier 2014, la Tunisie s'est dotée de la Constitution la plus progressiste du monde arabe, ou « les citoyennes et citoyens sont égaux devant la loi sans discrimination », la liberté de conscience et d'expression sont garanties, et la torture physique et morale est interdite.

Mais après la révolution, et une longue période de turbulences et d'inquiétudes, de nombreux problèmes persistent : l'explosion du chômage, surtout chez les jeunes, la pauvreté qui persiste dans les régions qui ont vu naître la révolte populaire, et les menaces qui incombent sur les acquis de la femme. Les artistes et leurs œuvres culturelles sont souvent attaqués. La presse aussi rencontre encore des difficultés structurelles dans son rôle d'information.

La Tunisie, premier pays à déclencher le « printemps arabe », lutte aujourd'hui pour bâtir une société démocratique, égalitaire, et sauvegarder ses traditions d'ouverture et de tolérance. Dans ce combat, des cinéastes ont pris leurs caméras pour filmer et raconter différentes réalités, à Tunis comme dans les régions périphériques. Dans ce nouveau climat, le cinéma tunisien se pose comme un outil qui peut aider à mieux comprendre et débattre de ces questions.

On peut commencer par Nadia El Fani, cinéaste franco-tunisienne, née en 1960, d'une mère française et d'un père tunisien, militant

communiste parmi les premiers cadres de la Tunisie indépendante.<sup>1</sup> Très proche des groupes de femmes militantes, en 1993 elle tourne un premier documentaire *Du côté des femmes leaders*, consacré aux femmes émancipées du Maghreb et, en 2002, elle réalise son premier long métrage, *Bedwin Hacker* dans lequel, dix ans avant la révolution en Tunisie et le mouvement du Printemps arabe facilité par la diffusion d'internet, Nadia El Fani imagine le web comme un lieu de contestation, prévoyant d'une certaine manière l'émergence des médias sociaux comme forme de résistance.<sup>2</sup> En 2002, la liberté d'expression en Tunisie n'est pas qu'un mirage, elle a identifié des actes de résistance individuels et locaux et démontré comment Internet et la télévision, à travers les images et la communication pourraient être des outils de résistance. Kalt, le personnage principal du film, est un hacker télévisuel qui refuse l'autorité nationale et qui lance, sous la forme d'un dessin animé représentant un chameau, des messages subversifs en arabe tunisien sur les ondes de la télévision française. Kalt, citoyenne du monde, utilise et reconfigure la technologie pour

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<sup>1</sup> À son père, un des membres dirigeants du Parti Communiste Tunisien, Nadia el Fani a consacré un film, *Ouled Lenine* (2007), qui trace un portrait particulier des militants progressistes dans la Tunisie de l'après indépendance, et qui pose la question de leur héritage.

<sup>2</sup> Note d'intention du film : « Pour dialoguer versus Sud-Nord, Kalt jeune femme maghrébine, génie de l'informatique, pirate les satellites et brouille les télévisions européennes... Mais les services de la DST, pilotés par Julia, son alter ego, sont à sa poursuite sur Internet...*Bedwin Hacker* est né d'une urgence : celle de prendre la parole! Ici et ailleurs... Raconter l'histoire de personnages décalés, rebelles, marginalisés mais résistants, face cachée de cette société à la fois moderne et réactionnaire qu'est l'Afrique du Nord aujourd'hui... Kalt est belle, libre, bisexuelle. Elle vit au milieu d'une 'Tribu' amicale et familiale pleine de vitalité. À l'aide d'un émetteur de fortune, depuis Midès, Oasis de montagne du sud tunisien, elle diffuse sur les écrans européens un premier télétexte en arabe : 'Dans le troisième millénaire, il existe d'autres époques, d'autres lieux, d'autres vies... Nous ne sommes pas des mirages...'. Signé d'un petit logo animé : un dromadaire du nom de 'Bedwin Hacker'. À la DST Julia, alias Agent Marianne, croit reconnaître là une allusion au pseudonyme Hacker de Kalt : 'Pirate Mirage'. Habilement, elle 'manipule' Chams, son amant, journaliste parti en reportage à Tunis, pour obtenir des informations sur le piratage... Tirailé par Julia avec qui il correspond sur Internet et Kalt qui le séduit intensément, Chams préférerait ne pas avoir à choisir son camp. Pourtant dans cette histoire de politique-fiction, chacun finira par se retrouver 'de l'autre côté'... Il est des défaites qui sont des victoires ! », in *Africultures*, <http://www.africultures.com/php/index.php?nav=film&no=296> (consulté le 2/12/2016).

ses propres fins et définit la liberté en ses termes à elle.<sup>3</sup> Ce personnage inédit pour le cinéma tunisien, offre aux femmes arabes un caractère féminin positif, libre et déterminé, qui refuse toute forme de conditionnements, et inverse le rapport Nord-Sud :

Depuis le premier de mes courts métrages, mes personnages féminins sont plus que libres. Pour moi, banaliser la liberté d'une femme est le meilleur moyen de l'imprimer dans la tête des gens au Maghreb. Je n'ai pas envie de faire des constats d'échec. Je peux dire que, vivant en Tunisie jusqu'à maintenant, comme je suis j'ai vécu. La liberté est un combat.<sup>4</sup>

En été 2010, avant la révolte, avec le même esprit, en mentant sur le sujet du film pour obtenir la demande d'autorisation de tournage, sans quoi on ne le lui aurait jamais accordé, Nadia El Fani filme la Tunisie en plein ramadan, où l'on voit un islam apparent, où la pression sociale est plus forte que la dévotion de la foi. En pleine révolution, et en plein montage de son film, elle retourne au pays pour poser une question directe : et si le vrai changement consistait à séparer enfin la politique du religieux ? Elle complète donc son film, *Ni Allah ni maître*, avec les débats sur la laïcité animés par les progressistes du pays, puis intitulé *Laïcité, inch'Allah!* pour calmer les polémiques suite à la sortie du film à Tunis. Dans *Même pas mal*, film réalisé en 2012, Nadia El Fani raconte les deux luttes menées pendant qu'elle réalisait *Laïcité, inch'Allah!*: sa lutte contre la maladie et celle contre les extrémistes et les attaques violentes dont elle a été l'objet depuis sa déclaration d'athéisme à la télévision tunisienne à l'occasion de la présentation de son film à Tunis en avril 2011. *Même pas mal* a eu une genèse très particulière. Avec l'avènement de la révolution, Nadia El Fani a su qu'elle avait un cancer. Après le 14 janvier 2011, et après une opération chirurgicale, elle est retournée en Tunisie pour tourner. C'est pendant cette période que sa maladie s'est aggravée et qu'elle a dû suivre une chimiothérapie. Dans sa narration cinématographique, elle met en parallèle les cellules cancéreuses qui habitaient son corps et les cellules islamistes qui se multipliaient en

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<sup>3</sup> C. McFadden, 'Technology, Resistance, and Franco-Arab Transculturalism in Nadia El Fani's *Bedwin Hacker*', in *Contemporary French Civilization* 38/1 (2013), pp. 1-21.

<sup>4</sup> B. D'Olivier Barlet, « Casser les Clichés. À propos de *Bedwin Hacker* », Entretien avec Nadia El Fani, Cannes, Mai 2002, in *Africultures*, disponible sur <http://www.africultures.com/php/?nav=article&no=2511> (consulté le 2/12/2016).

Tunisie. Le film est construit d'une façon chronologique avec une temporalité très linéaire, scandée par les prises de médicaments qui expriment l'idée de l'accumulation. Les titres des chapitres abordés sont annoncés par des « placards révolutionnaires », avec des paroles qui dénoncent ou qui revendiquent. « Les films » – elle dit – « sont nécessaires au débat, dans la Tunisie aujourd'hui » :

Je trouve que *Laïcité Inch'Allah!* qui exprime ma liberté de conscience est profondément respectueux des autres. *Même pas mal* aussi. C'est un film utile, parce qu'il expose les événements aux Tunisiens dans une autre démarche, en dehors de l'actualité diffusée dans les télévisions. De plus, je voulais que quelqu'un prenne en charge la réponse pacifique que l'on peut apporter à ces gens-là. Là est toute la différence entre le combat des progressistes et les autres. Le film existe pour prendre date.<sup>5</sup>

La violence des réactions face à la déclaration d'athéisme de Nadia El Fani a montré la présence d'un problème de liberté de conscience en Tunisie :

Toute la haine à son égard et qu'on voit dans *Même pas mal* – explique la réalisatrice – d'abord, elle vient du fait que je sois une femme, qui s'exprime dans son individualité et qui se défend quand on l'attaque. Ce n'est pas dans leur logique et leur vision du monde. Au lendemain du départ de Ben Ali, deux projets de société sont apparus : un projet de société moderne et un autre archaïque.<sup>6</sup>

À la fin du film, elle dit « la chimiothérapie de la Tunisie risque d'être longue », une thérapie que dans l'avis de la réalisatrice n'a même pas encore commencé.

Dans *C'était mieux demain*, premier documentaire de la cinéaste belgo-tunisienne Hinde Boujemââ réalisé en 2012, nous sommes face à une réalité tout à fait différente. Tourné sur une période d'un an et demi, pendant et à la suite de la révolution tunisienne, le documentaire raconte l'histoire d'Aïda, divorcée avec quatre enfants. Aïda a fait de la prison en passant aussi par la prostitution, et aujourd'hui se bat pour trouver un toit et maintenir les rapports avec ses enfants, placés en

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<sup>5</sup> « La liberté encore et toujours! », *La Presse*, 3/3/2013, disponible sur <https://nadiaelfani.wordpress.com/2013/03/03/la-liberte-encore-et-toujours-la-presse/> (consulté le 30/4/2015).

<sup>6</sup> *Ib.*

foyer. À l'image de la Tunisie bouleversée par la révolution de janvier 2011, elle voit les événements qui se déroulent dans la capitale comme une réelle opportunité de changement :

Une révolution – on lit dans les notes d'intention de la réalisatrice – c'est un moment unique dans une vie, où le pays que vous avez connu, change du jour au lendemain. Les visages et les endroits vous sautent aux yeux comme si vous ne les aviez jamais vus. Lorsque j'ai rencontré Aïda, aux environs du 14 janvier, j'étais comme beaucoup dans l'euphorie du moment, animée par le sentiment de vouloir raconter ma Tunisie malgré tous les questionnements et les incertitudes que je vivais à chaque instant. À chaque heure, j'étais à l'affût d'une nouvelle. Un président qui part, des snipers qui abattent les gens, un parti unique qui résiste, des manifestants qui rattrapent les années perdues de paroles confisquée, des grévistes de la faim... et une population oscillant entre l'ivresse de la liberté et la gueule de bois de la peur et de l'incertitude. Le 20 janvier, j'aperçois Aïda dans la rue. Quelque chose dans son regard et ses paroles m'attire. Elle n'est pas comme les autres, car elle n'a pas l'air préoccupée par la révolution, elle se faufile près des manifestations sans y prêter attention. Je l'aborde. Directement sans aucune gêne, elle me raconte sa vie : deux de ses enfants donnés à un orphelinat, son divorce, ses larcins. J'ai en face de moi une personne qui n'a plus rien à perdre, sur qui la vie s'est acharnée et qui demande à la révolution de lui ouvrir les portes d'une nouvelle vie.<sup>7</sup>

Tous les trois mois Aïda change de maison. Habitations malsaines, lugubres qu'elle quitte, flanquée d'un de ses enfants qui souffre d'un léger handicap mental, parce qu'elle ne paie plus le loyer. Elle se met à la recherche d'un appartement inoccupé, appartenant à un étranger décédé (juif, livournais, italien) pour le squatter. Cette révolution est pour elle l'occasion inespérée de révolutionner sa vie. Cette femme, combattante et effrontée profite du presque chaos social pour défoncer les portes se heurtant aux voisins et à des surprises souvent pas très heureuses.

Aïda est à l'image de tous les Tunisiens et de Tunis... pleine d'espoir, avec une soif de changement sans savoir quelle direction prendre. Pas de certitudes. Juste des questions. Les nouvelles continuent à tomber,

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<sup>7</sup> Hinde Boujemââ, « Note d'intention », disponible sur <http://www.trophees-francophones.org/#!ctait-mieux-demain/cb5c> (consulté le 2/12/2016).

création de partis, organisation d'une nouvelle vie politique. Tout le monde aspire à la justice. Aïda tout comme Tunis.

La vie d'Aïda avec son passé difficile et l'espoir pour son avenir ressemble au parcours de démocratisation débuté par la Tunisie après ses dernières 50 années de dictature. La révolution, avant laquelle il aurait été impossible de tourner un documentaire comme *C'était mieux demain*, a permis de découvrir, au-delà des façades, l'existence de plusieurs failles au sein d'une société qui se voulait parfaite.

La caméra de Hind Boujemâa est pointée sur Aïda tout le temps, mais l'avenue Bourguiba et les manifestations sont aussi là.

Elle s'est imposée à moi. Elle était tellement époustouflante car pour moi la révolution passe par elle. Elle est l'origine, l'essence même de la révolte. Elle était si détruite qu'elle n'a pensé qu'à elle à ce moment-là.

Et de rajouter à propos de ces images tournées en prison :

C'était une période de flottement, c'est pourquoi j'ai pu m'introduire en prison mais je me demande si je pourrai le faire aujourd'hui. J'ai pu me permettre de filmer des choses que je n'aurai jamais pu filmer avant. Un tel film n'aurait jamais pu être fait avant. Mais d'ailleurs, la révolution est en arrière-plan. Je ne m'y attarde pas beaucoup. Je suis restée fixée sur elle pour montrer combien mon héroïne était détachée par rapport à ce grand événement historique qui se passait bien, qu'elle en avait conscience à sa manière... C'était très important pour moi de montrer ce qu'il y avait derrière ce type de femme que l'on condamne parce qu'on les voit comme des prostituées, de personnes mauvaises. Pour moi, il y a quelque chose dans leur vie qui justifie cela. Elle m'a donné envie de fouiller plus.<sup>8</sup>

L'histoire de Aïda est le symbole des défaillances que le régime de Ben Ali a tenté de cacher. Même si elle n'a pas participé aux manifestations, cette femme avec son combat a les traits d'une vraie militante.

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<sup>8</sup> *11<sup>es</sup> rencontres cinématographiques de Béjaïa. L'espoir entre rêve et utopie*, L'Expression, 13/6/2013, disponible sur <http://www.lexpressiondz.com/culture/175703-l-espoir-entre-reve-et-utopie.html> (consulté le 2/12/2016).

Porteur de propos plus directement politiques, le film documentaire *Militantes* (2012) de Sonia Chamkhi<sup>9</sup> s'est servi d'un autre procédé : des entretiens avec des militantes représentatives de différentes orientations politiques, réalisés pendant et après les élections de l'Assemblée constituante. Le film tourne autour des portraits de huit femmes têtes de liste, à savoir Bochra Belhaj Hamida (Ettakatol), Radhia Nasraoui (Parti Ouvrier Communiste Tunisien), Saida Garrach (Mouvement des Nationalistes Démocrates), Houda Kéfi (Indépendante) Najla Bourial (Parti Démocratique Progressiste), Khadija Ben Hassine et Jinène Limam (El Qotb), et Souad Abderrahim (Ennahdha). Mais aussi d'autres femmes qui ont pris part aux travaux préparatoires des premières élections libres de l'histoire de la Tunisie et se sont engagées activement sur la nécessité de la participation des femmes tunisiennes à la vie politique. Latifa Lakhdhar (vice-présidente de la Haute Instance pour la réalisation des objectifs de la révolution), Monia El Abed (chargée des affaires juridiques et des relations publiques au sein de l'Instance Supérieure Indépendante pour les Élections - ISIE), Faiza Skandrani (présidente de l'Association Égalité et Parité), Besma Soudani (présidente de la Ligue des Femmes Électrices et observatrice dans les bureaux de votes) ou encore Raoudha Karafi (membre du bureau exécutif de l'Association des Magistrats Tunisiens).

Les raisons de la réalisation de ce film – souligne Sonia Chamkhi dans les notes d'intention – sont objectives. Car pour une Tunisie qui se construit, la femme tunisienne sera le vrai baromètre du projet de société de cette nouvelle ère de notre histoire : la Tunisie nouvelle ne sera ni démocratique, ni moderne, ni progressiste et ne pourra pas incarner un tel modèle pour les autres pays arabes et/ou musulmans, si la femme tunisienne n'est pas considérée comme une citoyenne à part entière. Mais, malgré les acquis de la femme tunisienne, obtenus

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<sup>9</sup> Sonia Chamkhi enseigne le design image et la pratique audiovisuelle à l'Institut supérieur des Beaux-Arts et à l'École des Arts et du Cinéma de Tunis. Elle a écrit et coréalisé des courts métrages et participé à l'adaptation de plusieurs longs métrages tunisiens. Son court métrage *Wara El Blayek* (2008) a été sélectionné en compétition officielle dans plusieurs festivals internationaux. En 2008, elle sort un premier roman, *Leïla ou la femme de l'aube* (Clairefontaine/ Elyzad, 2007). Elle est également auteur de *Le Cinéma Tunisien à la Lumière de la Modernité*, Centre de Publication Universitaire, Tunis, Octobre 2009 et *Cinéma Tunisien Nouveau, Parcours autres*, Sud Éditions, 2002, Prix Zoubeïda B'Chir de l'Essai Scientifique 2003.

depuis l'indépendance, le spectre d'un retour en arrière n'est pas dissipé. Donc, ce documentaire se propose d'expliquer déjà pourquoi la femme tunisienne est digne d'être l'égale de l'homme et combien les femmes qui incarnent cette exigence méritent le respect et la reconnaissance.<sup>10</sup>

Dans son film, Sonia Chamkhi raconte aussi l'engagement des militantes pionnières de la cause féminine en Tunisie. Amel Ben Abba, Aisha Belabed, Dalila Mahfoud, Badiâa et Bahija Dridi, des femmes qui ont pris part à la lutte pour l'indépendance de la Tunisie, aux revendications syndicales, à la lutte contre la marginalité, la pauvreté et l'ignorance et qui ont payé un lourd tribut à la cause de liberté par la prison, ou par le sacrifice de la vie familiale. L'éditrice Siham Ben Sedrine raconte comment en 2001, porte-parole du Conseil national pour les libertés en Tunisie, interpellée par la police politique, omniprésente dans le pays, à sa descente d'avion à l'aéroport de Tunis a été incarcérée à la prison pour femmes de Manouba, dans la banlieue de Tunis, pour avoir « diffamé le corps judiciaire » et propagé « de fausses nouvelles de nature à troubler l'ordre public » à l'occasion d'une déclaration sur la situation politique de son pays à la télévision arabe basée à Londres. D'autres militantes ont subi la persécution policière simplement du fait d'être la femme ou la fille de quelqu'un, comme Rhadia Nasraoui, femme du leader Hamma Hamami dirigeant du POST. Grâce à une recherche difficile dans les archives tunisiennes, *Militantes* rend hommage ainsi à des femmes dont l'Histoire n'a pas reconnu toute l'importance de leur contribution à la construction de la nation tunisienne.

Ce film n'est pas seulement réalisé pour faire connaître le mérite de ces femmes, la justesse de leur vision porteuse d'un équilibre social exigeant, viable et progressiste. Mais aussi pour donner envie aux jeunes femmes de s'engager, en leur offrant un modèle de femmes tunisiennes – et plus généralement arabo-musulmanes – libres, qui pensent, qui ont des programmes politiques et de société égalitaires et fédérateurs, qui agissent et se dépensent corps et âme et auxquelles elles peuvent s'identifier. Ce sont ces femmes qui m'ont donné l'envie de me battre, de faire du cinéma, de m'engager socialement et de lutter pour que la Tunisie reste ce pays où les femmes peuvent jouir

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<sup>10</sup> S. Chamkhi, « Note d'intention du film », disponible sur <https://moustaches.wordpress.com/tag/conditions-de-la-femme/> (consulté le 2/12/2016).

d'une dignité qui ignore le genre, le sexe et l'appartenance ethnique ou religieuse et j'aimerais transmettre, à travers ce documentaire, aux jeunes filles et aux jeunes garçons, la justesse et la noblesse de ce désir et de cet espoir.<sup>11</sup>

Sur la question de la mémoire revient aussi Sarah Benillouche quelques mois après la Révolution dans le documentaire *Ciao Habiba* (2012). Elle cherche la trace d'une diva tunisienne, Habiba Messika, un modèle de femme libre, brûlée par son amant dans les années Trente.<sup>12</sup> Pour tenter de l'incarner, la réalisatrice organise un casting et rencontre de jeunes artistes tunisiens, désireux de soutenir son projet. Tourné dans le nouveau climat « post-révolutionnaire », le film place au centre de la narration le concept de liberté, porté puissamment par les femmes, et aussi l'aspiration à une société multiculturelle, en évoquant l'époque à laquelle les juifs et les arabes se côtoyaient sans problèmes.

Mon cinéma – écrit la réalisatrice – tournant autour de l'errance, de la mémoire, de l'exil, de l'identité et de l'utopie, je suis en quête de ces cultures orales, de ces musiques, qui me semblent en être porteuses. Je vois dans leur transmission, envers et contre tout, une sorte de résistance populaire inconsciente au formatage de l'air du temps. Je poursuis ce travail autour de la musique judéo-arabe comme mémoire commune. Il ne s'agit pas de nostalgie au sens sentimental ou folklorique, ni de mystifier une utopique entente entre juifs et musulmans, mais il me paraît important de faire émerger une mémoire enfouie, pour tenter de dessiner, tant qu'il est encore temps, un horizon multiculturel.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> S. Chamkhi, « Note d'intention du film ».

<sup>12</sup> La réalisatrice tunisienne Selma Baccar a retracé sa vie dans un long métrage de fiction *La danse du feu* (1995). Le film évoque les trois dernières années de sa vie, à partir de 1927, rythmées par les soubresauts d'une société en pleine mutation et marquées au fer rouge par l'amour que lui vouent Elia Mimouni, un riche propriétaire terrien et Chedly un jeune poète. Au cours d'une tournée triomphale à Berlin, elle rencontre la star de la musique orientale, l'Irakien Baghdadi, puis s'initie à la vie parisienne avec un dandy au charme trouble. De retour à Tunis, l'artiste est emportée par le tourbillon frénétique du succès, jusqu'à la tragédie de son assassinat par son amant.

<sup>13</sup> S. Benillouche, « Note d'intention du film », disponible sur [http://www.lesproductionsdugolem.com/site/bio\\_sarah\\_benillouche\\_golem.html](http://www.lesproductionsdugolem.com/site/bio_sarah_benillouche_golem.html) (consulté le 20/4/2015).

Sara Benillouche choisit le Théâtre municipal de Tunis, lieu des représentations théâtrales de Habiba, pour filmer les témoignages de personnalités artistiques comme les actrices Fatma Ben Saïdane, Raja Ben Ammar, Amira Chelbi, Soumaya Boualagui, Amira Rezgui, et les chanteuses Sonia M'barek, Amel Mathlouthi, Olfa Souissi, la danseuse Malek Sebaï, ainsi que l'historien Ahmed Hamrouni auteur d'un livre sur Habiba Messika.<sup>14</sup>

Personnage audacieux et transgressif, Marguerite Messika est née en 1893 dans le quartier israélite de Tunis dans une famille pauvre. Elle apprend à lire et écrire à l'école de l'alliance israélite qu'elle quitte après sept ans pour suivre des cours de chant, de solfège et d'arabe classique auprès du célèbre compositeur Khemaïs Tarnane et du ténor égyptien Hassan Bannan. Bientôt elle prend pour pseudonyme arabe Habiba (l'aimée). À partir des années 1920, sa carrière théâtrale décolle et joue notamment *Le Fou de Leïla*, *Lucrece Borgia*, et la plupart des pièces du répertoire shakespearien. En mars 1925, elle joue *Roméo et Juliette* au théâtre Ben Kamla. Elle interprète Roméo, alors que Rachida Lotfi, une actrice israélite libyenne, joue Juliette. La pièce est montée par Mahmoud Bourguiba, frère du leader nationaliste tunisien Habib Bourguiba. Le baiser qu'elle échange avec Rachida Lotfi provoque une réaction si forte que la scène est incendiée par des spectateurs outrés. Elle provoque une nouvelle fois le scandale en 1928 en jouant *Patrie, les martyrs de la liberté* enroulée dans le drapeau tunisien et scandant des slogans indépendantistes pour lesquels elle fut arrêtée par les autorités coloniales.<sup>15</sup>

Dans sa vie comme dans sa carrière, elle incarnera l'indépendance de la Tunisie mais aussi et surtout la liberté des femmes. Presque un siècle plus tard, la jeunesse tunisienne connaît son histoire. Dans *Ciao Habiba*, lors d'une manifestation contre le pouvoir en 2011, on voit une jeune femme qui reprend les mots des chansons de Habiba Messika.

Les narrations cinématographiques des cinéastes comme Nadia El Fani, Sonia Chamkhi, Hinde Boujemaa, Sarah Benillouche montrent comment faire connaître les fondements du combat pour la liberté et l'égalité se pose comme une exigence. A travers ces films on peut voir

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<sup>14</sup> A. Hamrouni, *Habiba Messika, artiste accomplie*, L'Univers du livre, Tunis, 2007. Sur Habiba Messika voir aussi J. Faivre d'Arcier, *Habiba Messika. La brûlure du péché*, Belfond, Paris, 1998.

<sup>15</sup> B. Blum, *De l'art de savoir chanter, danser et jouer la bamboula comme un éminent musicien africain*, Scali, Paris, 2007, p. 227.

toute l'importance de l'image cinématographique pour restituer la mémoire politique et témoigner du rôle joué par des femmes en Tunisie, où le processus d'émancipation a commencé bien avant les révoltes éclatés en décembre 2010.

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# Tunisian Women: A Polyphonic Choir in a Heterogeneous Society

Marta BELLINGRERI

## Abstract

The definitive text of Tunisia's new Constitution was approved on the 26<sup>th</sup> January 2014, three years after the ousting of Tunisian dictator Ben Ali and two years after the election of the National Constituent Assembly. In analyzing the transitional process, it is interesting to follow the transformations undergone by socially and politically active Tunisian women over the last six years, their increasing self-awareness and their roles in today's society. I argue that the female polyphonic choir in the heterogeneous Tunisian society contests monolithic views of Tunisian women or Muslim women in general, especially challenging post-2011 binary narratives of a successful or unsuccessful revolution in terms of women's rights. This kind of analysis aims at stressing the heterogeneity of groups of women, as well as highlighting the emergence of new social actors following the 2011 revolution, contextualizing their (individual or collective) actions as well as their new approaches. Among them are young independent female activists, bloggers or intellectuals; feminist movements and associations formed before January 2011; new women's associations, formed after January 2011; peasant and working women or housewives. This distinction serves to define and include (social and economic) differences, although such simplification does not do justice to the diversity of a society and its transitional faces. Through a critique of empowerment as view from feminist associations, as well as a new approach coming from new associations like *Rayhana*, Tunisian women are walking towards an interesting feminist path. By considering the multiplicity of different groups in contrast to the monolithic view of a generally identified 'Arab/Tunisian woman', this paper tells the new pulse of a polyphonic choir in Tunisian society.

## Introduction

The definitive text of Tunisia's new Constitution was approved on the 26<sup>th</sup> January 2014, three years after the ousting of Tunisian dictator Ben Ali and two years after the election of the National Constituent Assembly. In analyzing the transitional process, it is interesting to follow the transformations undergone by socially and politically active Tunisian women over the last five years, their increasing self-awareness and their roles in today's society.

There is a general trend in Western perception, media and academia to see women as a homogeneous set<sup>1</sup> when in fact each woman and/or group of women need to be considered within the cultural complexity of Tunisia's society and its multiple walks of life. This kind of analysis aims at stressing the heterogeneity of groups of women, as well as highlighting the emergence of new social actors following the 2011 revolution, contextualizing their (individual or collective) actions as well as their new approaches. From this perspective it seems appropriate to distinguish among:

- young independent female activists, bloggers or intellectuals;
- feminist movements and associations formed before January 2011;
- new women's associations, formed after January 2011;
- peasant and working women or housewives.

This distinction serves to define and include (social and economic) differences, although such simplification does not do justice to the diversity of a society and its transitional faces.

The struggle for women's rights after January 2011 (first for the right to have greater representation in the October 2011 elections, then for the respect of women's rights in the Constitution draft during 2012 and 2013) has led to good results in the new Constitution, with article 20 stating equality rather than complementarity for women; article 33 guaranteeing female representation in elections; article 45 on equal opportunities and the application of 'the necessary measures to eradicate violence against women'. However, the types of forbidden discriminations remain unspecified and men are still privileged in matters of inheritance.

It is necessary to continue to follow and understand the effective changes linked to the emergence of women within the family, politics, society, and the work sphere, which can only be done by considering the multiplicity of different groups in contrast to the monolithic view of a generally identified 'Arab/Tunisian woman'.

### **Problematizing neo-orientalist perspectives through a polyphonic choir of women**

The ongoing transitional political process in Tunisia demonstrates the transformation undergone by socially and politically active

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<sup>1</sup> L. Abu-Lughod, *Do Muslim Women Need Saving?*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, London, 2013.

Tunisian women over the last five years, their increasing self-awareness and their roles in today's society. Through the intersection between post-colonial perspective and feminist criticism, this analysis of women in the heterogeneous contemporary Tunisian society aims at deconstructing the mainstream discourse on stereotyped understandings of Muslim Women.<sup>2</sup> This general trend to consider women in the Arab world as a homogenous set, which also has been called 'gendered orientalism', is constitutive of the perpetuation of hegemonic and colonial identity.<sup>3</sup>

Post-colonial analysis reads this persistent and vague definition of a Muslim Arab woman and the post-2011<sup>4</sup> meta-narratives as a form of neo-Orientalism,<sup>5</sup> which seeks to define – today as before – the geopolitical order of the area in question, by virtue of humanitarian and security principles in defense of women's rights. This trend sees women as a socially homogenous group and prevents the emergence of key elements for the definition of individual, collective and multiple identities, such as generation, social class, as well as political, cultural and sexual orientation.<sup>6</sup> Contemporary neo-orientalism, which sees binarism, dichotomies and epistemic violence reflected in the analysis of the contemporary female world, demonstrates the ignorance surrounding the heterogeneous female societies in the Arab region, where different aspects such as inter-generational differences, political militancy or on the contrary political apathy, geographical and subjective factors are key aspects to understanding the variety of women subjects and their positioning. I refer to women's presences as protagonists of changes, in the three-fold attempt to normalize their presence – referring to neo-orientalist astonishment at 'Arab women's' participation in revolts, politics, arts, society – as a part of the process to combat stereotypical analysis and to highlight their very special contribution.

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<sup>2</sup> L. Abu-Lughod, *Remaking Women: Feminism and Modernity in the Middle East*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1998.

<sup>3</sup> M. Yeğenoğlu, *Colonial Fantasies: Towards a Feminist Reading of Orientalism*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1998.

<sup>4</sup> R. Pepicelli (ed.), *Le donne nei media arabi*, Carocci, Roma, 2014, pp. 6-16.

<sup>5</sup> R. El-Mahdi, 'Orientalising Egyptian Revolution', in *Jadaliyya*, 11/04/2011, <http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/1214/orientalising-the-egyptian-uprising> (last access 13/11/2016).

<sup>6</sup> L. Abu-Lughod, 'Orientalism and Middle East Feminist Studies', in *Feminist Studies* 27/1 (2001), pp. 101-113.

In order to map a polyphonic choir of women's groups, not necessarily in conflict but rather in constant debate, I distinguish in this paper between different groups, contextualizing them in the heterogeneous framework of Tunisian society. I emphasize the emergence of new women's associations after January 2011, and the innovation that they brought about at both the political and social levels. This original research is based on the information gathered during fieldwork carried out in 2012 and 2013, and shows the new mosaic following the 2011 revolts. During the first four months of 2012, I met and interviewed people from 10 different women's associations, including both old feminist associations and newly founded ones, and the results are part of my post-graduate dissertation at "L'Orientale" University.<sup>7</sup> Since then I have been directly involved in an international cooperation project<sup>8</sup> with a group of women, and I have witnessed the formation of a new association in Jendouba, a city in northwest Tunisia.

My paper is divided into three parts. First, I will briefly describe the political framework in contemporary Tunisia. I will mention the problematic path of the National Constituent Assembly towards the definitive approval of the Constitution, mainly focusing on the articles concerning women, and emphasizing how the latter have been active actors in this transitional phase and how they maintained a prominent position on the eve of parliamentary and presidential elections. Second, I will introduce the different groups of women I analyze. They all protested side by side with men, creating a single transverse movement, which transcends differences of sex, status, religion, and political factions as well as geographical provenance. By focusing in particular on the new associations born after 2011, I will also underline the tendency to ignore this polyphonic choir. I will contend that these associations represent the expression of a new pulse for participation in the country's political life.

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<sup>7</sup> M. Bellingreri, *Women Association in Tunisia*, Master's Degree in 'Sciences of History, Languages and Cultures of Arabic Countries and Mediterranean Sea', University of Naples "L'Orientale", 2012. Methodology of Participatory Research: individual and groups interviews, participant observation, logbook, documents' and press analysis, visit to associations' places and library of *Université Feministe Ilhem Marzouki*.

<sup>8</sup> International Cooperation Project, co-founded by EU Commission in Tunisia and implemented by Italian NGO Cospe and Tunisian NGO AFTURD, « Centre Femmes Solidarité: soutien et inclusion de la femme rurale », May 2012-May 2014, Jendouba, Tunisia.

### **Tunisia and its Constitution in the Transitional Political Process**

The National Constitution Assembly (NCA) approved the definitive text of Tunisia's new Constitution on the 26<sup>th</sup> January 2014, three years after the ousting of Tunisian dictator Ben Ali and two years after the elections of the NCA. Tunisian legislative elections occurred on the 26<sup>th</sup> October, followed by presidential elections on the 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2014. The path towards the final approval and the elections passed through many political crises, such as those that occurred after the two political assassinations in Tunisia in 2013.<sup>9</sup>

The assassination of assembly member Mohamed Brahmi on 25<sup>th</sup> July 2013 led a number of opposition NCA members to boycott the work of the NCA and demand its dismantlement.<sup>10</sup> The national dialogue initiative made the commitment to preserve the NCA and help ensure the success of its work. In addition to the national dialogue and the consensus reached, judges, human rights advocates and journalists also played a role in amending constitutional provisions.<sup>11</sup>

The struggle for women's rights after January 2011 is not negligible: first for the right to have greater representation in the October 2011 elections, then for the respect of women's rights in the Constitution draft during 2012 and 2013. This struggle has led to good results in the new Constitution, with article 20 stating equality rather than complementarity for women; article 33 guaranteeing female representation at elections; article 45 on equal opportunities and the application of 'the necessary measures to eradicate violence against women'. However, the types of forbidden discriminations remain unspecified. For instance, men are still privileged in matters of inheritance.

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<sup>9</sup> Chokri Belaid, leader of Popular Front, was killed on the 6<sup>th</sup> February 2013, while his colleague and comrade Mohammad al-Brahmi was killed on the 25<sup>th</sup> July of the same year. Perpetrators involved in both killings pointed to links between Libyan Islamic Fighting Groups, Ansar al-Sharia and al-Nahda Movement.

<sup>10</sup> M. A. Jaidi, 'The Collective Making of a Constitution', in *Jadaliyya*, 10/06/2014, [http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/17860/tunisia\\_the-collective-making-of-a-constitution](http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/17860/tunisia_the-collective-making-of-a-constitution) (last access 13/11/2016).

<sup>11</sup> The Norwegian Nobel Committee has decided that the Nobel Peace Prize for 2015 is to be awarded to the Tunisian National Dialogue Quartet which comprised: the Tunisian General Labour Union (UGTT, Union Générale Tunisienne du Travail), the Tunisian Confederation of Industry, Trade and Handicrafts (UTICA, Union Tunisienne de l'Industrie, du Commerce et de l'Artisanat), the Tunisian Human Rights League (LTDH, La Ligue Tunisienne pour la Défense des Droits de l'Homme), and the Tunisian Order of Lawyers (Ordre National des Avocats de Tunisie).

On the 58<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the promulgation of the Personal Status Code enacted on the 13<sup>th</sup> August 1956, Tunisia celebrated National Women's Day. The National Constituent Assembly held a conference on the drafting of a law to fight violence against women, a further step towards consolidating Tunisian women's rights and addressing their existing problems, since the application of these laws still lacks efficiency. The new draft law will reinforce article 45. The law on violence against women, including domestic violence, has been approved by the Tunisian Parliament on 26<sup>th</sup> July 2017.<sup>12</sup>

Out of the 217 new representatives at the last legislative elections in 2014, 69 were women, i.e. 31,3% of the Assembly of the Representatives of the People.<sup>13</sup> Women appointed as leaders of parties before the elections were a minority,<sup>14</sup> thus betraying what was previously announced<sup>15</sup> and threatening the principle of equality between men and women, as stated by article 46 of the newly approved Constitution.

Therefore, despite the work of women active both before and after 2011, ambiguities, contradictions, and discriminations are still matters of concern for civil society and the private spheres: 'the involvement of women in the public realm has not been accompanied by more involvement of men in the private sphere',<sup>16</sup> nor by the reduction of violence. In particular, an important gap still exists between formal achievements and substantial change: the obligatory nature of instruments included in the Constitution's articles does not guarantee an actual obligation of achieving results.

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<sup>12</sup> Human Rights Watch, [www.hrw.org/news/2017/07/27/tunisia-landmark-step-women-violence](http://www.hrw.org/news/2017/07/27/tunisia-landmark-step-women-violence).

<sup>13</sup> M. Ben Hamadi, « Les femmes élues à l'Assemblée des Représentantes du Peuple », in *Huffpost Maghreb*, 30/10/2014, [http://www.huffpostmaghreb.com/2014/10/30/tunisie-assemblee-femmes\\_n\\_6075982.html](http://www.huffpostmaghreb.com/2014/10/30/tunisie-assemblee-femmes_n_6075982.html) (last access 13/11/2016).

<sup>14</sup> S. Lutyens, « Elections : après avoir soutenu la parité horizontale, des partis proposent une minorité des femmes têtes des listes », in *Huffpost Maghreb*, 19/08/2014, [http://www.huffpostmaghreb.com/2014/08/19/tunisie-parite-horizontale\\_n\\_5690997.html?utm\\_hp\\_ref=maghreb&ncid=tweetInkushpmsg00000067](http://www.huffpostmaghreb.com/2014/08/19/tunisie-parite-horizontale_n_5690997.html?utm_hp_ref=maghreb&ncid=tweetInkushpmsg00000067) (last access 13/11/2016).

<sup>15</sup> Vote on the 1<sup>st</sup> March 2014 on absolute horizontal parity in article 23bis: <http://majles.marsad.tn/fr/vote/5362543112bdaa078ab82510#> (last access 13/11/2016).

<sup>16</sup> O. K. Ben Hassine, 'Personal Expansion versus Traditional Gender Stereotypes: Tunisian University Women and ICT', in Ikene Buskens - Anne Webb (eds.), *Women and ICT in Africa and the Middle East*, Zed Books, London, 2015, p. 88.

This brief description of the political framework in the transitional phase after the 2011 revolution takes into account how women's struggles as well as their political and civil achievements reinforced their presence in society. Furthermore and being aware of their persistence in the struggle throughout the country's political history through their constant presence in national independence movements and the post-independence struggle for civil and political rights, this account also helps to de-homogenize the picture of an 'Arab woman', contextualizing Tunisian women within their history. Tunisia had in fact its most secular and modernist governance under its first President Habib Bourghiba, father of the nation, who made revolutionary reforms to the Code of Personal Status (CPS), which included abolishing polygamy, creating a judicial procedure for divorce, requiring marriage to be based on the mutual consent of both parties and obliging wives who had a source of income to contribute to the family's expenses. In addition, Bourghiba granted women equal rights to access education and participation in the workforce. A stereotyped understanding of Muslim women tends to overlook the nuanced view of different Arab countries where national postcolonial histories differ politically, legally, culturally and socially.

### **Tunisian Women: multiplicity in a mosaic**

The whole constituted by all Tunisian women forms a 'mosaic', as described by Nacyb Allouchi,<sup>17</sup> president of the newly formed association *Rayhana*,<sup>18</sup> in Jendouba. Within its own specificity and autonomy, each piece of the mosaic plays an important role when looking at the whole picture. In 2012, many women opposed Nahda's attempt to define women as complementary rather than as equal to men. If complementarity does exist, it relates to the work of the different groups of women that make up the multifaceted mosaic. In fact, despite their differences, they make a common effort to contribute to the growth of their country, to its political and social life, going beyond the struggle for the achievement of women's rights. The gender perspective, which urges on the fight for the affirmation of

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<sup>17</sup> Interview with Nacyb Allouchi, from the city of Jendouba, who is the co-founder and president of the association *Rayhana*, August 2014.

<sup>18</sup> *Rayhana* has a Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/association.rayhana?Fref=ts>.

one's formally acquired rights, needs to be understood within a framework of political and social struggle, where rights are not excluded but rather included.

The following analysis aims at highlighting the diversity and heterogeneity of various groups, in contrast to a homogenous entity, embracing the emergence of new social actors within the multi-faceted elements of the mosaic. It further contests Eurocentric/neo-Orientalist epistemologies which tend to emphasize difference as a space of conflict in the Arab world where instead multiplicity is a fertile terrain for debate. It starts with a general distinction between different groups and then takes a closer look at the associations born following the ousting of the dictator Ben Ali. From this perspective, it seems appropriate to distinguish between:

- Young independent female activists, bloggers or intellectuals, who have often had a wide international following and resonance, which sometimes made them the only spokespersons for the female Tunisian world;

- Feminist movements and associations formed before 2011, inspired by European left-wing ideology, with their perspectives, new contributions, and inevitable inter-generational conflicts;

- New women's associations, formed after January 2011, and sometimes connected with parties and cooperation projects, both religious and secular. I will contend that they are the most significant and innovative answer to the revolutionary process, thanks to the newly acquired freedom of association and freedom of expression;

- Peasant and working women or housewives, often illiterate and sometimes extremely politicized. This group also includes single mothers, who are concerned about their Country's political life, despite living at the margins of the political sphere.

It is important to point out that this division does not intend to separate the pieces of the mosaic. Rather, through the description of different women and their diverse positioning in the socio-political context, it seeks to emphasize the cultural complexity of Tunisian society and its multiple walks of life, thus problematizing the monolithic view that crystallizes women's identities in the Arab and Tunisian world.

The present analysis also considers irrelevant the distinction between secular and religious women, an element that is often used as a means of speculation and separation by internal and external

political and feminist forces for power interests,<sup>19</sup> where separation is also intended as a colonial controlling device. The meters of analysis are instead the different modalities that women adopted in their action and participation, and the generational gap that emerged with the revolution. Furthermore, the religious spectrum does not always seem suitable to understanding the real significance of the new social dynamics that emerge when looking at the distinction between the associations operating during the dictatorship and the newly born associations. We can then differentiate between women who have worked for decades as political opponents under the dictatorship from women who only recently made their appearance on the political, social and associational world.

### **Bloggers and Individual Actions. The Case of Amina Sboui**

Young independent female activists and bloggers, who have received much attention abroad and have been appointed by international public opinion as the sole spokespersons for the female Tunisian world, represent the first piece of the mosaic. One of the most well-known is Leena Ben Mehni, author of the blog 'A Tunisian Girl',<sup>20</sup> and of the first publication that carries the same name. Her intense work over the last six years and long before January 2011 and her strong public denunciation cost her threats from extremist groups, which have forced the Tunisian Ministry of the Interior to give her an escort since August 2013. Another very well-known blogger is Fatma Riahi, with her blog 'Arabicca'.<sup>21</sup> She was in prison in 2009 and was supported by a campaign advocating her freedom. Another activist and young woman is Amina Sboui, who became internationally known in 2013 as Amina Tyler or Amina Femen. Over the last few years, these three women have drawn more attention from abroad than in their own country among other Tunisian women. Their point of view has often been adopted as representative of the whole of Tunisian women, or even of Tunisian society, contributing to confirm what Rabab al-Mahdi has expressed in her article 'Orientalizing the Egyptian

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<sup>19</sup> A. Muhanna, 'Islamic and Secular Women's Activism and Discourses in Post-Uprising Tunisia', in Maha El Said - Lena Meari - Nicola Pratt (eds.) *Rethinking Gender in Revolutions, Lessons from the Arab World*, Zed Books, London, 2015, pp. 205-232.

<sup>20</sup> L. Ben Mehni, *A Tunisian Girl, Blogueuse pour un printemps arabe*, Indigene, Paris, 2011.

<sup>21</sup> Blog of Fatma Riahi: <http://fatmaarabicca.blogspot.com/>.

Revolution'. In fact, I believe that the analysis the Egyptian activist and researcher has made about her country can be applied to Tunisia as well.

The academic world, media, journalists, local elites, all read with amazement and surprise the events of the 'spring uprising', as it has been called, once more triggering the narrative that distinguishes between 'we' (the West) and 'they' (the East).<sup>22</sup> According to this narrative during the 'Arab Spring', in the end, 'they' – the Egyptian and Tunisian activist women – are not very different from 'us'; they are young and independent, they are 'modern' and non-violent. Through the Internet, they write and testify in a foreign language about what is happening in their country. The narrative of events is often based on what is found in these blogs and on what these well-known bloggers declare. Once these countries have made their own 'revolutions', commonalities are finally underlined, while a vast majority of voices remains unheard due to the emphasis placed on these representatives of 'modern' revolutions.

I will make a few brief considerations starting from the latter case of Amina. On 11<sup>th</sup> March 2013, Amina Sboui was the first Tunisian woman to post a photograph of herself nude from the waist up on Facebook, with the phrase 'My body is mine and not the source of anybody's honor' in Arabic. The photo was seen as scandalous and evoked strong controversies within Tunisian society comparable to the nude self-portraits of the Egyptian woman Aliaa Magda Elmahdy two years earlier. Between March and September 2013, the case of Amina Tyler often catalyzed the attention of the media and general public, diverting it from the correct understanding of events. Instead of listening to the multiplicity of existing voices, the mechanism of stereotypes and prejudices that embraces the 'Arab woman' is repeated, directly disconnecting Amina's personal episode from the political events of the country. A different reading of Amina's case would need to develop a more sophisticated understanding of the country's contemporary political events and to listen directly to her story. Decontextualizing her story led to a mystification of her action, especially because it was made by a woman. In fact, the month preceding the publication of Amina's picture on Facebook, the leader of the Popular Front, Choukri Belaid, was assassinated. According to

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<sup>22</sup> R. Al-Mahdi, 'Orientalizing Egyptian Revolution', in *Jadaliyya*, 11/04/2011, <http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/1214/orientalising-the-egyptian-uprising> (last access 13/11/2016).

Amina,<sup>23</sup> the shock that she personally underwent triggered the decision to take the fight to an extreme level. In addition, she claimed to be representing the feelings of the whole country. Amina is a teenager who prevented her classmates from regularly attending their class in order to protest in January 2011. After the murder of Choukri Belaidi, she believed that other citizens should also commit extreme actions in the same vein as hers. She chose this kind of personal protest to challenge the extreme violence that she perceived in her country. However, the murder of the leader of the Popular Front generated collective and spontaneous reactions, extreme in their own way when related to the cultural background, which are of more importance than Amina's individual battle.

According to estimates, during Choukri Belaidi's funerals, about one million citizens from all around the country reached the cemetery. What's more, for the first time in an Arab-Muslim country, women took part in the procession and escorted the body all the way to the cemetery, participating in the funeral service, from which they are traditionally excluded.<sup>24</sup>

Remembering these events responds to an important historical necessity of understanding individual stories within the contemporary socio-political order. On the contrary, Amina's case has been overemphasized and distorted internationally. In fact, her case has been discussed as an 'exceptional' and extreme act made by a vaguely defined 'Arab woman'. An Arab woman was simply in the nude. Her being in the nude is a revolutionary act that needs to be acknowledged:

C'était un mélange d'excitation et d'appréhension. La question lancinante « pourquoi je fais ça ? » revenait sans cesse, toujours cette petite voix de la sagesse qui me rappelait que j'avais une famille attachée aux traditions... et puis la nudité de la femme arabe c'est quand même le gros tabou!<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Interview with Amina some days after she released the photo, Tunis, 19<sup>th</sup> March 2013.

<sup>24</sup> Z. A., « Funerailles de Choukri Belaid : Beaucoup de femmes au cimetière aux côtés des hommes », in *Kapitalis*, 08/02/2013, <http://www.kapitalis.com/politique/14372-funerailles-de-choukri-belaid-beaucoup-de-femmes-au-cimetiere-aux-cotes-des-hommes.html> (last access 13/11/2016).

<sup>25</sup> A. Sboui, *Mon corps m'appartient*, Editions Plon, Paris, 2014, p. 12.

As Amina remembers in her book, many Arab women are in the nude in movies and video clips, but in her case it is the message on her nude body, like graffiti on a wall, that is revolutionary: 'My body belongs to me and it is not the source of anyone's honor'. This message mixes her personal story with the culture of her family and country, her courageous political involvement as a student, and the strength and shock she experienced after episodes of political violence in her country.

On 1<sup>st</sup> August 2013, an Italian RAI television troupe went to film Amina's liberation and her return home<sup>26</sup> in order to interview her and to continue following her story. This event occurred at the same time as other youngsters were protesting in front of the NCA with regard to the political murder of Mohammed Brahmi on the 26<sup>th</sup> July. Nevertheless, this latter episode did not find enough space in the Italian press for a detailed analysis, showing again how Western media feed on 'nudity' and 'extremism' more than on a daily understanding of political and social events in the 'Others' countries.

This is not to say that we should not talk about Amina or listen to her story or follow her journey. However, we should not lose sight of the bigger picture of events, in order to avoid reiterating the mystification of Arab women's rights or of their evasive and scandalous acts, nor should we determine the paths they choose to follow for themselves. This kind of narrative deliberately avoids talking about other forms of struggle through which rights can be achieved. For instance, it excludes the daily actions that associations of women carry out to oppose social taboos concerning the body, sexuality, violence, and marriage.

On the one hand, such decontextualized sensationalism tends to overemphasize gestures that are considered immoral by the Muslim community; on the other hand, it underestimates the daily acts that we could consider revolutionary in relation to Tunisian women's communities of provenance, such as those acts that the women of newly-formed associations carry out every day, but which are not nude, public or extreme enough to be listened to by the West. In other words, abroad Amina became the symbol of a struggle in which women and feminist associations are already engaged at home by other means. For instance, the fact that many women from the Muslim world have expressed their discontent with Amina's actions illustrates

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<sup>26</sup> Amina tells this episode in her own book: Sboui, *Mon corps m'appartient*, p. 52.

how they did not feel represented by the message she attempted to launch.

The media phenomenon that concerned Amina had a negative impact on Amina's life itself. She has been de-individualized as a young woman in the press; she has been under constant pressure for months, to which she responded with a strong temperament. It was not understood that her arrest on the 19<sup>th</sup> May, 2013 was a loss for the country in terms of civil and libertarian rights. However, going beyond the phenomenon itself, Amina's arrest was unjust, just like many other arbitrary arrests that posed a threat to freedom of expression.<sup>27</sup> But Amina also determinedly dealt with this latter episode of her life in Tunisia, before leaving for France: she offered the proceeds of her publication to her fellow female prisoners.

In conclusion, reading and emphasizing individual voices of bloggers and activists responds more to a tendency to mystify uncommon events, as Europe and the western world often do, rather than really understanding the Arab world and its changes, especially among women. Only by listening to the multiplicity of voices of women in relation to the global context will we be able to better grasp the real change that is taking place.

### **Women's Feminist Associations. What Kind of Empowerment?**

Feminist movements and associations such as the ATFD (Tunisian Association of Democratic Women) and AFTURD (Association of Tunisian Women for Research on Development)<sup>28</sup> are registered independent associations and NGOs and differ from the new movement for a few reasons. First, they were created under the so-called 'State Feminism' or 'Institutional Feminism' inaugurated under Bourghiba. After 1987, their identity shaped itself around their opposition to Ben Ali's regime. The latter exploited the issue of women's rights, adopting it as a weapon against the chief enemy of the state, fundamentalist Islam. On a social level, while approving women's rights formally, Ben Ali never took action to make the substantial changes necessary to enact them. On a legal level, it meant

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<sup>27</sup> S. Alba Rico, 'Amina en Tunez: otra historia ejemplar', in *Tunisia in Red*, 01/06/2013, <http://www.tunisiainred.org/tir/?p=2629> (last access 13/11/2016).

<sup>28</sup> All information regarding both associations which I have described in depth in my Master thesis are available at their own websites: ATFD, <http://femmesdemocrates.org.tn/> and AFTURD: <http://www.afturd-tunisie.org/accueil/>.

it was impossible for women to enjoy their rights. The single-party state reproduced the patriarchal system and women's associations were often only elitist groups or state unions (such as the UNFT, the National Union of Tunisian Women, founded by Bourghiba at the end of 1950s), working as a political shelter rather than promoting social mobilization. The isolation, the lack of media support, and the lack of free communication with the outside world,<sup>29</sup> during the long dictatorship, weakened and devitalized these associations. Following the revolution, both women's associations as well as other associations<sup>30</sup> have undergone a new phase of development and their numbers have grown. This phenomenon is only partially due to the general freedom that they acquired after Ben Ali's flight. In fact, another reason for their growth is that secular feminists feared that the advancement of Islamism would cause a regression in the long march for the achievement of women's rights. For decades, Islamic parties were repressed together with the freedom of religious expression. With the fall of the regime, they sprang up again, both peacefully and with extremist tendencies, oftentimes with the result of building up more pressure on women.<sup>31</sup> Therefore, women felt the need to team up in order to protect the rights hitherto achieved with the Code of Personal Statute in the post-colonial era, despite obstacles posed by dictatorships and authoritarianisms. According to one of the women I interviewed, following the ousting of the dictator, the next step should be a cultural revolution able to transform the status of women, because they are still, in her words, a 'shop window' of the State: « On doit se battre pour l'espace public. Rien est gagné ».<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> I. Marzouki, *Femmes d'ordre ou désordre de femmes ?*, Noir sur blanc, Tunis, 1992, pp. 5-10.

<sup>30</sup> N. Bousidi, 'Bath 100 jamiyya jadida', in *al-Shuruq*, Tunis, 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2011.

<sup>31</sup> <http://bulletinoftheoppressionofwomen.com/2012/09/06/tunisian-women-activists-assaulted-by-salafists/>: this is just one of the cases reported by the press. The number of physical and verbal attacks in the last four years is innumerable: one of the most known cases exploded in November 2011 and throughout 2012 at the University of Manouba, Tunis, with Salafists groups pressuring women to wear the *niqab* at University: <http://tempsreel.nouvelobs.com/l-enquete-de-l-obs/20120202.OBS0453/tunisie-les-salafistes-contre-les-femmes.html> (last access 13/11/2016). Many of these episodes as well as women's lives in the face this attempt at Islamist control can be found in M. Kilani, *Quaderni di una rivoluzione, Il caso tunisino e l'emancipazione del mondo contemporaneo*, Elèuthera, 2014, pp. 225-267.

<sup>32</sup> Interview with Soha Ben Othman, ATFD's militant, Tunis, the 16<sup>th</sup> January 2012.

Over the past thirty years, feminists have been culturally marginal, as well as socially elitist and politically extremist.<sup>33</sup> This led to a sort of self-censure, which prevented the movement from growing. Furthermore, over the last four years, the attempt to overcome this self-censure intermingled with the fear of a new censure, due to the fact that the Islamic party took charge of the country, as well as to the social pressure, violence and threats carried out by the Salafists. Nevertheless, since 2011, feminist associations have been receiving more support and have been able to develop a few projects. This has been possible especially thanks to funds that were previously blocked and that are now available to them, as explained by Soha Ben Othman, a militant of the ATFD.<sup>34</sup>

It is important to note that these associations historically depended upon left-wing parties. This caused them to adopt in their actions dynamics proper to party politics, giving priority to political factors rather than to social ones. With the approval of the new Constitution and the articles 20, 33 and 45 perceived as formal political achievements by feminist movements, the risk is that the State will reproduce a form of paradoxical 'State feminism', where the State will formally promote women's rights as a way to exert its control on their emancipation and feminists will eventually fall into the trap, forgetting social and economic inequalities as causes for the gender imbalances present in society. Such intrusion of the State in the public and political sphere is in certain respects shaped by the funds offered by the European Union, as the latter often reiterates a unilateral and decontextualized view of women in Arab countries. The fate of the entire movement is thus at stake because it risks to become NGO-ized.<sup>35</sup> For instance, AFTURD was able to extend its action to rural areas outside of Tunis thanks to funds received through projects for international cooperation.<sup>36</sup> In fact, one of their objectives following

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<sup>33</sup> Marzouki, *Femmes d'ordre ou désordre de femmes?*, pp. 5-10.

<sup>34</sup> Interview with Soha Ben Othman, ATFD's militant, Tunis, the 16<sup>th</sup> January 2012.

<sup>35</sup> G. Daniele, 'Tunisian Women's Activism after the January 14 Revolution: Looking within and towards the Other Side of the Mediterranean', in *Journal of International Women's Studies* 15/2 (2014), pp. 16-32: <http://vc.bridgew.edu/jiws/vol15/iss2/2>.

<sup>36</sup> Project CIDEAL-AFTURD, co-financed by EU, in the city of Kef: « Promotion de l'égalité à travers le renforcement de la société civile et la participation des citoyennes et citoyens au processus démocratique dans le Nord-Ouest tunisien » and project COSPE- AFTURD, co-financed by the EU, in the city of Jendouba: « Centre Femmes Solidarité: soutien et inclusion de la femme rurale ».

the flight of Ben Ali was to operate in areas hitherto considered 'marginal'. However, their ignorance about the territory where they intended to intervene caused clashes that we can define as generational between left-wing militants from the capital and some of the new associations. Such disagreements can be seen as a consequence of the changes that occurred following the fall of the dictatorship. The feminist militants are going through a transitional phase that takes them outside of the bureaus and tribunals of the capital and into other regions of their country where they form up new associations fostering social and political engagement.

These militants often support their actions in the less known regions of the country through a vocabulary that is generally well received when applying to European funds for international cooperation, such as the concept of *women's empowerment*. This language appears to be suitable to the international institutionalized discourse on human rights and the 'participation of poor people to development' but is often distant from the Tunisian women of these regions.

The relationship between the feminist associations and the Tunisian women living both in the capital and in other regions of the country is sometimes shaped around a mechanism used by the West for women of the 'third world' that post-colonial feminists have denounced. It consists of the process of essentialization that lies behind the institutionalized approach of *women's empowerment*, which sees women as a homogenous and monolithic category in need of rescue and help. This approach does not take into account women's diversity, nor does it consider the existent power differentials between women, or the relationships of power that envelops them all:<sup>37</sup> the 'power over' prevails over the 'power with'.

As stated by Rowlands, empowerment 'must also include the processes that lead people to perceive themselves as able and entitled to make decisions',<sup>38</sup> being co-creators and co-participants of processes rather than being beneficiaries of results. Empowerment is a process where women are involved and results cannot be forecast or prescribed. Furthermore, results are not always the same due to the

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<sup>37</sup> A. Ferguson, 'Empowerment Development and Women's Liberation', in Anna Jonasdottir - Kathleen B. Jones, *The Political Interests of Gender Revisited. Redoing Theory and Research with a Feminist Face*, United Nations University Press, New York, 2009, pp. 85-103.

<sup>38</sup> J. Rowlands, *Questioning Empowerment. Working with Women in Honduras*, Oxfam, London, 1997, p. 16.

subjective and geographical elements in which these processes inevitably incur. A standardized notion of empowerment ignores the intersectional nature of power which constitutes these relationships, and the ways in which racism, class, and patriarchy are articulated and reinforced, creating inequalities between different groups of women. Post-colonial literature contends in this analysis that the beneficiaries of these forms of institutionalized empowerment are the less marginalized women, and that women rights' lack localization and contextualization.

The origin of the concept of empowerment is found within Feminist thought, within Gandhi's thinking, as well as within the Black Power movement.<sup>39</sup> It has been spread in social protest movements and developing feminist theory during the 1980s. In the 1990s, the concept became gradually more institutionalized in the political vocabulary of governmental or non-governmental organisms until its success reached the United Nations Cairo Conference on Population and Development in 1994. In its first conceptualization, the term empowerment is a complex and multidimensional process which includes both the individual and collective functions of power. Over the course of its development during the last two decades, the concept adopted by the mainstream discourse of the United Nations has been accompanied by an individual notion of power and the fundamental transition has been that from 'liberating empowerment' to 'liberal empowerment',<sup>40</sup> critically paving the way for new associations. The latter-refusing the ideology behind the Western feminist model as well as keeping their distance from the dynamics of the left-wing parties-represent in the Tunisian context a new post-dictatorship model, able to pose a serious threat to the image of women as a 'window-shop' and to 'State Feminism'. It seems that, as I will show in the next paragraphs, women from newly formed associations are re-writing, through their 'politics of doing',<sup>41</sup> the concept of empowerment which has been recently

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<sup>39</sup> A.-E. Calvès, « Empowerment: généalogie d'un concept clé du discours contemporain sur le développement », in *Revue Tiers Monde* 4 (2009), pp. 735-749 and B. Solomon, *Black Empowerment: Social Work in Oppressed Community*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1976.

<sup>40</sup> C. Sardenberg, 'Liberal vs Liberating Empowerment: a Latin American Feminist Perspective on Conceptualising Women's Empowerment', in *IDS Bulletin* 39 (2008), pp.18-25.

<sup>41</sup> Interview with Nacyb Allouchi, president and co-founder of association *Rayhana*, August 2014.

imposed from the top down: power is not to be given from the outside, it is to be valorized from within.

### **New Tunisian Women's Associations. The Pulse of Post-Dictatorship Times**

Since 2011, the rise of a constellation of more than five-thousand associations of various kinds is the result of the absence of democracy, which characterized the reign of the regime. Associations are a means of social expression, which addresses both the society and the system of representation, which works as mediator with the state. The new women's associations are today the new social and political actors in society, with diverse and specific vocations, together with the feminist opponents to the regime that I described in the previous paragraph. All associations formed after 2011 are now legally registered in Tunisia and try to achieve their objectives and goals, continuing missions and projects. Giving some of these women's associations greater representation and visibility would reinforce a broader vision of the heterogeneity of Tunisian society and clarify in further detail the various roles and positions in the polyphonic choir of Tunisian women's voices.

Among the various women's associations – formed in 2011 and in 2013 – are *Voix des femmes* in Tunis, the capital, while others such as *Nour* in Tataouine, in the south, and *Rayhana* in Jendouba, in the west,<sup>42</sup> are in 'marginalized' areas, isolated for years from the country's political, social and cultural center. One of the achievements of the revolts in 2011, which also needs to be noted in a Western analysis of revolutions and changes in Arab countries, has been the re-appropriation by Tunisian citizens of their own country.<sup>43</sup> It was previously hard to travel across Tunisia because of the police controls and the fear that reigned in the country. Following the revolts, part of the civil society from Northern Tunisia and the capital started to discover the internal and border areas of their country. Tataouine is not far from the border with Libya, while Jendouba, in the northwest, is close to Algeria. Thus, they are different socially and economically from the capital. However, this geographical distribution highlights

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<sup>42</sup> I personally met and interviewed people from the first two associations, *Voix des femmes* (Voices of Women) and *Nour* (Light) and then followed the third one, *Rayhana*, between 2012 and 2013; it is composed of a group of women with whom I worked on the COSPE–AFTURD project. While not living anymore in Tunisia, during 2014 and 2015, I interviewed them again via Skype.

<sup>43</sup> Kilani, *Quaderni di una rivoluzione*, pp. 35-40.

the importance given to new associations in marginalized areas, unless these regions remain invisible to an external eye. They represent a form of new hope for the political and social life of citizens in these regions. By emphasizing the geographical distribution of *Voix des femmes*, *Nour*, and *Rayhana* I also want to express my view on associations in Tunisia, and valorize emergent actors as opposed to the voices that are already well known and have been heard by the West and by international actors, as I showed in the paragraph on bloggers and Amina. As is inherent to this kind of qualitative feminist research, the value given to the associations corresponds also with the empathic relationship and the connection that I have established with their members. Since the first interviews in January 2012 I have maintained a constant rapport with women in the field, which has allowed me to be continuously updated on the life of these associations. All these women's associations used to consider feminist associations such as ATFD and AFTURD as the preeminent interlocutors in the field of political campaigns and in the effort to rethink and strategize the campaign for equal opportunities for women in the country. *Voix des Femmes* (Voices of Women), was one of the first associations founded after January 2011 and it includes both men and women, activists from humanitarian associations that came together. The presence of men shows that there is no conflict against men as such. Their focus is women's inequality in the labor market, unemployment, and political participation, and they fight against the marginalization of women and for women's leadership, working around and with women workers and peasants, female students, and women who actively participate in political life. These kinds of actions move towards the promotion of citizenship and involvement in politics, as Ikram herself did during the revolts of January 2011. And now:

It's time to build and to do, I don't have to be in the streets, and it's not my work. My work is to invest in women, in the future. Maybe people do not see our work because it will have an impact in 10 years but I believe firmly this is a great contribution. That's how I built the association, even if our vision at the beginning was not so clear.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> A. Belli, 'Uno sguardo di genere sull'attivismo tunisino: frammenti di un mondo in fermento', unpublished, 2016. I have translated into English Ikram Ben Said's words from Alessia Belli's essay.

The highlights of the association are intellectual heterogeneity, which represents a plus, and its pragmatism and professionalism, where creativity and the ability to negotiate are evident. The initiatives that have been hitherto undertaken include: seminars on gender issues; conferences for the exchange of ideas on the different views that Islam holds about women; awareness campaigns on the eve of political elections in Tunisia's different governorates, in particular in areas, factories and places where there was a significant presence of working women. These campaigns took place between the summer and autumn of 2011 and the months before the legislative and presidential elections between October-November 2014. All these actions were also carried out by the old feminist associations mentioned above, which also organized similar initiatives for political elections and reached the extreme corners of the country, such as Tataouine. In Tataouine, in 2011, the first women association in the south of Tunisia was formed: *Nour*. Tataouine is situated at the gates of the southern desert, and it is the southern-most town in Tunisia, a few kilometers away from Libya. The sociocultural situation is thus very different from the capital and from other cities. During the first interview, the president of the association *Nour*, who has often been to the capital, stated that 'women in Tataouine don't have any rights, and nothing is granted to them, except the obligation to stay segregated at home, especially after sunset'.<sup>45</sup> *Nour* mostly addressed unemployed women or women without identity cards, offering information and suggestions. Thanks to the leadership of its founder, Sabrine Wafi, *Nour* also took part in several training workshops. The association, thanks to a few private funds, is an employment opportunity for its members, but cannot guarantee a stable working position. When I first went to the association, I noticed that the women working at the counter were both offering a service and at the same time taking advantage of it:

We graduated from university with degrees in sociology or economics, and the association represents the only alternative to unemployment after graduation, which would mean a life as housewives and only family duties. Our degrees, achieved in other cities in the South like

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<sup>45</sup> Interview with Sabrine Wafi, president and founder of *Nour*, Tunis, the 20<sup>th</sup> January 2012.

Gabes, do not offer any opportunity in the area where they are from. The association is a work opportunity in the field of expertise.<sup>46</sup>

Kabeer<sup>47</sup> refers to empowerment as the expansion in people's ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability was previously denied to them. The encounter with this association is important to understand the situation in Tunisia, where women tend to preserve their traditional roles within their families. This is not only due to a patriarchal mentality, to religion or to family impositions, but also to unemployment. Certainly these two aspects walk hand in hand, one being a consequence of the other. Therefore, the simple dynamic which needs to be understood is: were the country's economy to improve and unemployment to decrease, especially among women, especially in the south, an important number of educated women would respond positively to the needs of the labor market, thanks to the new competences they acquired during their experience at the association. Despite sharing a liberal attitude, which characterizes ATFD, and while being inspired by the documents and the workshops that AFTURD offered them in Tataouine, *Nour* keeps away from the secularist ideology adopted by the two main feminist associations of the capital. It instead identifies itself with the Arab-Muslim ideology of the country, taking up a position within the feminist Muslim current, which sees Islam as the source of inspiration from which they draw their rights. Since these women believe in Islam, they have to negotiate their religious beliefs with their associations, where they are required to find a balance between 'secular' rights, as provided by the Constitution, and an actual society far removed from these formal acquisitions.

In Jendouba, the women of *Rayhana* first met and began to work together during an international cooperation project titled 'Centre femmes Jendouba: soutien et inclusion de la femme rurale', organized by a partnership between the Italian NGO COSPE and AFTURD, co-financed by the European Union Commission.<sup>48</sup> In order to avoid the

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<sup>46</sup> Group interview with Mariem Zarizir, financial administrator; Lobna Assaqay, receptionist; Sana Dubbabi, social worker; Selwa Bu Khashem, communication and media employee, Tataouine, the 9<sup>th</sup> February 2012.

<sup>47</sup> N. Kabeer, 'Reflections on the Measurement of Women's Empowerment', in *Discussing Women's Empowerment-Theory and Practice*, Sida Studies 3, Novum Grafiska, Stockholm, 2001, pp. 17-57.

<sup>48</sup> The project on the websites of both NGOs, AFTURD: <http://www.afturd-tunisie.org/espace-tanassof/centre-femme-solidarite/>, and COSPE: <http://www.cospe.org/progetto/un-nuovo-centro-per-le-donne-di-jendouba/>.

dispersion of the individual skills that these women had acquired, they decided to organize themselves into an association independent from these NGOs. Despite the fact that *Rayhana* still needs external funding, it is important to analyze the process that brought the association to become autonomous from projects of cooperation. The cooperation project aimed at the creation of a centre for women, whose activities would guarantee the sustainability of the centre upon conclusion of the project in order to have access to funding. Finally, the tools provided during the workshops, as part of the project itself, shaped the association's members' consciousness of being autonomous from the NGOs that organized the project.

After working together for one year, *Rayhana* and AFTURD founded the first centre for women, Espace Femmes Rayhana, in Jendouba in October 2013. However, even though AFTURD rejected the creation of a new association separate from the project, *Rayhana* decided to break away and opened a new headquarter. One of the episodes that tells us about the differences, inter-generational conflicts and changes in the regions outside the capital Tunis took place during the opening of the center for women, before the two associations split up. A group of young girls, belonging to a sports group at the centre, put on a performance: the goal of the performance was to invite women at the opening to join the center's sports activities. One of these girls, who was wearing glasses, stood up and gave a lesson to the rest of the students, who were sitting down in a class, about women and their rights. The 'students' pretended to become bored and started to yawn. At some point, they decided to put on contemporary music and they started to dance to it, inviting the surprised teacher to dance with them. This short performance was criticized by the feminist association AFTURD, declaring it 'without political significance'. On the contrary, the message was clear and was a parody of their top-down approach which the younger girls wanted to show as ridiculous or at least inappropriate to women of this region. *Rayhana* describes their new methodology of empowerment – in contradiction with old feminist associations' approach, which is more similar to a standardized European approach – as a new spirit overcoming the idea of rescuing women in marginalized areas. They prefer to understand and enact empowerment practices as a transmission of competences, the production of a *savoir faire*, the implementing of an activity in society, a form of teamwork aimed at rendering society dynamic and at criticizing patriarchal norms. This

new line is also based on a gender transversal approach to empowerment, which valorizes adequate and equal exchange of competences, information and knowledge at a regional and international level. Furthermore, *Rayhana* also represents a very intimate place for expression between women where they can also release their bodies from external pressures. *Rayhana's* women see their space as a meeting point as well as an opportunity to connect to places different from their house or their working position. These physical spaces were non-existent in Jendouba, but now they shape new spaces of belonging in post-revolution and transitional Tunisia. These spaces are not a new form of confinement; rather they serve women's purposes to become more and more involved in public life.

The proliferation of associations and initiatives is an important index of a global evolution of society rather than only of the development of a feminist consciousness, an aspect which has not been sufficiently considered by a Western perspective influenced by dichotomous views of a successful or unsuccessful revolution in terms of it Islamic or secular gains or results. However, I expect these women's associations to promote a different method of understanding the global political debate. Their presence is perceived as different, a presence that disrupts other political approaches because women's political management can be – and must be – different. Those women who created associations perceived the need for the latter to be political subjects, capable of making new proposals for the cities and for the country as a whole:

We want to have and give opportunities. We want to think together about political elections and raise awareness. We try to interact with people and we have a lot of responsibilities. There are many divisions amongst women, there is this tendency not to be involved in politics because we have lost our trust. But the politics of doing and the practice of daily work makes us militants: only the context has changed.<sup>49</sup>

### **Working Women, Peasants and Housewives: The Last Piece of the Mosaic?**

Finally, there are the women who on the surface are less active on the political and social scene, because they are not directly connected

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<sup>49</sup> Interview with Sawsen Gharbi, co-founder and administrator of *Rayhana*, and Fathia Ghanjati, co-founder and animator, August 2014.

to associations nor are they active through the Internet, yet they represent another important piece of the mosaic. This group includes women working in factories or in the fields, as well as unemployed women who take care of the house and the family. They often are women of different social and cultural classes, not just peasants or factory workers, and at the same time mothers and sisters of young boys who emigrated to Italy and France. Meeting all these women helped me to understand more deeply and to praise the work carried out in the associations. I gathered information about these final groups through interviews made during my fieldwork in 2012–2013, in particular in Jendouba. Most of the women I interviewed took part in the revolts in 2010 and 2011 and now work in small or middle-sized enterprises, in factories or in the fields. This group also includes the mothers of migrants and of those who were lost at sea<sup>50</sup> during the journeys from Tunisia to the Sicilian coast during 2011 and in the shipwreck that took place between the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> September 2012.<sup>51</sup>

By including this last piece of the mosaic, I wish to add two fundamental parameters to my observation and analysis. First, although these agriculture- and factory-working women, housewives, and single mothers – often illiterate and sometimes extremely politicized – are the most marginalized from the public sphere, they are nonetheless concerned about and involved in their country's political life, once more validating the argument that further knowledge of the country and of the heterogeneous groups of women that exist within it is required to understand and eventually analyze the dynamics of gender. For instance, it is relevant to cite the case of the mothers and sisters of the missing migrants. Even though they have never gathered into an association,<sup>52</sup> these women brought forward a campaign where they were not only protagonists of protests in front of the Italian embassy in Tunisia,<sup>53</sup> but were also at the head of a delegation to Italy that directly challenged the institutions, demanding

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<sup>50</sup> All the calls and letters are published at: <http://www.storiemigranti.org/spip.php?article1047>.

<sup>51</sup> « Naufrage au large de Lampedusa : 56 immigrés sauvés », in *Liberation*, 7/09/2012, [http://www.liberation.fr/monde/2012/09/07/naufrage-au-large-de-lampedusa-54-immigres-sauves\\_844618](http://www.liberation.fr/monde/2012/09/07/naufrage-au-large-de-lampedusa-54-immigres-sauves_844618) (last access 13/11/2016).

<sup>52</sup> Just recently an association gathering families of missing migrants at sea was formed, but I did not include it, as it is not a women's association.

<sup>53</sup> Tunisie: « Sit-in des familles des disparus devant l'ambassade d'Italie », in *Babnet*, 11/01/2013, <http://www.babnet.net/cadredetail-58961.asp> (last access 13/11/2016) and video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3kr8Y2ImpY0>.

news about their sons.<sup>54</sup> Therefore, on the one hand they publicly conveyed a private grief, demanding a communitarian responsibility. On the other hand, they challenged European policies on migration, which cause all these deaths in the Mediterranean Sea by refusing to grant entrance visas to migrants.

Their march has been accompanied by associations of Italian women, such as the '2511', which have supported their campaign. Their gathering was spontaneous and resulted from one of the achievements of 2011, consisting of the opportunity to appear in the public sphere, to manifest their dissent and their needs.

The second factor recalls the analysis of the NGO-ization in Tunisia, as these women are often the beneficiaries of projects of international and local cooperation. They are in short the women who should be 'empowered' through these projects. Even before becoming the object of the benefits provided by the cooperation projects, they took part in the revolution, in the protests and in the political elections of 2011. Despite being considered the most invisible women in Tunisia, it is important to point out that almost all of Tunisia's agricultural output is the result of women's backbreaking labor. They account for 70 to 90 per cent of the country's farming workforce. These women see very little of the wealth derived from their efforts. A woman in Tunisia may receive around five dollars for an entire 10-hour workday, despite playing a crucial role in the country's agricultural industry, and in fighting poverty and hunger. Their contribution to the economic life of the country goes hand in hand with their participation in political life, which still remains discontinuous and rare compared to some of the groups in the capital. Welcoming this spontaneous activism and will to participate in political life seems to be useful in implementing the work of newly formed associations. Just as they did during the 2011 elections, before the elections in October 2014 the associations worked to promote awareness campaigns across the country, often addressing illiterate women or those who did not have a national identity card.

The complementarity between associations and the rural areas or minor cities, where there is still a need for spaces to meet and promote public participation in social and political life, is a clear sign of a change that is taking place. It is also an index of the willingness to

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<sup>54</sup> 'Lettera video delle madri e delle famiglie dei migranti tunisini dispersi a Giusi Nicolini, sindaco di Lampedusa', <http://www.storiemigranti.org/spip.php?article1053>

actively and creatively renegotiate the presence of those social rights that have already been achieved, and those that are still pending between formal and substantial changes.

### **Conclusion**

In this paper, I argue that the female polyphonic choir in the heterogeneous Tunisian society contests monolithic views of Tunisian women or Muslim women in general, especially challenging post-2011 binary narratives of a successful or unsuccessful revolution in terms of women's rights. The exploration of the female world through individual actions, feminist associations and new associations in the post-revolutionary period aims at showing how the complexity and multiplicity of subjective and political experiences, in different geographical contexts, constitutes a counter-discourse to a simple understanding of women in the Arab region. Through a critique of empowerment as a view from feminist associations, as well as a new approach coming from new associations like *Rayhana*, Tunisian women are walking towards an interesting 'co-creation of the environment and creation of their own selves'.<sup>55</sup>

A new understanding of the phenomenon in this important period of transition puts the events in explicative contexts and links every element within a scheme that includes all the actors. The most evident aspect is the impact that the country's socio-political as well as cultural situation has had on the emergence of new associations. Critiquing the neo-orientalist perspective, which tends to homogenize women's achievements or failures to the West, a deep insight into women's diverse experiences tells of progressive changes and an inter-generational debate growing throughout the network of associations. Undeniably, the country's independent activist bloggers and the associations of historical militants made a change on their own. But now it is important to pay attention to the new emerging associations, still less visible, which are breaking new ground and enacting changes in all dimensions. The women of these new associations are protagonists of the changes that started in 2011. They are the new pulse of the multiplicity of voices in a polyphonic choir that is still to be discovered, given voice and narrated.

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<sup>55</sup> Ben Hassine, 'Personal Expansion versus traditional gender stereotypes: Tunisian university women and ICT', p. 89.

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# **The Politics of Mourning: Mothers of the Martyrs' Narratives of Resistance and Empowerment**

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## **Abstract**

This paper is based on the narratives of a group of Egyptian mothers whose sons were killed during the 25<sup>th</sup> January demonstrations in Egypt in 2011. I examine the narratives of this group of martyrs' mothers whether those that appeared in Talk Shows in the mainstream media, or in Youtube videos commemorating their sons, or in Facebook pages which they created to remember their martyred sons, or videos depicting the mothers' speeches and actions during protests, or photographs depicting their powerful iconic status and hence great influence on revolutionaries as 'mothers of martyrs'. I argue that their narratives are simultaneously narratives of resistance and empowerment. Some of those mothers – although they were still mourning the deaths of their sons – participated in the protests that led to the overthrowing of Mubarak on the 11<sup>th</sup> February. I believe that both those who participated 'politically' and those who told their/their sons' stories inspired other protestors, attested to the injustice of the regime, its use of excessive violence against the protestors and therefore signalled its loss of legitimacy. Even after Mubarak stepped down, under the rule of the military they continued to act as reminders of the atrocities committed by the regime and the need for bringing justice for the blood of the martyrs. I argue that the actual and symbolic presence of the martyrs' mothers played a unifying role in the society. They unified protestors in spite of ideological and religious diversity against a common tyrannical regime. The voices of the martyrs' mothers or the 'mothers of the revolution' continue to counter dominant myths propagated by the counter revolution about the revolution and its martyrs. Since both the 'mother' and the 'martyr' are archetypes that trigger certain feelings in the Egyptian collective unconscious; hence, making their voices heard can counter the counter revolutionary discourse which represents the revolutionaries as immoral, paid, traitors of the nation and who do not represent 'the people'.

## **Introduction**

Two words come to my mind when I think of Egypt's political martyrs over the last few years: appropriation and erasure. The memory of martyrs has been used in different ways by the state and

political groups to ‘reconstruct events in the popular imagination’.<sup>1</sup> It has been part of the struggle over power. During their opposing presidential election campaigns, the two candidates Morsi and Shafiq used images of Mina Daniel, the Maspero martyr, as a mascot. In an attempt to present himself as ‘the president of the revolution’, Morsi invited the families of the martyrs to the presidential palace after he was elected.<sup>2</sup> When the transitional government in November 2013 built a monument in Tahrir square, it announced that it is erected in commemoration of the martyrs of the 25<sup>th</sup> January and 30<sup>th</sup> June revolutions. The state, by doing so, wanted to equate between 25<sup>th</sup> January and 30<sup>th</sup> June, affirming that 30<sup>th</sup> June is a revolution, leaving out and thus erasing the memory of martyrs of the Mohamed Mahmoud battles, the Maspero massacre and the Port Said Stadium massacre. The government wanted to ‘differentiate between those who have died for a cause deemed worthy, and dissidents who do not get the honour of being described as [...] “martyr[s]”, but are labelled “baltageyya” (thugs), “terrorists” or “conspirators”’.<sup>3</sup>

The last temporary government and the counter-revolutionary forces before it has been keen on erasing certain facets of collective memory and re-writing the story of Egypt ever since the revolution erupted. The 25<sup>th</sup> January martyrs represent the main actors in that story and an integral part of that memory.<sup>4</sup> To eradicate martyrs’ memory, some claim that the Victims Fund for Families of the Martyrs and the Injured has been used to bribe families in order to passively accept the deaths of their sons. The state has also made numerous attempts to disrepute the memories of martyrs who were regarded as iconic – and by relation taint the revolution.<sup>5</sup> Khaled Sa‘īd is a clear example. On one hand, in the months leading up to the 25<sup>th</sup> January revolution, it is the disfigured picture of 28 year old Khaled, who was beaten to death by the police in Alexandria and which became emblematic of Egypt’s problems under Mubarak, that can be regarded as the initial spark for the revolution. To counter this iconic status of Khaled the counter-revolution propagated an opposing

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<sup>1</sup> L. Gribbon, ‘On Owning the Memory of the Martyrs’, in *MadaMasr*, 25<sup>th</sup> January 2014, pp. 1-3, p.1, <http://www.madamasr.com/content/owning-memory-martyrs>.

<sup>2</sup> Gribbon, ‘On Owning the Memory’, p. 2.

<sup>3</sup> *Ib.*, p. 2.

<sup>4</sup> *Ib.*, p. 1.

<sup>5</sup> *Ib.*, p. 2.

representation of him as a *hashāsh* or drug addict. Heroic youth such as Wael Ghoneim and Ahmed Doma who played key roles in the mobilization for the protests leading up to the 25<sup>th</sup> January revolution are being persecuted, and systematically portrayed as unpatriotic figures.

Martyrs have been 'imbued with contradictory meanings, vices, virtues', to the extent that even the causes of their deaths have been turned into ambivalent events.<sup>6</sup> According to *Al-Masry Al-Youm*'s 6<sup>th</sup> February account, Sally Zahran (the well-known female icon of the revolution) had died from being clubbed on the head by regime thugs on her way to Tahrir Square on 28<sup>th</sup> January.<sup>7</sup> Her family, however, publicly contradicted the story of her death on 24<sup>th</sup> February 2011, denying the cause of her death and claiming that 'she had been trying to leave home to join the demonstrations against her mother's wishes and had either jumped or fallen from the family's [...] balcony while trying to leave'.<sup>8</sup> Many believed that her family was 'compelled by forces sympathetic to the old regime to issue a denial of the heroic martyr story'.<sup>9</sup> This denial which conflicted with the iconic image of Sally – killed in battle – discredits Sally and therefore serves anti-revolution propaganda.

As a result of these strategies of erasure, martyrs have been reduced to mere numbers and one way of going beyond this reduction is to give due attention to the feelings of loss that those martyrs' families experience. I examine the visual and audiovisual narratives of a group of martyrs' mothers whose sons died on 28<sup>th</sup> January, the 'Friday of Rage', a day which left the Security Forces broken after four days of trying to subdue demonstrations. My aim is to uncover the different strategies used by mothers to cope with their experiences of loss and grief. I argue that their diverse attempts to deal with and survive their grief, are simultaneously acts of resistance to the counter-revolution's increasing erasure of the martyrs from collective memory. In their case, mourning – far from being a passive activity – emerges as an active occasion for self-discovery and empowerment. They rediscover

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<sup>6</sup> Gribbon, 'On Owning the Memory', p. 1.

<sup>7</sup> W. Armbrust, 'The Ambivalence of Martyrs and the Counter-revolution', in *Fieldsights - Hot Spots*, *Cultural Anthropology Online*, 8/5/2013, pp. 1-4, p.2, <http://culanth.org/fieldsights/213-the-ambivalence-of-martyrs-and-the-counter-revolution> (access 2/12/2016).

<sup>8</sup> Armbrust, 'The Ambivalence of Martyrs', p. 3.

<sup>9</sup> *Ib.*

previously hidden aspects of their identity as public speakers, activists, leaders who inspire the masses. By engaging in acts of resistance, going beyond mere mourning, and by channelling their grief instead into positive action, the mothers emphasize their subjectivity and agency.

I have divided the different forms of mothers' engagement in resistance into: 'Activist resistance' or resistance by being physically present in protests, 'Verbal resistance' in the media (on T.V. talk shows), 'Digital resistance' through representation of the martyr in the digital media namely YouTube videos and Facebook.

*Guwāya Shahīd* [Inside Me there is a Martyr] is the title of an anthology on the 25<sup>th</sup> January revolution's graffiti.<sup>10</sup> This title describes best the experience of mothers of the martyrs, who are (metaphorically) still inhabited by their sons: they gave birth to them, and in dying the mothers repossess the issues and ideas that moved their sons most. Paradoxically, in losing their sons they cling to the very aims of a revolution that took their sons away from them. I argue that the main frames of the 25<sup>th</sup> January revolution have an afterlife in the mothers' words and actions. The mothers not only reiterate the: *Karāma* (Dignity), *Hurriya*, (Freedom), '*Adāla Ijtimā'iyya*, (Social Justice), but they also extend and reinvent them. My reading of the mother's relationship to the martyred son is informed by Suad Joseph's approach which focuses on kinship and interfamily dynamics, specially the mother-son relationship.<sup>11</sup> She conceives the subject as:

A reticulation of sites, a shifting networks of meaning and interaction. The subject is constantly re-consolidating, re-configuring in relation - a notion of subjectivity that is always in motion, always in relation. A constant re-figuring locates the subject in the processes of re-figuring the sites of re-figuring. Relationships constitute those locations.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> H. Helmy, *Guwāya Shahīd: Fan Share'e al-thawra al-missriyya* [Inside Me there is a Martyr: Street Art of the Egyptian Revolution], al-'Ein Publishing House, Cairo, 2013.

<sup>11</sup> S. Joseph, 'My Son/Myself, My Mother/Myself: Paradoxical Relationalities of Patriarchal Connectivity', in Suad Joseph (ed.), *Intimate Selving in Arab Families: Gender, Self and Identity*, Syracuse University Press, Syracuse, 1999, pp. 174-190.

<sup>12</sup> S. Joseph, 'Thinking Intentionality: Arab Women's Subjectivity and Its Discontents', in *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies* 8/2 (2012), pp. 1-25.

### Sacrifice, Motherhood and the Politics of Mourning

*Mater Dolorosa* or 'mother of sorrows' is a monument depicting protective, sorrowing mothers sculpted by Käthe Kollwitz to commemorate the sacrifice of mothers during WWI. Sara Ruddick describes *Mater Dolorosa* as such:

Scrounging for food to keep her children alive, weeping over the body of her son, nursing survivors, sadly rebuilding her home, reweaving the connections that war has destroyed - as she grieves over her particular loss, she mourns war itself.<sup>13</sup>

The 'mother of sorrows' tears are caused by the destruction of 'women's work' brought about by war and violence. Yet, despite her pain, she instils life in everything around her, 'hold[ing] lives together'.<sup>14</sup> For Ruddick, 'the world seen through mourning women's tears suggests the blessings of peace'; as such, the 'mother of sorrows' is representative of maternal peacefulness.<sup>15</sup> She regrets that weeping women will be too wrecked for a political response and poses the question: 'how can suffering be made effectively political?' In other words, how can suffering become an agent of change? Only through effective representations of suffering can suffering become political. Protests that can be regarded as 'effective' are those that 'display in public emotions that have been relegated to a 'private', apolitical world'.<sup>16</sup>

In some contexts (as in Iran during the war), mothers were not only expected to be the resilient keepers of the hearth while men go to battle, but they were also expected to give their sons to the state to die in the war. When they die there, they were expected to be strong mourning mothers, to be 'Mary figures holding their sons in a "pieta"',

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<sup>13</sup> S. Ruddick, *Maternal Thinking: Towards a Politics of Peace*, Beacon Press, Boston, MA 1989, p. 142.

<sup>14</sup> S. Ruddick, 'Women of Peace: A Feminist Construction', in Lois Ann Lorentzen - Jennifer E. Turpin (eds.), *The Women and War Reader*, New York University Press, New York-London, 1998, pp. 213-226, pp. 215-216.

<sup>15</sup> Ruddick, 'Women of Peace', p. 216.

<sup>16</sup> Idem. Ruddick cites the example of the Madres of Argentina who protested because of the disappearance of their children, as an example of 'effective representations of suffering', as they display what traditionally belongs in the private sphere in public. As they paraded in a central square, they wore 'as kerchiefs diapers on which they embroidered the names of the disappeared children'.

a stance of mourning frozen in time'.<sup>17</sup> In order to mobilize the Iranian people on such a large scale for the war, the state promoted a culture of martyrdom. This culture rendered women, from the state's point of view, 'only visible as mourners' which excluded mothers without martyred sons/husbands. It also excluded mourning discourses that deviated from the state's dominant discourse of strong mourning women who were 'bound to the cemetery, alone, with very well-scripted and acceptable lines of lament'.<sup>18</sup>

Apart from the 'mother of sorrows' as symbolic of peace and the resilience of Iranian mourning women in 'unending pieta[s]',<sup>19</sup> mourning women in different parts of the world have used their suffering as an agent of change. 'Las Madres de La Plaza de Mayo' are mothers whose militancy was against forgetting those who disappeared during the years of political dictatorship in Argentina. In Chile, the 'Mothers of the Association of Families of the Detained-Disappeared' questioned their government regarding the disappearances of their children and relatives during periods of political turmoil.<sup>20</sup> 'Women in Black' is an international movement of women of all nationalities that protest against war, the arms industry, racism, human rights abuses, violence against women, wars of aggression.<sup>21</sup> They 'stand silently [...] holding banners that invite people's participation: "Dress in black, mourn the victims, stand for peace"'. The black clothing or 'mourning attire' signals not only women's right to mourn but that it is also their civic duty. According to nationalist and patriarchal fantasy the 'mother of the nation', the lamenting mother proudly gives up her son to the 'nation's military pursuits'. However, the 'Women in Black':

Undermine the normative role stereotypically assigned to women by nationalism and patriarchy [...] by re-embodiment the ambiguous sign of mourning outside the sanctioned boundaries of the home [...and]

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<sup>17</sup> R. Varzi, 'Iran's Pieta: Motherhood, Sacrifice and Film in the Aftermath of the Iran- Iraq War', in *Feminist Review* 88 (2008), pp. 86-98, p. 96.

<sup>18</sup> *Ib.*, p. 94.

<sup>19</sup> *Ib.*, p. 96.

<sup>20</sup> B.P. Libed, 'Mothering and Militarism: Forging a New Feminist and Nationalist Consciousness', in *Dekada '70 and Activist Mothers: A New Look at Mothering, Militarism and Philippine Martial Law*, Thesis 2010, pp. 53-79, p. 54.

<sup>21</sup> A. Athanasiou, 'Reflections on the Politics of Mourning: Feminist Ethics and Politics in the Age of Empire', in *Historein* 5 (2005), pp. 40-57.

being radically disloyal, instead of unconditionally supportive, to their men in time of war.<sup>22</sup>

The Women in Black's untypical involvement in politics or their politics of mourning drives us to reimagine the endless possibilities of women's political participation in the future and drives us to re-envision politics itself. By

Resisting what has been categorized as 'mourning' in its normative connections to the feminine and the patriotic, 'Women in Black' leave open a space for a politics-to-come, for a renewed anti-racist, anti-colonialist, and anti-militarist feminist protest against biopolitical production of life as bare life.<sup>23</sup>

A woman as 'icon of the nation' is a well-known image in Egyptian history, political rhetoric, art, nationalist songs and poetry. It is a cultural construct. Its message was used by Egyptian women as a means to affirm their political agency and to demand for their rights. Şafıyya Zaghül, wife of nationalist leader Sa'd Zaghül used motherhood imagery to establish a political role for herself. She shaped her public image to the extent that she came to be known and acquired the title of the mother of Egyptians, *Umm al-Miṣriyyīn*.<sup>24</sup> Nationalist women used 'their motherhood roles in their political activism' and 'carved a space for themselves in the public and political realms'.<sup>25</sup> The relationship between discourses emphasising the iconicity of mothers and women's agency is found in other areas of the region. In the Palestinian context, for example, Peteet argues that:

While a nationalist discourse celebrated [mothers] as icons of the nation, emblematic of the suffering and losses of the Palestinian people, mothers were crafting an agential location for themselves in a movement that did not directly recruit them as or position them as crucial actors.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Athanasiou, 'Reflections on the Politics', p. 41.

<sup>23</sup> *Ib.*, p. 52.

<sup>24</sup> Z. Zaatari, 'The Culture of Motherhood: An Avenue for Women's Civil Participation in South Lebanon', in *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies* 2/1 (2006), pp. 33-64, pp. 55-56.

<sup>25</sup> Zaatari, 'The Culture of Motherhood', p. 56.

<sup>26</sup> J. Peteet, 'Icons and Militants: Mothering in the Danger Zone', in *Signs* 23/1 (1997), pp. 103-129, p. 114.

In the Egyptian context, like the Palestinian one ‘women, as agents and subjects, negotiate the meaning of official, nationalist, maternal imagery’.<sup>27</sup> The subjectivity of the women in the mothers’ narratives examined here drives us to question the one-sidedness of the dominant imagery. In the context of women’s civil participation in Southern Lebanon, Zaatari argues that despite the differences between the women she interviewed, they all placed ‘a great deal of importance on the woman as “mother” of her family *and* of her “society”’.<sup>28</sup>

This ‘elevation of the role of motherhood to the realm of sanctity’ can be limiting but it’s also very liberating, since the emphasis on the mother role ‘allows [women] the flexibility outside the realm of the domestic’.<sup>29</sup> Their roles as mothers permit them to ‘deploy idioms of kinship with “strangers” or authoritative figures, providing them with the “uncontested” access to the public domain as mothers of all’. This motherhood discourse allows women to be culturally and politically active in their community.<sup>30</sup> Women in Southern Lebanon thus used the ‘culture of motherhood’ to their advantage, enabling them to go beyond religious/cultural boundaries and ultimately ‘transform[ing] the women themselves and the public space’.<sup>31</sup>

Coexisting with the discourse of mothers as national icons in Egypt is another dominant discourse: of mothers as patient and sacrificing. In the Middle East ‘cultural notions of motherhood, and of mothers as sacrificial and devoted’ are pervasive and the Islamic belief ‘elevates mothers to near saintliness and exhorts believers to honour mothers’.<sup>32</sup> An Egyptian mother is expected to sacrifice for the sake of her family, and patiently bear her pain without complaint.

Such selflessness/sacrifice is perceived as ‘natural’ and mothers seem to be elevated on account of their sacrifices. For some time after the revolution, the attention given by the different political powers and the media to the ‘mothers of martyrs’ endowed the ‘mother of martyr’ with reverence, gave meaning and public recognition to maternal sacrifice. Mothers of martyrs came to be regarded as icons of sacrifice. A few questions come to my mind: Are ‘mothers of the martyrs’ expected to patiently and quietly lose their sons? Are they

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<sup>27</sup> Peteet, ‘Icons and Militants’, p. 110.

<sup>28</sup> Zaatari, ‘The Culture of Motherhood’, p. 34.

<sup>29</sup> *Ib.*, p. 36.

<sup>30</sup> *Ib.*, p. 34.

<sup>31</sup> *Ib.*, p. 58.

<sup>32</sup> Peteet, ‘Icons and Militants’, p. 106.

expected to be as selfless and sacrificing for their nation as they are for their families? How can those mothers as agents and as subjects negotiate the meaning of maternal sacrifice?

I believe that the 'mother of martyr' status is simultaneously empowering and imprisoning. It gives power to a mother when she – emphasizing her agency – acts and makes her voice heard thus appropriating her newly acquired status. Khalid Sa'īd's mother is a case in point: she voices her opinion about imprisoned youth in the media, in public and even to former President Morsi himself.<sup>33</sup> It is also limiting when a mother – identifying with the naturalised discourse of the sacrificing mother – passively accepts her loss and becomes imprisoned in her own private mourning. The two states are not mutually exclusive, but coexist and the mothers experience both with varying degrees.

The 'mothers of martyrs' whose narratives are examined here deviate from the flatness of Ruddick's helpless model of the 'mother of sorrows': sacrificing, weeping, mourning passively, surrendering her son to the state and accepting her loss. On the contrary, the mothers of 25<sup>th</sup> January martyrs represent a much more complex model of mourning mothers as they stand in opposition to the state. And unlike the 'Women in Black' (who challenge maternal sacrifice both to the nation *and* the state), they politically oppose and challenge the state but sacrifice their sons to the nation *rather than* to the state. Finally, unlike the Palestinian 'mothers of martyrs' sacrifices that have always been supported by the Palestinian authorities, the sacrifices (and mourning) of the mothers of 25<sup>th</sup> January martyrs have never been encouraged by the authorities.

The 'mother of the 25<sup>th</sup> January martyr' carries her martyred son inside her in a state of eternal pregnancy. It is true that patriarchal societies institutionalised motherhood as a tool to control women, and in order to sustain structures of domination, especially that 'proper' motherhood was defined by men.<sup>34</sup> However, the motherhood of the martyrs' mothers (under discussion) is not a limited role that detracts from a woman's identity; rather, it is open enough to add to her

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<sup>33</sup> N. Hemeda - S. Ashour 'Interview with a Martyr's Mother: Khaled Sa'id's Mother Talks about June 30th and the End of the Muslim Brotherhood', translated from Arabic by Lamees Al Sharqawy, pp. 1-4, <http://en.hoqook.com/post/53667413528/interview-with-a-martyrs-mother-khaled-saids> (access 2/12/2016).

<sup>34</sup> A. Rich, *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*, W.W. Norton & Company Inc., New York-London, 1995.

identity, rather than subsume that identity. In the diversity of their mourning narratives, the mothers' forms of mourning contrast with the oneness of state or official discourses on mourning women, such as the dominant discourse of strong mourning mothers in Iran.

## **The Mothers of Martyrs in Resistance**

### ***Activist Resistance***

#### **Khaled Sa'īd's Mother: Mother of the Revolution**

Khalid Sa'īd's mother – who played a very important role in mobilizing and inspiring the revolutionaries during the 25<sup>th</sup> January demonstrations, sit-ins, marches and funerals of martyrs of the revolution – can be regarded as representative of the 'activism of mourning'. Athanasiou defines it as 'public and collective formations by which trauma is addressed in all its affective, social, and political or biopolitical implications, intimacies, and limits'.<sup>35</sup> She channels her own personal grief into public action. By participating in demonstrations and funerals, she is simultaneously mourning the death of her son and the murder of other youth, objecting to what happened to her son and to the atrocities committed against other youth. She experiences both personal and collective trauma, and reacts to those traumas on emotional, social and political levels.

I will refer to two photos that reveal her politics of mourning: her use of her status as mother of the martyr to engage in political actions. In the first photo (figure 1), Sa'īd's mother is warmly embracing Wael Ghoneim, the administrator of the 'We are all Khaled Sa'īd' Facebook page.<sup>36</sup> The photo is loaded with symbolism: the mother of Sa'īd whose murder was the initial spark for the 25<sup>th</sup> January revolution hugging Wael whose weeping during a TV interview after seeing pictures of the revolution's martyrs, brought millions to the streets to demand Mubarak leave office.

The mother's physical gesture here is an instance of 'other mothering' when 'an act of maternal caring [is] extended communitywide'.<sup>37</sup> 'Other mothering' is when mothering extends beyond the home and beyond actual kinship ties. The events of the last few years from protests, to the violence practised against the

<sup>35</sup> Athanasiou, 'Reflections on the Politics', p. 42.

<sup>36</sup> 'Egyptian Wael Ghonim, a Google marketing manager, hugs the mother of Khaled Said', Photo:APPhoto/AhmedAli.<http://www.bbc.co.uk/staticarchive/6b450c53223bd410ff17090144e7c2cd689321ff.jpg> (access 2/12/2016).

<sup>37</sup> Petecet, 'Icons and Militants', p. 121.

protestors, and to the death of youth that is its outcome, foregrounded the role of 'other mothering' in the context of violence, which 'overturns the semblance of a home-feminine/front-masculine equation', thus 'renegotiating the meaning of motherhood'.<sup>38</sup> Her newly acquired role and status is apparent during the protests, when mothers of martyrs generally and the mother of Sa'īd in particular were popularly regarded as 'mothers of the revolution'. Youth, for example, in Tahrir square would go to greet Khalid Sa'īd's mother.

Fig. 1



Equally symbolic and an instance of 'other mothering' is her supportive embrace of Mina Daniel's mother in another photo, another iconic martyr, who died in the Maspero massacre (figure 2).<sup>39</sup> The two photos are very telling: her stance in support of the revolutionary youth (Wael Ghoneim) and the families of the victims of the regime's police (Mina Daniel's mother), represent her attempt to attain justice for the blood of her son. By supporting them she is supporting a revolution that promises to bring about the end of a regime that was responsible for the death of her son and other Egyptian youth.

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<sup>38</sup> Peteet, 'Icons and Militants', p. 121.

<sup>39</sup> Nadia Beshara (L), mother of Mina Daniel, and Leila Said (R), mother of Khalid Said, embrace at the Daniel family's home on the outskirts of Cairo, 23/10/2011, in <http://www.globalpost.com/dispatch/news/regions/middleeast/egypt/111021/mothers-the-revolution> (access 2/12/2016).

Fig. 2



Thus, Sa'īd's mother created an agential location for herself in a revolution that was mainly mobilized by youth, and a society that didn't locate mothers of martyrs as central actors, but merely idealised and honoured them as icons of maternal sacrifice (and only for some time before the counter-revolutionary forces suppressed them together with memories of the martyrs). The fact that she creates for herself such an important public and political role testifies to the view that mourning implies acceptance that 'by the loss one undergoes one will be changed, possibly forever', and that mourning 'has to do with agreeing to undergo a transformation [...] the full result of which one cannot know in advance'.<sup>40</sup>

### **Anonymous 'Mother of the Martyr': from Icon to Agent**

'For the sake of this woman the revolution did not end!' (*Min ajl hadhī al-mar'a lam tatawaqaf al-thawra*) is the title given to one of the videos uploaded on YouTube of this mother in Tahrir square.<sup>41</sup> The title testifies to her influence on the crowd and proves how inspirational her words were. Like all leaders, she typically stands on a pedestal, invoking and practically screaming the need to bring retribution. She voices one of the main frames of the revolution: justice for the blood of the dead. Significantly, she holds in her hand a full-page feature of eleven martyr faces published in the newspaper

<sup>40</sup> J. Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*, Verso, New York-London, 2004, p. 21.

<sup>41</sup> من اجل هذه المرأة لم تتوقف الثورة - YouTube.flv (Accessed: Saturday, 15<sup>th</sup> August 2015).

*Al-Masry al-Youm* on 6<sup>th</sup> February. In response to a man from the crowd who tells her: 'Don't be upset. Have faith in God! Your son is a martyr!'

She screams back (now addressing the crowd gathering around her):

You shouldn't give in. I am not upset about *him*, I am upset from those who killed *them* and from those who did nothing about their death. They want you to give in. But you must not keep quiet. Don't give in! Down with Mubarak! (She starts cheering while crying at the same time).

Even though according to Freudian psychology 'letting go' is what distinguishes normal mourning from abnormal 'melancholia', yet like the 'Women in Black', the mourning woman here refuses to 'let go' or get over her loss, and her mourning in public is 'a historically situated practice of dissent and alternative responsiveness in our present world such as it is *now*'.<sup>42</sup>

She invokes the crowd to continue the resistance and instead of mourning the loss of her son only, she mourns the loss of other youth: 'I am not upset about *him*, I am upset from those who killed *them*'. Thus, her mourning 'generalises the grieving at the same time that it makes it more acute' which makes it more powerful and effective in mobilizing the crowd because

Although the problem of loss is always *this* loss, this person or relative I knew and loved, it is also [...] all those who are injured or destroyed by the peoples and nations who wage war.<sup>43</sup>

Moreover, in her mourning 'the individual loss is not absorbed by the more generalised loss; instead they become inextricable from one another'.<sup>44</sup> Not only does her public mourning represent an act of resistance against the particular political regime of Mubarak, but her emotional mourning performed in public is akin to the way 'Women in Black'

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<sup>42</sup> Athanasiou, 'Reflections on the Politics', p. 48.

<sup>43</sup> J. Butler - A. Athanasiou, *Dispossession: The Performative in the Political*, Polity, Cambridge-Malden, 2013, pp. 142-143.

<sup>44</sup> *Ib.*, p. 143.

Through their political-performative gestures of affect [...] not only compel gender, kinship, and national intelligibility into a severe crisis, but they also unsettle the very boundaries of the political.<sup>45</sup>

Thus, her public expression of emotions or emotional performance of mourning opens up the boundaries and broadens the limits of the political. Her opposition to Mubarak's regime is also most politicized because she is opposing her own state, thus breaking away from the dominant norm of the 'women of sorrow [who] are meant to accept their suffering, protesting only against enemy aggressors'.<sup>46</sup>

The mother's actions here are proof that 'effective representations of suffering both deploy expectations of womanliness and violate them'. Although she does not stop crying (fulfilling expectations of womanliness) yet she does not shy away from standing on a high pedestal (violating expectations of womanhood). As a result, her demonstration of suffering prompts 'the sympathies that mourning tends to elicit but in a context in which passive or sentimental witness becomes difficult'.<sup>47</sup> Her audience do not simply 'sympathise' with her loss, but they are driven (by her representation of suffering) to take a stand and to act upon it. Thus, her emotional mourning shows that 'women who act as women in public spaces transform the passions of attachment and loss into political action', and more importantly 'transform the woman of sorrow *from icon to agent*'.<sup>48</sup>

### *Digital Resistance*

#### **Ahmad: The Groom of the Revolution**

Ahmad Ihab's mother creates a Facebook page that she calls 'Om El-Shaheed' (*Umm al-Shahīd*) 'Mother of the Martyr', which contains images tracing Ahmad's life from childhood, to marriage and to death.<sup>49</sup> She posts his photo at school, in disguise clothes as a child, and other photos of him as a young man throbbing with life. One of the photographs she posts of Ahmad is his enlarged photo, placed on a car in the procession during his funeral. In it, Ahmad looks very cheerful, in an orange shirt. Significantly, it is the same one that appeared in the full-page feature of the eleven martyr faces published

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<sup>45</sup> Athanasiou, 'Reflections on the Politics', p. 43.

<sup>46</sup> Ruddick, 'Women of Peace', pp. 216-217.

<sup>47</sup> *Ib.*, p. 216.

<sup>48</sup> Ruddick, 'Women of Peace', p. 217.

<sup>49</sup> [www.facebook.com/Om-El-Shaheed](http://www.facebook.com/Om-El-Shaheed).

in the newspaper *al-Masry al-Youm*. The image of martyrdom represented in this newspaper page is immediately evoked at viewing Ahmad's photograph, and is an immediate and effective reminder of revolutionary meaning.

Ahmad is known as '*arīs al-thawra*' ('The Groom of the revolution'), as he was married only one month before he died on the 28<sup>th</sup> of January. His wedding photo with his mother – not his bride – together with her photo looking very cheerful with a pink head scarf on (also carrying his wedding photo) in a protest after his death, is very telling (figures 3 and 4). In Islam, eternal life and honour are bestowed upon the martyr. So in Palestine, where 'funerals dramatized sentiments that were decidedly celebratory, and thus defiant, in the face of death and collective loss and asserted community solidarity despite wrenching adversity', a mother ululates at the funeral of her martyred son.<sup>50</sup> This explains the celebratory spirit in figure 4. In dying, he is as happy as a groom, awaiting a new life in heaven. Not only that, the mother's celebration of Ahmad's martyrdom is an act of defiance at the forces that caused his death.

Fig. 3



Fig. 4



The mother's creation of 'Om El-Shaheed' is an act of defiance on more than one level. She resists Mubarak's regime and the fate (of death) it imposed on her son by providing him with an alternative

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<sup>50</sup> Peteet, 'Icons and Militants', p. 115.

eternal existence in virtual space. It is also a resistance of the counter-revolution's intentional erasure of the memory of martyrs and exclusion of martyrs' families from the media in recent years. Her facebook page represents an alternative space where she can infinitely tell her/her son's story, to an endless number of people. It is a space where communal mourning also takes place: this is represented in the comments and responses of her friends whenever she chooses to remember her son by posting one of his photos.

### **Tarek: A Vision of Social Justice**

Eternally pregnant with their sons, the mothers reiterate the causes and aims of the revolution that motivated their sons to protest most. This is reflected in the testimony of Tarek's mother, which is part of a documentary video made up of Tarek's photos at different stages of his life, that tells his story, which she uploads on YouTube. Her testimony is very powerful because it is eloquent and genuine.<sup>51</sup> She starts to talk about Tarek by explaining that *he* was living comfortably, yet he 'saw how young men of his age suffered to find a job, and waited for years to save enough money to be able to get married!'<sup>52</sup> Her empathetic tone shows that she identifies with those young men's ideas, and is thus spreading and preaching one of the main frames of the revolution, namely: Social Justice. However, this is not simply her son's voice and perspective that is being communicated to us by her, nor is it entirely hers, for

Grief displays [...] the thrall in which our relations with others hold us [...] in ways that often interrupt the self-conscious account of ourselves we might try to provide, in ways that challenge the very notion of ourselves as autonomous and in control.<sup>53</sup>

Tarek's mother also relives his experiences and imagines the agonies he must have went through even after his death - as a body. Impregnated with their sons, the mothers try to imagine what the

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<sup>51</sup> V. Das, 'Language and Body: Transactions in the Construction of Pain', in *Daedalus*, 125/1 (1996), pp. 67-91, pp. 80-81. Das argue that grief leaves its mark not only on the body of a mourning woman but also on her language, which 'bears witness to the loss that death has inflicted'. She also refers to the 'excess of speech in the mourning laments' of Punjabi women, which 'stands in stark contrast to the behaviour of men' who 'in the case of death [...] become mute'.

<sup>52</sup> ذكرى الشهيد طارق عبد اللطيف الأقطش - YouTube.flv (Accessed 18/8/2015).

<sup>53</sup> Butler, *Precarious Life*, p. 23.

youth went through at different stages of their disappearance. In doing so, her narrative revives the pain of the nation as such: the loss that 'one cannot "get over", one cannot "work through", which is the deliberate act of violence against a collectivity, humans who have been rendered anonymous for violence'.<sup>54</sup> Thus, she gives paramount importance to the search for his body and how they miraculously found it. She says that:

A man – *by chance* – who was looking for the corpse of his relative, and was shown Tarek's corpse as his relative's, found Tarek's ID in his pocket! Imagine?! For over a month, no one *bothered* to look in this corpse's pocket?! (Emphasis hers.)

This last revelation foregrounds the 'interdependence' of not only our lives but our bodies too: her reclamation of her son's body was dependant on another's reclamation of his relative's body. Likely, the improvement of the life conditions of other youth of Tarek's age *depended* on Tarek's participation in the revolution (which involved risking his body and life). This reveals that:

Relationality [is] not only [...] a descriptive or historical fact of our formation, but also [...] an ongoing normative dimension of our social and political lives, one in which we are compelled to take stock of our interdependence.<sup>55</sup>

Her narrative drives us to view mourning as

An ethical and political reflection on what it means to be responsible to the memory of the lost other, the one whose suffering and loss is expropriated (the enemy, the marginal, the foreign, the illegal immigrant, the other).<sup>56</sup>

Responsibility to the memory of the lost other is revealed in her narrative. The 'other' here is the socially marginalised poor classes. It is revealed in the use of 'someone' instead of her son's name.

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<sup>54</sup> J. Butler, 'Afterword: After Loss, What Then?', in D. L. Eng - David Kazanjian (eds.), *Loss: The Politics of Mourning*, University of California Press, Berkeley, CA 2003, pp. 467-473, p. 468.

<sup>55</sup> Butler, *Precarious Life*, p. 27.

<sup>56</sup> Athanasiou, 'Reflections on the Politics', p. 42.

'Someone' can refer to the numerous poor youth who lost their lives during the early days of the revolution.

### *Resistance in the Media*

#### **Ziad: The Artist as Philosopher**

Sawsan's narrative represents the selflessness of the martyrs: Ziad sacrificed his life because he wanted a better Egypt; he wanted things to improve for the people.<sup>57</sup> He is presented as a thinker and an artist. Her words communicate this selflessness powerfully: 'Martyrs didn't just die. They died because they felt that in risking their lives they would actually improve people's living conditions and bring about freedom'. He is an embodiment of those 'practices of resistance which involve dispossessing oneself as a way to dispossess coercive powers'.<sup>58</sup> 'Horreya' or Freedom is the main revolutionary frame communicated in her narrative. She represents a determination to embrace this freedom when she refuses to give in to blackmail. She announces on TV (during the Talk Show she and her husband appeared in) that they were threatened and told not to talk to the media, but she did so in spite of all the threats. They were even promised to get their son back, at a time when – she discovers later – he was already dead.

Sawsan's silences (which are frequent during the long interview) drive us to question the possibility of representing pain and point to the limits of language before human pain. Her narrative, 'by exposing the condition by which disaster wrecks language' does not give voice to those who are voiceless, but integrates 'the bewildered muteness of the survivors'.<sup>59</sup> Her narrative – slow paced, contemplative and filled with silences – registers the survivor's bewilderment and muteness at the unspeakable violence committed by the security forces against the youth protestors. Their violence represents the 'disaster' that befell the nation at large and her family in particular, and although she did witness the killings in the demonstrations like many Egyptians in the media, yet she is a first-hand 'witness' to what befell her own son. She is a 'survivor' of her son's death. Her narrative is a survivor's testimony which has to have a listener, represented here in the

العاشرة مساءً منى الشاذلي أسرة الشهيد زياد بكير أحد شهداء ثورة 25 يناير حلقة 02 07 2011 جزء 00 2 - YouTube.flv (Accessed 19 /10/2015), العاشرة مساءً منى الشاذلي أسرة الشهيد زياد بكير، 00 3 - YouTube.flv (Accessed 18/8/2015).  
 00 3 جزء 02 07 2011 حلقة 25 يناير - أحد شهداء ثورة 25 يناير حلقة 02 07 2011 جزء 00 3

<sup>58</sup> Butler - Athanasiou, *Dispossession*, p. 146.

<sup>59</sup> Athanasiou, 'Reflections on the Politics', p. 46.

audience who are watching the program. The TV program can be regarded as a chance to involve the community at large in an act of 'public witnessing' which transforms a 'bad death' – un-mourned and un-witnessed – into a 'good death'.<sup>60</sup>

### **Conclusion**

Grief is not only a tool enabling mourning women to enter the patriarchal public sphere, but it is also a way of reaching a wider audience (thus resisting forgetfulness of the revolutionary mottoes). Through their physical presence in Tahrir Square, the new social media space, and the regular media, the mothers attained this.

Most of the martyrs (whose mothers' narratives are examined here) were not needy. They belonged to middle – upper middle classes. As they themselves were not poverty stricken, their martyrdom should be regarded with deep reverence, for not only did they participate in a fight that was not primarily theirs but they also died for their cause. As such, their selflessness comes to the fore.

Mourning mothers created political space(s) in which they challenged the state's power and authority. In these spaces of resistance, they converted and employed their grief into a plea for justice and human rights of other citizens in their society. Whether these spaces were the squares or the new media – represented in Facebook or Youtube documentaries – the mothers became agents of change.

The martyrs' mothers had the choice to object and speak out against the violence practised against their sons or to be silent, let go and let their sons and their maternalism become mere 'victims' of state/police violence. They sacrificed their sons to the nation but not to the state. In fact, the state (represented in the different governments that ruled Egypt since the revolution erupted) was rarely on their side. Moreover, whereas the iconic status of Egyptian mothers in general is stable and persistent, the iconicity of the mothers of January 25<sup>th</sup> martyrs is variable. It varies with the passage of time and as the state's position varies towards the revolution, a position which determines who is perceived as patriotic and who is perceived as a traitor. This relativity is no more apparent than in the media (which reflects the state's position): the media moved from a preoccupation with the revolution's 'mothers of martyrs' to utter negligence and from an

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<sup>60</sup> Athanasiou, 'Reflections on the Politics', p. 46.

admiration of their sons' patriotism to suspicion regarding their patriotism.

In the two years following the revolution the numerous mothers of the martyrs protested frequently for the trial of the killers of the martyrs. Today – at a time when Egyptians have either forgotten the revolution, or are blaming it for Egypt's economic troubles, or regard it as a conspiracy – the mothers of martyrs, are still waiting for retribution, especially that *qiṣāṣ* (justice for the blood of the martyrs), is still an unfulfilled demand of the parents of martyrs. The group of mothers examined here are part of this general struggle by 'mothers of the martyrs' for the rights of their sons. And in telling and preserving the history of their martyred sons, they are also telling the history of the revolution. As such, they can be regarded as the revolution's guardians: saving it, its causes, mottos, and aims from forgetfulness.

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# **Increased Gender-Based Violence as a Result of the Greater Visibility of Women's Rights Defenders in the Public Sphere? Remarks on 'Anti-Harassment' Initiatives in Egypt**

Roswitha BADRY

## **Abstract**

By all accounts, women played a prominent role during the mass protests of 2011 in the MENA region. As a result, they were highly visible in public places usually claimed by male authorities. While women's participation was initially praised and honoured, domestically as well as internationally, soon after the ousting of the former rulers, attempts were made to push defenders of women's rights out of the public sphere back into the private sphere. In the transitional period, women were not only marginalized in the political decision-process but were also, as protesters in public space, subjected to harassment, sexual violence and other instruments of political intimidation. This phenomenon is best documented in Egypt, thus this paper will focus on the reactions to and explanations of increased gender-based violence in this country. In response to both the significant rise in sexual assaults and the inadequate reactions on the part of political authorities, a number of organizations, groups, and campaigns emerged to provide protection for female protesters, to offer psychological support to the victims, to document the cases, and/or to press for a fundamental solution to the 'social-culturally embedded problem'. The official reactions demonstrate that a real change in gender policies and political participation is far from welcomed.

## **Introduction**

### **Sexual/Sexualized Harassment in Egypt – A Complex Issue to Conceptualize and Frame**

By all accounts, women played a prominent role during the mass protests of 2011 in the MENA region. Photographs from the streets and squares transmitted their challenge against persistent stereotypical images of traditional gender roles: women were very clearly seen and heard demonstrating side-by-side with men in the public sphere that so far had been largely marked out as masculine and where women were expected to behave within the confines of their defined gender category as females. However, this situation began to change as soon

as the battle for control and legitimacy started following the ousting of the former rulers. Whereas women's participation was initially praised and honoured, domestically as well as internationally, now attempts were made to push women protesters out of the public arena back into the private sphere. In the transitional period women were not only marginalized in the political decision-process but were also, as protesters in public squares, subjected to harassment, sexual violence and other instruments of political intimidation. Yet, despite post-revolutionary conservative backlash and a surge of gender-based violence, women's rights activists have continued to assert their claims.<sup>1</sup>

This paper will focus on Egypt, where the so-called 'phenomenon' of 'sexual harassment' (*al-taharrush al-jinsī*) has become a major issue of national concern and a dominant topic in the media coverage of the activities of women's rights supporters over the past three years – often at the expense of other important women's rights issues, as some observers comment.<sup>2</sup> According to several studies, surveys, and reports, sexual harassment, ranging from verbal and non-verbal molestation to rape, has escalated to unprecedented levels in the post-Mubarak era. News agencies frequently refer to the results of a survey conducted by *UN Women* in 2013<sup>3</sup> that do indeed sound dramatic. But simply talking of more than 99% of Egyptian women having experienced 'some form of sexual harassment' (in 2012) rather

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<sup>1</sup> For an overview of the development described see, in general, the essay by N. Al-Ali, 'Gendering the Arab Spring', in *Middle East Journal of Culture and Communication* 5/1 (2012), pp. 26-31; for Egypt (and further references for 'women and the Arab Spring'), R. Badry, 'Against all Odds – New Tendencies in Egyptian Feminism (2011-2013)', in *Hemispheres* 29/3 (2014), especially pp. 5-7, 22-25.

<sup>2</sup> C. Froböse, 'Women are a Red Line! Sexualisierte Belästigung und Frauenrechte im "post"-revolutionären Ägypten', in D. Filter - E. Fuchs - J. Reich (eds.), *Arabischer Frühling? Geschlechterpolitiken in einer Region im Umbruch*, Centaurus, Hamburg, 2013, pp. 175-176. Comment of Dr. Rabab El Mahdi, professor of political science at the AUC, as quoted in S. El Masry, 'The Proliferation of Women Initiatives', in *Daily News Egypt*, 28/11/2012, <http://www.dailynewsegypt.com/2012/11/28/the-proliferation-of-women-initiatives/> (accessed 2/12/2016).

<sup>3</sup> For a link to the survey by *UN Women*, to be precise 'United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women', entitled 'Study on Ways and Methods to Eliminate Sexual Harassment in Egypt: Results/Outcomes and Recommendations Summary' see, HarassMap, 'Sexual harassment myths': <http://harassmap.org/en/resource-center/harassment-myths/> (accessed 18/03/2015). As indicated by the respondents, the most common manifestation of SH is touching, followed by whistling and verbal abuse.

obscures the issue and is more misleading than clarifying.<sup>4</sup> It comes as no surprise that a closer look at the publications and statements reveals that the issue is much more complex, not only as regards the understanding and perceptions of the term sexual harassment but also regarding the framing of the issue, that is whether the social phenomenon of sexual harassment (henceforth SH) is interpreted in a reductionist manner or fairly comprehensively. Either way, choosing one explanatory approach over another has a far-reaching impact on the way appropriate solutions to the problem are envisioned. Roughly speaking, two major tendencies can be discerned. Organizations or groups which are part of or close to the regime, among them the so-called 'QUANGOS' or 'GONGOS',<sup>5</sup> often refer to the problem as a social evil, a 'cancer-like disease'<sup>6</sup> that once removed will result in the recovery of the whole body of the nation. More than once the proponents of this kind of reasoning have shifted the focus of attention

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<sup>4</sup> See, for instance, the following articles: '99.3% of Egyptian Women Experienced Sexual Harassment: Report', 28/04/2013, in <http://www.dailynewsegypt.com/2013/04/28/99-3-of-egyptian-women-experienced-sexual-harassment-report/>; E. Abdelkader, '99.3% of Egyptian Women, Girls have been Sexually Harassed', 06/04/2013, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/engy-abdelkader/99-percent-of-egyptian-women-girls-have-been-sexually-harassed\\_b\\_3373366.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/engy-abdelkader/99-percent-of-egyptian-women-girls-have-been-sexually-harassed_b_3373366.html); M. Shalaby, 'When Sexual Harassment Becomes a Barrier to Development', Issue Brief 12.23.13, Rice University's Baker Institute, Houston, Texas, 2013, <http://www.bakerinstitute.org/research/issue-brief-122313-when-sexual-harassment-becomes-barrier-development/> (all sites accessed 2/12/2016).

<sup>5</sup> This is the abbreviation for 'Quasi-non-governmental organizations' or 'Governmental NGOs' - a widespread phenomenon in the MENA region. For Egypt cf. e.g. M. Tadros, *The Politics of Mobilising for Gender Justice in Egypt from Mubarak to Morsi and Beyond*, Institute of Development Studies (IDS), Brighton, (April) 2014, p. 11, who gives the *Egyptian National Council for Women* (NCW) and the *National Council for Childhood and Motherhood* (ECCM) as examples for a 'hybrid' between QUANGO and GONGO. For a more balanced assessment of the NCW, cf. H. Elsadda, 'Women's Rights Activism in Post-Jan25 Egypt: Combating the Shadow of the First Lady Syndrome in the Arab World', in *Middle East Law and Governance* 3 (2011), p. 93.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. the 2007 study of the *Egyptian Centre for Women's Rights* (ECWR), which was entitled 'Sexual Harassment ... Social Cancer' and 'Collected Complaints from 3000 Women and Girls': 'Sexual Harassment ... To Where?', 06/11/2012, <http://ecwronline.org/?p=1026> (accessed 26/03/2015). For a critical assessment of the position of the ECWR and an analysis of its discourse focusing, as other organizations of the 'NGO establishment', on 'respectability and security' see also the most informative article by P. Amar, 'Turning the Gendered Politics of the Security State Inside Out? Charging the Police with Sexual Harassment in Egypt', in *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 13/3 (September 2011), pp. 317-318.

by pinpointing the immorality of young, socio-economically marginalized men. Consequently, what they chiefly diagnose are socio-economic causes of the crisis while either neglecting or minimizing the gender-political dimension, i.e. the use of SH as a political tool to maintain the neo-patriarchal system – a strategy used by Mubarak as well as his successors. As a result, apart from educational measures, the solution lies for them in imposing harsher laws and strengthening the security state apparatus with the primary aim of averting potential damage to the economy and to the image of the state. The opposite view explains the increasing levels of violence against women (hereafter VAW) as a problem embedded in social structures and patriarchal gender hierarchies; so in this view, legal and enhanced security measures would only remedy the symptoms rather than offer any lasting solution. Nevertheless, such interventions could be seen as a first useful step – that is if their intention is not solely to strengthen the state. But in the long run, a systemic change is needed.<sup>7</sup> Adherents to this second position, among them independent NGOs such as *El-Nadeem Center for the Rehabilitation of Victims of Violence and Torture* (henceforth *El-Nadeem*), do not turn a blind eye to state-imposed sexual aggression.<sup>8</sup>

### **Sexual Harassment and Street Harassment - What's in a Word?**

The term SH is a relatively new concept, originally coined by Western feminists in the mid-1970s. By the 1990s it had started to enter the global South with the internationalization of the 'women question'. SH is seen as one specific form of VAW or 'Gender-based

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<sup>7</sup> See also E. Ambrosetti - N. Abu Amara - S. Condon, 'Gender-Based Violence in Egypt: Analyzing Impacts of Political Reforms, Social, and Demographic Change', in *Violence against Women* 19/3 (2013), p. 401: '...the mere existence of laws does not necessarily affect hegemonic perceptions and patriarchal norms' (see also p. 415).

<sup>8</sup> *El-Nadeem*, established in 1993, expanded its activities in the 2000s as the 'baltagi-effect' (referring to thugs paid and deputized by police and security forces to terrorize protesters) began to take on its 'deeply gendered and sexualized character' (Amar, 'Turning the Gendered Politics of the Security State Inside Out?', p. 312). Independent NGOs such as *El-Nadeem* reveal and openly criticize the repressive power of the security state; they have done so before and after 2011. On the beginnings of *El Nadeem* see also N. Al-Ali, *Secularism, Gender, and the State in the Middle East: The Egyptian Women's Movement*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 2005, pp. 169-171. For an update cf. the official website: <http://alnadeem.org/en/node/23> (accessed 27/12/2013).

Violence' (hereafter GBV) – expressions that have been popularized since the adoption of the 'Declaration on the Elimination of VAW' by the United Nations General Assembly in December 1993<sup>9</sup> which in turn has given rise to regular UN-sponsored worldwide campaigns on the part of human rights organizations and to a great number of publications ever since.<sup>10</sup> Article 1 of the 1993 UN resolution defines VAW as '... any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life'. Article 2 distinguishes three contexts of VAW: the family, the general community and the state ('violence perpetrated or condoned by the State'). SH is mentioned in the second category – next to 'rape, sexual abuse, intimidation at work, in educational institutions and elsewhere, trafficking in women and forced prostitution'. Following this widely used definition SH is a broad concept and encompasses 'physical, sexual and psychological violence' occurring in the private, semi-public and public sphere. It includes unpleasant verbal and non-verbal behaviors, for example, as in the Egyptian context, obscene gestures and remarks, as well as unwanted physical contact that can take the form of touching and groping but also of brutal sexual assaults such as gang rape.

Up to a point I agree with a number of anthropologists who consider attempts to extend the term and concept of VAW to cover forms of symbolic, structural, psychological and other forms of violence as problematic. Such an inclusive definition provokes ambiguity and carries the risk of undermining the differences between

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<sup>9</sup> For the text of the Declaration, see United Nations General Assembly, 'A/RES/48/104. Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women', 20/12/1993: <http://www.un.org/documents/ga/res/48/a48r104.htm> (accessed 24/03/2015).

<sup>10</sup> Academic publications on VAW in the MENA region coincided with the gradual lifting of the taboo on discussions on the topic in the 2000s. Until recently, most works focused on VAW in the family and at the workplace. See, for instance, D. Ghanim, *Gender and Violence in the Middle East*, Praeger, Westport, Connecticut, 2009; M. Ennaji - F. Sadiqi (eds.), *Gender and Violence in the Middle East*, Routledge, London - New York, 2011; Z. S. Salhi (ed.), *Gender and Violence in Islamic Societies: Patriarchy, Islamism and Politics in the Middle East and North Africa*, I.B. Tauris, London - New York, 2013.

violence, violation and cruelty.<sup>11</sup> Imprecise distinctions can be even more problematic in the legal area, for example, in the case of punishments that are out of proportion to the severity of the actions committed. At least in times of ‘revolutionary transition’ and in the instances of the use of GBV as a political tool it seems helpful to focus on the physical dimension of hurt (including its intended psychological effects and its function), and on the question of legitimacy in the eyes of society.

To this end I will concentrate in the following on the phenomenon of street (or public) harassment in Cairo before and after 2011 as this sort of abuse has been particularly relevant to the calculated exclusion of female protesters from the public sphere. Cairo is chosen for three reasons: First, Cairo, and in particular Tahrir Square and its vicinity, has been the epicenter of mass demonstrations and protests, and most cases of brutal sexual assault have occurred there. Second, there is abundant material and very good documentation of politically motivated public harassment there. Third, most formal and informal (grassroots) anti-harassment initiatives were established there and center their activities on the capital.

It is worth noting that giving primary attention to male-to-female harassment does not imply ignoring the fact that men, too, are victims of SH, in public spaces and also in custody. But this phenomenon, which can be seen as a result of the nexus between body (sexuality) and power (politics) and as characteristic of stereotypical images of masculinity and femininity held in heteronormative patriarchal value systems, is rarely studied and discussed, among other reasons due to the reluctance of men to speak about their experiences.<sup>12</sup>

Street or public harassment (henceforth STRH/PUH) is widely considered as a subcategory of SH. In the contemporary Egyptian context, but not only there, the term refers to two dimensions: First, to

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<sup>11</sup> For the discussion among anthropologists, see the article of P. Zuckerhut, ‘Feminist Anthropological Perspectives on Violence’, in Ennaji - Sadiqi, *Gender and Violence in the Middle East*, pp. 13-25, especially pp. 15-16.

<sup>12</sup> M. Tadros (*Politically Motivated Sexual Assault and the Law in Violent Transitions: a Case Study from Egypt*, Institute of Development Studies, Brighton, June 2013, pp. 13-15) mentions *El-Nadeem* as one of the few human rights organizations, which also document men’s experiences of sexual assault. For shorter notes on male exposure to sexual harassment see HarassMap - Youth and Development Consultancy Institute (Etijah) (eds.), *Towards a Safer City: Sexual Harassment in Greater Cairo: Effectiveness of Crowdsourced Data*, HarassMap, Cairo, 2014, p. 30.

a widespread phenomenon that women from all walks of life and age groups experience on an almost daily basis in the streets or on public transportation; second, to political violence against oppositional forces.<sup>13</sup> In both cases, STRH hinders women's mobility and impedes their access to public spaces, and thus may limit their legitimate right to political participation. In contrast to other forms of harassment, perpetrators (i.e. passers-by unknown to the targeted person) easily blend into the anonymous masses. As is the case for GBV and SH, there is no universal definition for STRH, but a certain consensus exists that it includes physical, sexual and psychological abuse.<sup>14</sup> The distinction between the public and semi-public sphere implies the exclusion of SH at the workplace or in educational institutions. In addition, it is helpful to differentiate, as for example Mariz Tadros has done in her numerous publications on GBV in Egypt, between socially and politically motivated PUH, though this distinction may be blurred

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<sup>13</sup> Froböse, 'Women Are a Red Line', p. 183.

<sup>14</sup> The definition of cultural anthropologist M. Di Leonardo is often mentioned as one of the first definitions of STRH. It reads as follows ('Political Economy of Street Harassment', in *Aegis: Magazine on Ending Violence Against Women*, (Summer) 1981, pp. 51-2): 'Street harassment occurs when one or more strange men accost one or more women whom they perceive as heterosexual in a public place which is not the woman's/women's worksite. Through looks, words, or gestures the man asserts his right to intrude on the women's attention, defining her as a sexual object, and forcing her to interact with him'. Di Leonardo emphasized the difference between harassment and 'badinage, the friendly give-and-take' (cf. *mu'ākasa*, 'flirting' in the Egyptian context): 'The distinction between badinage and harassment is that a woman can start or stop badinage on her own time; it is a mutually agreed-upon interaction'. Di Leonardo proposed (p. 56) 'consciousness-raising as the first task to help women and to recognize for what it is, to overcome the myth' (cf. p. 55 – of 'enticing clothing'); further, she saw the 'ask of information-gathering' and 'thinking creatively about strategies for fighting back' (p. 56) and also warned against trivializing the matter. For other definitions see, for instance, N. Ilahi, 'Gendered Contestations: An Analysis of Street Harassment in Cairo and its Implications For Women's Access to Public Spaces', in *Surfacing - An Interdisciplinary Journal for Gender in the Global South* 2/1 (May 2009), pp. 58-61; C. Froböse, *Soziologische und sozialpsychologische Aspekte von sexueller Belästigung an Frauen in Ägypten: Geschlechterzuschreibungen als Platzanweiser für Frauen und Männer in Ägypten*, LIT-Verlag, Berlin, 2011, pp. 47 ff.; F. M. Peoples, 'Street Harassment in Cairo: A Symptom of Disintegrating Social Structures', in *The African Anthropologist* 15/1&2 (2008, publ. 2011), pp. 4-6.

due to the anonymity and impunity of harassers in protest spaces as well as the possible mixture of motives behind a particular attack.<sup>15</sup>

Tadros emphasizes that there are important similarities between both kinds of GBV: first, in terms of the underlying values and norms informing male behavior (such as notions of power and dominance, which are played out on women's bodies); second, in terms of the reactions, especially when framed by social norms that condone assault (such as the resilient logic of blaming the victims for the assault that often results in a 'culture of silence' regarding incidents for the sake of 'protecting honor' and 'preventing community shame').

The main difference between socially and politically motivated PUH relates to the question of accountability. Political violence is usually premeditated, organized and orchestrated, whereas this is not necessarily the case with socially motivated GBV that can be the quasi spontaneous outcome of a kind of mass hysteria. Politically motivated sexual assaults occurred particularly in public places where protests took place ('protest spaces') before and after 2011. However, the question of whether all 'mob assaults' were politically motivated or not, and if so, who was behind them, remains a highly controversial issue among activists and observers alike. Nonetheless, one should not forget that spreading confusion, doubt and insecurity has always been part of the divide and rule strategies of political authorities.

In the next sections, I will first give a brief survey of the incidents of STRH before and since 2011. Then I will turn to a selection of innovative anti-harassment initiatives, which are divided into three categories according to their respective approaches (or reactive patterns) to dealing with increased GBV: women's and/or human rights NGOs, (informal) vigilante groups and those using forms of silent protest. Finally, I will acknowledge and highlight the effects and achievements of the constant pressure exerted by independent civil society actors.

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<sup>15</sup> See, also for the following, M. Tadros, *Reclaiming the Streets for Women's Dignity: Effective Initiatives in the Struggle against Gender-Based Violence in between Egypt's Two Revolutions*, Institute of Development Studies (IDS), Brighton, (January) 2014, pp. 10-11; eadem, *Politically Motivated Sexual Assault*, pp. 6-7, and for the motives behind politically motivated STRH (pp. 16f.) and for the public norms, values and perceptions (pp. 18-22).

### Street Harassment before 2011

Street harassment is not a new phenomenon in Egypt, though it was not termed *taḥarrush* until recently. It already existed at the beginning of the 20th century, as indicated, for example, by a remark of the well-known feminist and writer Malak Ḥifnī Nāṣif (1886-1918) on verbal and physical harassment of women in Cairo's streets.<sup>16</sup> At the time of her writing, there was widespread anxiety over growing female visibility throughout urban space, over women's claim of physical space, and finally the social manifestation of a local, modern femininity, which seemingly increased after the 1919 national uprising, i.e. at the very moment when gendered (female) visual and linguistic representations of the nation became more widespread.<sup>17</sup>

Without doubt, however, STRH has been on the increase over the past decade. As a social phenomenon the surge in STRH correlates with immense structural, institutional and spatial transformations that have been taking place since the late 1980s and, in particular in the 1990s when the detrimental consequences of the *Infiṭāḥ* (economic 'opening') policies for the great majority of the population could no longer be ignored. The dramatic changes (among other things, rising unemployment, migration, alteration in traditional family structures, greater visibility of women as a result of their mass entry into colleges and into various fields of employment) had, as several researchers underscore, an impact on patriarchy as a defining system for the relationship between men and women. Against this background STRH can be identified as a 'symbolic reclaiming of challenged masculinity in public'.<sup>18</sup> At the same time Cairo's cityscape underwent a great

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<sup>16</sup> M. Hifni Nasif, *Über die ägyptische Frauenfrage*, Constantinople, 1926, p. 14, as quoted in R. Kreile, *Politische Herrschaft, Geschlechterpolitik und Frauenmacht im Vorderen Orient*, Centaurus, Pfaffenweiler, 1997, p. 247.

<sup>17</sup> M. Booth, 'Un/safe/ly at Home: Narratives of Sexual Coercion in 1920s Egypt', in *Gender and History* 16/3 (Nov. 2004), p. 744. (Booth analyzes the emergence of a genre of writing that she calls 'simulated memoirs'; she argues that the implicit presence of bodily coercion in these texts demonstrates the above mentioned anxiety about female visibility). For a thorough study on the interconnection of nationalism, gender, and politics cf. B. Baron, *Egypt as a Woman: Nationalism, Gender, and Politics*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 2005.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. D. Kandiyoti, 'Fear and Fury: Women and Post-revolutionary Violence', 10/01/2013, in <http://www.opendemocracy.net/5050/deniz-kandiyoti/fear-and-fury-women-and-post-revolutionary-violence> (accessed 18/02/2014). Kandiyoti remarks a global trend: 'We are witnessing a profound crisis of masculinity leading to more

transformation as a result of neoliberal policies. Its urban landscape has become progressively exclusionary and segmented, and tendencies toward social closure and class segregation have become obvious. Seen from this perspective STRH may also have a class-specific component.<sup>19</sup> After being a taboo for years, incidents in 2005 and 2006 marked the beginning of extensive public debates on harassment, initially in the blogosphere, then in conferences, seminars, newspapers and magazines. This increase in public attention first generated research, initiatives and campaigns and finally led to a greater readiness to speak out publicly on personal experiences with PUH.

The so-called ‘Black Wednesday’ in May 2005<sup>20</sup> can serve as an example of political violence: women were attacked in the midst of an anti-Mubarak demonstration. Perpetrated by both plainclothes policemen and hired *baltagiyya*, these attacks were specifically aimed at disrupting the protests and terrorizing female protesters, a tactic which continued to be used in the revolution of January 25<sup>th</sup>. Other incidents, examples of socially motivated STRH, were reported from

violent and coercive assertions of male prerogatives where the abuse of women can become a blood sport (...).

<sup>19</sup> For the transformation of Cairo’s city-space and its consequences see the excellent study by A. de Koning, ‘Gender, Public Space and Social Segregation in Cairo: Of Taxi Drivers, Prostitutes and Professional Women’, in *Antipode* 41/3 (2009), pp. 533-556 (with a focus on socially and intellectually distinguished young female upper-middle-class professionals and how they navigate Cairo’s public spaces, both the safe spaces of the upscale coffee shops and the open spaces of the streets; on STRH cf. pp. 545ff.); cf. also the spatial-sociological field research by T. Beutling, *Gendered Spaces Kairo: eine interkulturelle raumsoziologische Analyse*, KISDedition, Cologne, 2013, particularly pp. 79-103 (includes several photos). For the ‘Intersection of Gender, Race and Class with Street Harassment’ cf. also Ilahi, ‘Gendered Contestations’, pp. 61-63.

<sup>20</sup> The subsequently mentioned incidents have been described in several publications; for more details see, for instance: Peoples, ‘Street Harassment in Cairo’, pp. 6-7; Froböse, *Soziologische und sozialpsychologische Aspekte von sexueller Belästigung an Frauen in Ägypten*, pp. 55-60; N. Ebaïd, *Sexual Harassment in Egypt - A Neglected Crime: An Assessment for the Egyptian Government Performance in Regard to the Sexual Harassment in Egypt*, The American University in Cairo/Egypt, Cairo 2013; Ilahi, ‘Gendered Contestations’, p. 59; S. Carr, ‘Sexual Assault and the State: A History of Violence’, in *Mada Masr - The Morning Digest*, 07/07/2014: <http://www.madamasr.com/content/sexual-assault-and-state-history-violence> (accessed 08/07/2014); N. Abu Amara, « Le débat sur le harcèlement sexuel en Égypte : une violence sociale et politique », in *Égypte/Monde arabe*, Troisième série, 9 (2012), pp. 119-135: <http://ema.revues.org/3012> (accessed 26/03/2015).

2006 onwards: during the post-Ramadan celebration of *Īd al-Fiṭr* in 2006, a ‘mob of men’<sup>21</sup> attacked females in front of a cinema in downtown Cairo. As this attack was filmed by individual observers and posted on the Internet, male-to-female harassment in Cairo gained national and international attention. Other group assaults (‘mob outbursts’ of STRH) took place repeatedly over the two main religious national holiday festivities, *Īd al-Fiṭr* and *Īd al-Aḏḥā*, in the following years.

In 2008, the *Egyptian Centre for Women’s Rights* (ECWR), which had initiated its ‘Safe Streets for everyone’ campaign three years before, carried out the first in-depth study on SH (defined in the broad sense) in Cairo.<sup>22</sup> The survey helped to refute prevalent myths on SH, such as that women or girls are attacked because of the way they dress; that sexual violence takes place at night, and that harassment is not widespread. Nevertheless, conservative forces would continue to see SH as the result of inappropriate dress and behavior and recommend veiling as prevention. It is striking that most recommendations were addressed to women, not to men. Also in mid-2008, a harassed woman managed to take the offender to a police station and file charges against him. Three months later, and for the first time in Egypt, the offender was sentenced to three years in prison in addition to a fine on charges of sexual assault. This case set a precedent and encouraged others to pursue charges against sexual attacks. However, it is also worth noting that this woman’s action was followed by a smear campaign in the media.<sup>23</sup> The state authorities first refused to admit the existence of a problem; they did not alter their position until it became apparent to them that, as Amar argues, ‘(...) civil society organizations were ignoring the role of the police and the security state in the *generation* of sexualized violence’.

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<sup>21</sup> On ‘gendered tropes’ like this see S. Ellman-Golan, *Deconstructing Discourse: Gender and Neoliberal Orientalism in the Egyptian Revolution*, Barnard College/Columbia University, Department of African Studies and Human Rights Studies (BA-thesis), New York, 2014, pp. 7, 16f., 31; Amar, ‘Turning the Gendered Politics of the Security State Inside Out?’, p. 321 and *passim*.

<sup>22</sup> For a link to the full text of this survey see note 3 above; for an outline of the main results, cf.: Froböse, *Soziologische und sozialpsychologische Aspekte*, pp. 66-73; Ilahi, ‘Gendered Contestations’, pp. 59-60; Peoples, ‘Street Harassment in Cairo’, pp. 4-8.

<sup>23</sup> Amar, ‘Turning the Gendered Politics of the Security State Inside Out?’, pp. 319f.

As a result, the issue of SH was politicized, reduced to questions of people's morality, and exploited for the justification of extended brutal 'security' measures.<sup>24</sup>

Suggested reasons for the problem often mentioned during the public debate in Egypt during these years included sexual frustration, economic hardship, decline in moral standards, a lack of law enforcement, the role of the media.<sup>25</sup>

The year 2010 witnessed two remarkable attempts to raise the awareness of PUH; both were able to reach a broader audience. The release of the movie *Cairo 678* illustrates the dramatic social and psychological consequences for harassed women in three concrete and realistic cases, each of them representing a woman from a specific class background. The story of one of the protagonists alludes to the above-mentioned story of the first woman who made headlines in 2008 when she succeeded in bringing her case to court.<sup>26</sup> At the same time the grassroots initiative *HarassMap* was established. This initiative does not simply collect data and place it on a map in order to try to identify 'hotspots' of STRH but also provides offline interventions in the form of street discussions or the presentation of quantitative and qualitative surveys to raise public awareness of the problem.<sup>27</sup>

### Street Harassment in the Post-Mubarak Era

Following the fall of Hosni Mubarak, STRH increased in intensity and frequency. Politically motivated harassment regularly occurred in

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<sup>24</sup> Amar, 'Turning the Gendered Politics of the Security State Inside Out?', p. 319.

<sup>25</sup> For more details cf., for instance, Ilahi, 'Gendered Contestations', pp. 63f.; Peoples, 'Street Harassment in Cairo', pp. 2, 15-17.

<sup>26</sup> On the movie *Cairo 678* cf. e.g. the following newspaper articles: N. El-Hennawy, '678: Sexual Harassment in a Movie', in *Egypt Independent*, 17/12/2010, <http://www.egyptindependent.com/node/273544>; W. Eskandar, '678 Unveils One of Egypt's Taboos', in *Al-Ahram English*, 20/12/2010, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/News/2120.aspx>; A. Heine, 'Controversial Egyptian Movie 678 Wins Several Awards', in *Daily News Egypt*, 22/10/2012, <http://www.dailynewsegyp.com/tag/678/> (all accessed 01/09/2014).

<sup>27</sup> On *HarassMap* (apart from a self-description of their work on <http://harassmap.org/en/what-we-do/> and in HarassMap - Etijah (eds.), *Towards a Safer City*, pp. 11f.; cf. L. H. Skalli, 'Young Women and Social Media against Sexual Harassment in North Africa', in *Journal of North African Studies* 19/2 (2014), pp. 250f.; M. Tadros, *Database of Collective Actors Involving Men Tackling Gender-Based Violence in Public Space in Post-Mubarak Egypt*, Institute of Development Studies (IDS), Brighton, (July) 2013, pp. 7, 16-18.

Tahrir Square and its vicinity.<sup>28</sup> The attacks were disconcerting for the protesters, and various speculations on the perpetrators and their aims circulated. It may suffice to refer to a few major incidents that were extensively reported and generated further protests.<sup>29</sup>

The first widely published incident of sexual assault on women protesters occurred on 9<sup>th</sup> March 2011. A group of women protesting in Tahrir Square, demanding recognition of equal rights for women in the next constitution, were exposed to sexualized attacks. On the same day the military police arrested and detained at least 18 of the women, 17 of whom were then subjected to torture and forced to undergo ‘virginity tests’ and threatened with prostitution charges – a strategy that the former regime had already used to discourage people from empathizing with dissident women. The then commander-in-chief of the SCAF, the current President Abd al-Fattah al-Sisi, defended the use of the ‘tests’, and he was not alone in his belief that female protestors bore sole responsibility for these attacks.

What came to be known as the ‘blue-bra-incident’ happened in December 2011 near to Tahrir Square: photos and a video-clip of this brutal attack distributed on the Internet show how an unarmed young female activist (covered by an *abaya*) is severely beaten, kicked, dragged, and stripped by three riot policemen, so that the upper part of her body is exposed. The blue bra turned into an iconic symbol that took thousands of women to the streets in solidarity with those protesting. In addition, the incident inspired several works of art: a Moroccan painter depicted the oppressors as gorillas; and a cartoonist

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<sup>28</sup> For a chronology of the incidents and a collection of testimonies of the victims of the assaults, cf. the report prepared by El Nadeem Center for Rehabilitation of Victims of Violence and Torture – Nazra for Feminist Studies – New Women Foundation, *Sexual Assault and Rape in Tahrir Square and its Vicinity: A Compendium of Sources*, February 2013. For a link to the report and to the compendium of testimonies: <http://nazra.org/en/node/229> (accessed 27/03/2015). For recent reports cf. notes below.

<sup>29</sup> For the following incidents cf. Tadros, *Politically Motivated Sexual Assault*, pp. 9-10 and *passim*; Ellman-Golan, *Deconstructing Discourse*, pp. 36f., 42ff., 58ff.; M. Abaza, ‘Gender Representation in Graffiti Post-25 January’, in Mikala Hydlig Dal (ed.), *Cairo: Images of Transition. Perspectives on Visuality in Egypt 2011-2013*, transcript, Bielefeld 2013, pp. 250-251; Abu Amara, « Le débat sur le harcèlement sexuel en Égypte », §§ 20-21.

imagined how the victim could take revenge on one of her attackers in a 'superwoman style'.<sup>30</sup>

A series of similar incidents took place in 2012 and 2013, especially during major protests on International Women's Day, the anniversary of the 25<sup>th</sup> January revolution, and anti-regime demonstrations. Between 28<sup>th</sup> June and 7<sup>th</sup> July 2013, during the massive protests on Tahrir Square that saw the ousting of the former President Mohamed Morsi, 186 cases of sexual assault and rape were reported.<sup>31</sup>

### **'Fighting Back' – The Emergence of New 'Anti-Harassment' Initiatives in Egypt**

The escalation of political violence after the revolution generated a proliferation of citizen activism in favor of women's rights, with due regard to the fundamental, unconditional rights of dignity and bodily integrity. Several of these new anti-harassment initiatives demonstrate that more and more young activists are not going to accept any restriction of their freedom of mobility in public space. Three categories of reactive patterns can be distinguished based on the focus of their activities.

### **Human Rights and/or Women's Rights NGOs: The Example of 'Nazra for Feminist Studies'**

*Nazra for Feminist Studies*, hereafter referred to as *Nazra*, can serve as an example for a number of independent human rights and/or women's rights organizations, such as the afore-mentioned *El-Nadeem*, which had come into existence before 2011, but expanded and intensified their efforts after the January 25<sup>th</sup> revolution. Since

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<sup>30</sup> R. Badry, 'Körpersprache, Macht und Geschlecht in Zeiten sozialen Umbruchs - Bilderwelten aus dem "Arabischen Frühling"', in *Hemispheres* 28 (2013), pp. 150f. With further references to photos of the works of art; for these see also illustrations in Abaza, 'Gender Representation in Graffiti Post-25 January'.

<sup>31</sup> Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies – Nazra for Feminist Studies (eds.), 'Human Rights Violations against Women in Egypt': <http://www.cihrs.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/Human-rights-violations-against-women-in-Egypt.pdf> (accessed 27/03/2015). The same report mentions other brutal human rights violations, in particular the killing of more than 1,000 persons following the intervention of security forces against pro-Morsi demonstrations. With respect to these crimes see also the joint call of *CIHRS*, *Nazra* and a dozen of other national and international human rights organizations: 'Egypt: No Acknowledgment or Justice for Mass Protester Killings, Set Up a Fact-Finding Committee as a First Step', in *CIHRS* 10/12/2013: <http://www.cihrs.org/?p=7670&lang=en> (accessed 10/12/2013).

then they have continuously reported on and combatted women's/human rights abuses using diverse (traditional as well as innovative) online and offline activities, often in cooperation with other independent NGOs and groups.<sup>32</sup>

*Nazra* was formed by a group of young activists in 2005 and officially registered in December 2007. The organization defines itself as a group whose aim is to build an Egyptian feminist movement as its members believe that feminism and gender equality are political and social issues affecting freedom and development in all societies. The organization works to popularize these values in both the public and private spheres. To this end they have launched various programs, initiatives and activities, such as: knowledge production based on research, documentation, monitoring and analysis of methodologies. This work includes position papers on recent political events and decisions, joint declarations with other groups and associations they are cooperating with, and the submission of reports and articles including empirical data on discriminatory practices in Egypt and other countries of the MENA region. In addition, they assist women in the political arena. Giving support to 'Women's Human Rights Defenders' through legal, moral, and medical interventions is one of the key fields for their activities. Since the surge of SH in the public domain in the post-Mubarak era, *Nazra* has continuously documented the violations and recommended appropriate counter-measures. On the basis of its gender approach *Nazra* seeks to provide an in-depth view of the nature of such violations, as opposed to simply producing overly quick, reductionist explanations of the problem. For the

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<sup>32</sup> On *Nazra* see Badry, 'Against All Odds', pp. 18-22; Skalli, 'Young Women and Social Media', pp. 249-250. *Nazra* cooperated, for instance, with the following organizations and groups (cf. their joint statements and reports): *El-Nadeem*, *CIHRS*, *OpAntiSH* (cf. remarks below); *New Woman Foundation/NWF* (cf. note 53 in Badry, 'Against all Odds', p. 20), *Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights (EIPR)*, independent human rights organization, established in 2002; for more information on their programs and publications cf. <http://www.eipr.org/en/>), the *Women and Memory Forum (WMF)*, founded in 1995, among others by Hoda Elsadda, professor of English and comparative literature at the Cairo University, and composed of a group of women academics, researchers and activists; cf. <http://www.wmf.org.eg> apart from their presence on Facebook and Twitter), and *Center for Egyptian Women's Legal Assistance (CEWLA)*, founded in 1995, registered in 2003 as an NGO, with a focus on raising legal awareness and campaigning on the equality of women before law), cf. [http://www.cewla.org/about\\_us.php](http://www.cewla.org/about_us.php) (only in Arabic). All URL: last access on 27-28/03/2015.

members of the organization, SH and assault, which have been in evidence for a very long time, are a socially and culturally embedded problem that has only become clearer because of the unstable situation following the fall of Mubarak. As a result, the discussion on VAW over the past few years cannot be limited to the general lack of security in public spaces and to certain actors' attempts to terrorize women protagonists. On 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2013, for instance, *Nazra* and other independent groups published a joint declaration entitled 'Brutal sexual attacks around *Tahrir* and the unprecedented decadence in the reaction of Egyptian authorities...' with a report on the increase in the number of assaults in the week surrounding the ousting of President Morsi.<sup>33</sup> The signatories vehemently criticized the fact that SH is not criminalized, and that rape using objects or hands is classified merely as assault; that the issue is not addressed in schools either, where the curriculum reinforces traditional gender roles; and that there is a culture of impunity at state level with assailants rarely facing any consequences. Moreover, the security forces are said to compound the problem as both the police and military have been involved in sexual violence against women (i.e., harassment, rape, 'virginity tests'). That is why the activists did not wait until the government tackled the problem – they organized themselves, and sent volunteers to rescue women from sexual assault, ran hotlines and provided help to the victims of the criminal acts. In an earlier position paper which also dealt with the increasing sexual violence in the public sphere, the signatories emphasized their rejection of the monopolization of women's issues by a 'specific set of women, whether those working in institutional frameworks (e.g., NCW) or in rights groups that are active only in some spheres'.<sup>34</sup> The position papers accentuate that the problem of sexual assaults can only be solved when it is rightly termed a crime of violence and discussed as part of a larger public debate over its interrelation with the societal view of women and their

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<sup>33</sup> 'I'tidā'āt jinsiyya waḥshiyya fī niṭāq al-taḥrīr wa-inḥitāt ghayr masbūq fī radd fī'l al-suluṭāt al-miṣriyya...irtifā' ḥaṣīlat al-i'tidā'āt al-jinsiyya ilā 101 ḥālat fī aḥdāth 30 Yūniyū. Bayān mushtarak' [Brutal sexual attacks around Tahrir and unprecedented decadence in the reaction of Egyptian authorities ... increase of sexual assaults reaches 101 cases during the 30<sup>th</sup> June incidents], <http://nazra.org/node/243> (accessed 11/11/2013).

<sup>34</sup> 'Position Paper on Sexual Violence against Women and the Increasing Frequency of Gang Rape in Tahrir Square and its Environs', *Research paper*, <http://nazra.org/en/node/200> (accessed 02/09/2013).

bodies as being inferior to men and theirs. In brief, cultural norms need to undergo long-term change through awareness campaigns all over the country.

*Nazra's* overall purpose is to initiate a new gender discourse and spread alternative, non-conventional knowledge. They envisage a 'holistic' approach and solution – a cultural, normative and structural change, not only a change of government.

### **Informal Vigilante Groups**

A number of initiatives decided to send teams of volunteers to protest demonstrations in order to intervene directly and to stop assaults: *OpAntiSH*, *Tahrir Bodyguards*,<sup>35</sup> *Shuft Taharrush* (I Saw Harassment), *Basma* (Imprint),<sup>36</sup> and other informal groups that were formed in most cases in 2012. *Operation Anti Sexual Harassment*, in Arabic *Quwwa didd al-taharrush*, but better known under the abbreviation *OpAntiSH*, was established in November 2012 by volunteers as a direct answer to the multiplication and intensification of (premeditated forms of) 'gang' SH and assaults on women. It first appeared on Tahrir Square at the end of November 2012, during protests against President Morsi's constitutional declaration alongside other vigilante groups formed earlier that year. Supported by a coalition of organizations like *HarassMap* and *EIPR*, the group intervened in particular – under the slogan 'A safe square for all' – during major demonstrations such as the anniversary of the 25<sup>th</sup> January revolution. Alongside setting up rescue squads *OpAntiSH* makes use of other methods to combat STRH: they conduct outreach and publicity campaigns to raise awareness of such crimes, and

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<sup>35</sup> On *OpAntiSh* see <https://www.facebook.com/opantish> (accessed 28/03/2015), and on *Tahrir Bodyguards* (started their interventions in December 2012; also organized free self-defense classes for women) <https://www.facebook.com/Tahrir.Bodyguards> (accessed 11/11/2013) and <https://ar-ar.facebook.com/Tahrir.Bodyguards> (28/03/2015) – with the last entry on 10<sup>th</sup> June 2014; more recent entries on the Twitter account of the organization. Cf. also Tadros, *Reclaiming the Streets*, pp. 16-18; and eadem, *Database*, pp. 23-25 for *OpAntiSh*; on *Tahrir Bodyguards*, '*Shoft Taharosh*', *OpAntiSh*, etc., see also D. Tannir - V. Badaan, *Women and Participation in the Arab Uprisings: A Struggle for Justice, Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)*, ECSWA, New York, (December) 2013: E/ESCWA/SDD/2013/Technical Paper.13 (Online available), pp. 11-12.

<sup>36</sup> On *Basma* and *Shuft Taharrush* see Tadros, *Reclaiming the Streets*, pp. 12-14 and pp. 14-16 respectively.

provide legal, medical and psychological support. For this purpose, they divided their actions over the past years into three interconnected fields: first, the ‘intervention or confrontation (*ishtibāk*) team’, responsible for rescuing the woman in danger; second, the ‘safety team’, taking care of the victim or targeted woman by delivering her to a safe place and providing her with first aid (basic medical and psychological help),<sup>37</sup> while another group of volunteers functioned as silent observers with the responsibility of filming the attacks in order to produce awareness raising and/or documentation material (such as flyers, distributed by other volunteers), and later analyze the way the assaults operate and develop intervention strategies. Finally, the ‘control or operation room’, consisting of the ‘core group’, took care of the coordination of the different teams and kept them informed on the calls received through the group’s hotline. All *OpAntiSH* teams included both male and female volunteers, and females who wanted to join the intervention team were not excluded on the pretext that it would be too dangerous for them. Only a few specific roles that involved direct contact with the rescued person immediately after the attack were for obvious reasons strictly filled by women. This differentiates *OpAntiSH* (and *Shuft Taharrush*) from other vigilante groups as it is indicative of their ‘gender justice’ or ‘partnership’ position. Moreover, in contrast to other vigilante groups, *OpAntiSH* tried to avoid violence as much as possible and did not aim at punishing the harassers. They refuse, as they say, to reproduce patriarchal discourses, attitudes and practices. The group is firmly opposed to any moralizing, blaming or idealizing discourse. In accordance with their slogan, the group perceives the protection of women from attacks on their bodily integrity as a way of creating safer public spaces for their political participation as well as putting up resistance to attempts by different societal and political forces to exclude women from the public sphere altogether.

### **Silent Protests and Awareness-raising Initiatives – *Nefsi* and Street Performance**

Other groups used short effective messages, written or painted, to raise awareness on the phenomenon of STRH.

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<sup>37</sup> *Nazra* is said to have provided the volunteers with the necessary training on how to deal with the victims.

In May 2012 independent activists launched the initiative *Nefsi* meaning ‘I wish/want’.<sup>38</sup> Quite spontaneously, as it seems, the core group decided to form human chains, standing in silence in public places which were deemed notorious for STRH – while holding simple sheets of paper bearing messages. Three human chains were organized in 2012, one of them together with *Basma* in the Cairo metro.<sup>39</sup> Volunteers joined the campaign, others were mobilized via Facebook. The messages were in Egyptian dialect, and intended to start a dialogue with and/or spark conversation among passers-by. Some of the messages read as follows: (a young girl together with a completely veiled woman wrote on their sheet) ‘I wish you’d admit that you harass [women]’ and ‘I wish I could feel safe in streets’; ‘I wish I could walk around without being hurt by inappropriate words’ was the message of a young unveiled woman with glasses. And a young man wrote: ‘I wish I didn’t have to escort my sister everywhere’. The campaign was supported by the global UN project ‘Safe Cities’. One of the founders of the group stressed in an interview that she considers the phenomenon of SH to be political, namely as the intentional, systematic use of violence against women to scare them.<sup>40</sup>

Among the most prominent artistic means since the beginnings of the protests in January 2011 have been graffiti and other forms of street art.<sup>41</sup> Two participatory campaigns, *Graffiti Harimi* (Female

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<sup>38</sup> Cf. Tadros, *Database*, pp. 26-28. “‘I Wish...’ UN Women Captures One Street Campaign against Sexual Harassment in Egypt”, in *UN Women* 31/05/2012: <http://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2012/5/i-wish-un-women-captures-one-street-campaign-against-sexual-harassment-in-egypt> (accessed 01/09/2014). See also for the ‘Transit Campaign’, in which *Nefsi* as well as *Basma* participated, ‘From Play-Acting to Real Life Action: A Journey to End Harassment on Public Transit in Egypt’, in *UN Women* 27/02/2013, <http://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2013/2/from-play-acting-to-real-life-action> (accessed 22/03/2015). On *Nefsi*, *Basma* and *Nazra* see A. Bajec, ‘The Persistent Battle against Rampant Sexual Harassment in Egypt’, in *Third World Resurgence* 266/267 (October/November 2012), pp. 64-65, <http://www.twinside.org.sg/title2/resurgence/2012/266-267/women1.htm> (accessed 01/09/2014).

<sup>39</sup> *Basma* was one of the first initiatives to become very active in undertaking security patrols in subway stations. Cf., for instance, the report of A. Van den Berghe, ‘Cairo Women Bring Men Back on the Rails’, in *Inter Press Service – News Agency*, 14/11/2013, <http://www.ipsnews.net/2013/11/cairo-women-bring-men-back-on-the-rails/> (accessed 01/09/2014). Cf. <https://ar-ar.facebook.com/Imprint.Movement.eg> (accessed 28/03/2015).

<sup>40</sup> Tadros, *Database*, p. 26.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Badry, ‘Körpersprache, Macht und Geschlecht’, pp. 152-154.

Graffiti<sup>42</sup> and its successor *Women on Walls* (WOW)<sup>43</sup> were launched to give women ‘a voice’ in the public spaces, in particular to integrate them in a scene that had largely remained a male space. The graffiti, stencil and mural motifs included pictures addressing the topic of the sexual abuse of women. One mural, entitled ‘The Circle of Hell’ depicts a girl or woman threateningly surrounded by a group of men and thereby alludes to an uncontrolled ‘mob’ or ‘gang’ who are going to commit sexual violence – a crime that has taken place several times during protests in Tahrir Square or other public squares over the past years, as outlined above.<sup>44</sup> The Danish-funded project WOW was initiated by the Swedish journalist and street art documentarian Mia Gröndahl and the local cultural manager Angie Balata. Whereas the first campaign took place in four major Egyptian cities in April 2013, the second edition in February 2014 only ran in Cairo (with fewer participants) due to limited funds.<sup>45</sup>

‘Shout Art Loud’ is an interactive documentary on diverse arts in Egypt that illustrates how theatre, dance, music and graffiti are used to tackle the issue of VAW.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> See Chapter ‘Women Power on the Wall’, in M. Gröndahl, *Revolution Graffiti: Street Art of the New Egypt*, The American University in Cairo Press/AUC Press, Cairo, 2012, pp. 132-139.

<sup>43</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/womenonwalls/info> (accessed 16/09/2014); N. Barakat, ‘Women on the Walls’, in *Al Ahrām Weekly*, 05-03-2014, <http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/News/5610/30/Women-on-walls.aspx>; M. Patry, ‘Egypt Confronts Sexual Harassment’, in *The Huffington Post* 17/07/2014, [http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/melody-patry/egypt-confronts-sexualharassment\\_b\\_5591945.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/melody-patry/egypt-confronts-sexualharassment_b_5591945.html); M. El Nabawi, ‘“Women on Walls” Campaign Empowers Women via Street Art’, in *Egypt Independent*, 09/04/2013, <http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/women-walls-campaign-empowers-women-street-art> (all accessed 2/ 12/2016).

<sup>44</sup> ‘[O]ne of the most telling works’, according to J. Van de Bildt (‘Revolutionary Graffiti in Egypt: Resistance and Commemoration’, in *Tel Aviv Notes* 7/24, 26<sup>th</sup> December 2013, p. 3, [www.dayan.org](http://www.dayan.org)), is a stencil that portrays the profiles of three women, the first of them unveiled, the second with ‘hijab’, and the third one completely covered except the eyes; the accompanying text reads, ‘Don’t label me’. The article also mentions other artistic movements focusing on women’s empowerment.

<sup>45</sup> A. Bajec, ‘Can Graffiti Remake Egypt’, in *Women in the World (WITW)*, 19/02/2014, <http://www.thedailybeast.com/witw/articles/2014/02/19/can-graffiti-remake-egypt.html> (accessed 16/09/2014).

<sup>46</sup> For a link to ‘Shout Art Loud’, a web documentary by M. Patry, see: ‘Shout Art Loud: A “Living Report” on Art and Sexual Violence in Egypt’, in *Index on Censorship*, <http://www.indexoncensorship.org/shoutartloud/> (accessed 16/09/2014).

Though all the artists involved in such performances were apparently convinced that art is able to trigger discussion in society, and can challenge perceptions and raise awareness, they had to admit that cultural means could only effectively combat STRH in combination with political initiatives.<sup>47</sup> For this reason, WOW, for instance, worked together with other organizations and groups, such as *Nazra* and *HarassMap*, during its second campaign.

Another quite unusual activity by Egyptian standards was the organization of mixed gender bike rides in 2014 – seemingly not only with the aim of breaking gender stereotypes but also of reclaiming public space in an alternative way.<sup>48</sup>

### **Are We Seeing the First Results of Constant Pressure by Civil Society Actors?**

In June 2014, shortly before leaving office, Egypt's interim president, Adly Mansour, passed an amendment to the Penal Law of 1937 that for the first time in Egyptian history criminalized SH.<sup>49</sup> As women's rights activists and lobbyists had repeatedly, but in the end always unsuccessfully, developed proposals and even drafted laws in this direction in the previous years, the final modification of the Penal

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<sup>47</sup> M. Patry, 'Egyptian Artists Declare War on Sexual Harassment', in *Index on Censorship*, 15/05/2013, <http://www.indexoncensorship.org/2013/05/egyptian-artists-declare-war-on-sexual-harassment/> (accessed 16/09/2014).

<sup>48</sup> 'From Bike Rides to Pink Ribbons, Egyptian Anti-Violence Campaigns Create Ripples across the Country', in *UN Women* 19/11/2013, <http://www.unwomen.org/ca/news/stories/2013/11/> (accessed 18/02/2014). Cf. also for a note on the bike rides as well as on WOW: M. El Nabawi, 'Bigger, Bolder, Brighter: The Women on Walls Graffiti Campaign', in *Mada Masr, The Morning Digest*, 14/02/2014, <http://www.madamasr.com/bigger-bolder-brighter> (accessed 16/09/2014).

<sup>49</sup> For a summary of the legal amendments to the Egyptian Penal Code: S. Abdelaziz, 'Egypt Criminalizes Sexual Harassment', in *CNN*, 10/06/2014, <http://edition.cnn.com/2014/06/06/world/africa/egypt-sexual-harassment-law/> (accessed 04/09/2014) – incl. critical comments of Fathi Farid, a founder of Egypt's 'I Saw Harassment' campaign; 'Qānūn miṣrī jadīd yarda' al-taḥarrush al-jinsī', in *al-'Arabiyya net*, 06/06/2014: <http://www.alarabiya.net/ar/arab-and-world/egypt/2014/06/06/> (accessed 04/09/2014). HarassMap/Kharīṭat al-taḥarrush, 'Qawānin tajrīm al-taḥarrush al-jinsī fī Miṣr', <http://harassmap.org/ar/resource-center/laws-against-sexual-harassment-in-egypt/> (accessed 04/09/2014) - includes a link to the full text of the law and remarks on the deficits of the amendments; S. Cordes, 'Egypt's New Anti-Harassment Law to Make a Difference?', in *WoMenDialogue*, 04/08/2014, <http://www.womendialogue.org/node/10171> (accessed 04/09/2014).

Law can be assessed, at least *prima facie*, as a success and as the result of the continued pressure on the part of civil society actors insisting on the need to hold perpetrators of GBV crimes accountable. However, in view of the weaknesses of the new articles and also of other measures introduced by the new political elite (new protest law, violence against oppositional and/or nonconformist forces), it can also be seen as an attempt by the state to reclaim the prerogative of interpretation (and control).

Until the amendment, SH was not specifically defined or addressed by Egyptian Penal Law. But there were three articles in the Penal Code that were sometimes applied to cases of sexual (or sexually motivated) attacks on women: insulting (Article 306), indecent behavior (Article 278), and sexual assault (Article 268). There were a number of problems with these articles: among other things, the burden of proof was laid on the victim/targeted woman, public awareness regarding the law and its enforcement was limited, and a further factor was the reluctance of victims to report the attack and the unwillingness of witnesses to become involved and support the victims.<sup>50</sup>

Although the new laws were welcomed by all women's rights activists, independent NGOs such as *Nazra*, *El-Nadeem* and other of the aforementioned groups pointed to its weaknesses and called for a revision. Following the sexual assaults perpetrated during the celebrations for the inauguration of the new president al-Sisi, the aforementioned groups asserted in a joint statement<sup>51</sup> that the incidents demonstrated the 'insufficiency of the recent legal amendment to combat these crimes'. What was required instead, they argued, was a 'holistic national strategy and comprehensive legal reform'. Concerning the necessity of a revision of articles 267 and 268, the signatories demanded the inclusion of a detailed definition of rape<sup>52</sup> and a clear definition of sexual assault. While a definition of

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<sup>50</sup> For the Penal Law prior to the amendment, see Tadros, *Politically Motivated Sexual Assault*, pp. 24-26; Ebaid, *Sexual Harassment in Egypt*, p. 7 (pp. 8-9 for former reform proposals; on these see also Ambrosetti - Abu Amara - Condon, 'Gender-Based Violence in Egypt', p. 401).

<sup>51</sup> 'The Mob-sexual Assaults and Gang Rapes in Tahrir Square during the Celebrations of the Inauguration of the New Egyptian President is Sufficient Proof for the Inefficiency of the Recent Legal Amendments to Combat these Crimes – Joint Statement (09/06/2014)', <http://nazra.org/en/node/323> (accessed 22/08/2014).

<sup>52</sup> I.e., the definition must include oral and anal rape, in addition to rape with sharp objects and fingers.

*taharrush* was introduced for the first time in the amendment, they were critical of the fact that this definition would leave too much room for interpretation as it is tied to the intention of the perpetrator to receive benefits of a sexual nature.<sup>53</sup> In addition the signatories emphasized the necessity of undertaking appropriate procedures and mechanisms to protect women who file reports of SH and pursue legal cases.

Following the sentencing of seven defendants involved in the ‘Qasr El-Nil Felonies’ *Nazra* and other groups issued another joint statement in which they asserted that the verdict should be considered as a starting point for legal reform and as the beginning of an investigation into all previous crimes.<sup>54</sup>

Further steps taken in 2014 to combat SH included the establishment of ‘VAW units’ in all police departments, the formation of a committee launched by the prime minister to investigate the causes of widespread SH and design a national strategy to combat VAW. These steps can be regarded as a ‘milestone’<sup>55</sup> but also as an attempt to neutralize those groups that call for a comprehensive change. As the joint statement of *Nazra*, *El Nadeem*, *CEWLA* and *NWF* shows, the composition of the committee is deemed problematic. Moreover, the signatories doubt the approach (‘limited vision’), commitment and transparency of the committee that is ‘coordinated by the National Council of Women with several ministries and a small number of civil society organizations and initiatives’.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Cf., in contrast, for an official praise of the amendments, the interview of Muṣṭafā ‘Īd from *al-Shurūq* with a legal advisor in the Ministry of Justice, ‘Umar al-Sharīf: ‘Ra’īs al-tashrī’ bi-l-‘adl: ‘uqūbat al-taharrush fī Miṣr ashadd min al-Sa’ūdiyya...wa-al-ghamza wa-hātī būsa’ jarīma taṣīl lil-sijn 5 sanawāt’, in *al-Shurūq*, 30/07/2014, [www.shorouknews.com](http://www.shorouknews.com) (accessed 04/09/2014).

<sup>54</sup> Nazra for Feminist Studies, ‘First Verdict in Cases of Mob-Sexual Assaults and Gang Rape in Tahrir Square is No End to the Story; All Previous Crimes of Sexual Violence must be Investigated – Joint Statement’, 19-07-2014, <http://nazra.org/en/node/342> (accessed 16/09/2014).

<sup>55</sup> N. Abol Komsan (ed.), ‘2014: The year of unfulfilled promises for Egyptian women. Women’s Status Report 2014. Summary, performed by ECWR’: <http://ecwronline.org> (accessed 23/03/2015), p. 17.

<sup>56</sup> ‘Feminist Groups and Organizations Collaborate together in order to Present their Vision for a National Strategy to Combat Violence against Women and Adopt a Holistic and Broad Perspective to Eradicate these Crimes from their Roots – Joint Statement’, 10/12/2014, <http://nazra.org/en/node/392> (accessed 27/03/2015).

### **Concluding Remarks – Positive Signs and Ongoing Systemic and Organizational Obstacles**

First of all, one has to acknowledge the courage, commitment, steadfastness and creativity of the various initiatives on behalf of women's empowerment. Despite the relatively small number of their respective key activists (some of whom are members of different organizations and groups) and ongoing repression, they made a difference in several aspects: first, as other observers already stressed, the involvement of men in the initiatives on GBV is one of the most positive developments. Through their presence and partnership work they are challenging traditional social norms and values and also encouraging alternative gender roles, perceptions and forms of femininity and masculinity.<sup>57</sup> In addition, they have provided a live example of inclusive citizenship as against traditional authoritarian patterns. Moreover, as Skalli has pointed out, through their combination of online and offline activism, these groups were able to expose 'the complicity of political and patriarchal forces in (re)producing and condoning sexual harassment before and since the Arab Spring'.<sup>58</sup> Last but not least, their innovative artistic or at any rate unusual methods of reclaiming and re-organizing public spaces have demonstrated the potential of at least a small segment of young activists in Egypt and their drive for a more open society.

What may be problematic in the long run is the fact that the overwhelming majority of the activists are relatively privileged – compared to the great majority of the population. Reaching a broad audience may thus be difficult, not only because of the social and intellectual gap, but most importantly due to the lack of funds. Most initiatives have been either self-funded or operated through short-term funded projects,<sup>59</sup> in contrast to the established NGOs. And, in particular after the removal of Morsi, old rifts between the diverse groups have reappeared causing 'revolutionary' coalitions to drift apart.<sup>60</sup> Further fragmentation and polarization of society is a hindrance to efforts to work in a sustained manner towards exerting collective pressure on the government to carry out genuine reforms.

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<sup>57</sup> Tadros, *Database*, pp. 37-38, 42; Skalli, 'Young Women and Social Media', p. 250.

<sup>58</sup> Skalli, 'Young Women and Social Media', p. 244 (abstract).

<sup>59</sup> Cf. Ambrosetti - Abu Amara - Condon, 'Gender-Based Violence in Egypt', p. 414.

<sup>60</sup> On the recent establishment of a new regional coalition see: 'Founding Statement of the Coalition of Women Human Rights Defenders in the Middle East and North Africa – Joint Statement', 08/03/2015, <http://nazra.org/en/node/402> (27/03/2015).

Everything considered, the various initiatives have had an impact as regards raising awareness of SH, but with the setting of the problem on the state agenda and the dominance of the established NGOs it is hardly conceivable that a genuine solution is to be expected. What is more, despite all the great efforts over the past years, old stereotypes, rhetoric and discursive patterns die hard, as the reaction in some media to a case of SH in March 2014 at Cairo University demonstrates.<sup>61</sup>

Further campaigns are needed as is further research to shed light on the historical roots and continuous reinvention of persistent collusion between state authorities, including judiciary and security apparatus, in instigating and/or condoning politically motivated GBV. The law's recognition of acts of violence as crimes should not be restricted to violence against women but should also encompass crimes against other vulnerable segments of society that are easily exposed to discrimination and oppression as a result of culturally deeply rooted and widely accepted prejudices. And further, a specific and limited definition of STRH is required.

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<sup>61</sup> 'Victim Blamed after Sexual Assault at Cairo University', in *Mada Masr - The Morning Digest*, 18/03/2014, <http://www.madamasr.com>; see also 'Rights Groups Hold State Responsible for Sexual Harassment', in *Mada Masr - The Morning Digest* 23/03/2014 (both accessed 08/07/2014).

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# **Egypt in Transition: What future for Islamic Feminism?**

Margherita PICCHI

## **Abstract**

This article aims to present an overview of the discursive and political movement known as Islamic feminism, which has received a lot of attention from Western media and academia in recent years, choosing Egypt as a country case study. The purpose of this article is threefold: first, to review the heated debate over the definition of Islamic feminism, its significance, and its legitimacy. Secondly, to present the goals, the methodologies, and the characteristics of this very dynamic and diversified phenomenon in the specific context of Egypt; and finally, to reflect on how, and to which extent, the dramatic and on-going changes that Egypt has faced since the beginning of the 2011 revolution are influencing the projects of scholars, groups and organizations that can fall under the label of ‘Islamic feminism’.

## **Defining a Controversial Term**

Islamic feminism has been the subject of growing attention in the West, an interest that can be situated in the larger post 9/11 context of looking for ‘moderate Muslim’ voices to contrast the rise of Islamic fundamentalism and jihadism all over the world. However, the concept of ‘Islamic feminism’ itself has deeper historical roots, and it requires a terminological reflection since it constitutes a relatively new term, and highly controversial at that, which still does not have a clear and unambiguous definition.

The feverish debate over this term has been captured in an extensive body of writings that includes the research of Margot Badran, Ziba Mir-Hosseini, Saadiya Shaikh, Qudsiya Mirza, Aysha Hidaytullah, Raja Rhouni, Valentine Moghadam and Omaila Abou Bakr, to name only a few of the many scholars who have dealt with the subject of Islamic feminism.<sup>1</sup> Grounding this paper on this extensive scholarship, I will

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<sup>1</sup> There is a growing body of literature on Islamic feminism, its methodology and its goals. See for example O. Abou Bakr, ‘Islamic Feminism? What’s in a Name? Preliminary Reflections’, in *AMEWS review* 15/16 (2001), pp. 1-4; M. Badran, ‘Engaging Islamic Feminism’, in Anytta Kynsilehto (ed.), *Islamic Feminism: Current*

try to summarize the descriptions provided by the abovementioned scholars.

Broadly speaking, Islamic feminism can be used as an umbrella term to define various knowledge building projects which share the goal of empowering women from within an Islamic frame of reference. Like other modernist-reformist religious discourses, Islamic feminism is text-centred, in the sense that 'it derives its understanding and mandate from the Qur'ān'.<sup>2</sup> Central to this is the concept of *ijtihād*, an independent and critical approach to the interpretation of the Holy Book usually conceived of as an opposite to *taqlīd* or 'imitating', a method that consists in reading the Qur'ān following the opinion of an authoritative scholar of the past.<sup>3</sup> Emphasizing individual agency in the interpretative process, Islamic feminism invokes a 'democratization of the *ijtihād*'<sup>4</sup> and a redefinition of religious authority that challenges the monopoly of traditional scholars and institutions in interpreting religious sources. It affirms that:

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*Perspectives*, Tampere Peace Research Institute Occasional 96 (2008), pp. 25-36; the collection of articles by Margot Badran entitled *Feminism in Islam: Secular and Religious Convergences*, Oneworld, Oxford 2009; M. Badran, 'From Islamic Feminism to a Muslim Holistic Feminism', in *IDS Bulletin* 42/1 (2011), pp. 78-87; M. Cooke, *Women Claim Islam: Creating Islamic Feminism Through Literature* Routledge, New York-London 2001; A. Hidayatullah, *Feminist Edges of the Qur'an*, Oxford University Press, New York 2014; Q. Mirza, 'Islamic Feminism and Gender Equality', in *ISIM Review* 21 (2008), pp. 30-31; Z. Mir-Hosseini, 'Muslim Women's Quest for Equality: Between Islamic Law and Feminism', in *Critical Inquiry* 32 (2006), pp. 629-645; Z. Mir-Hosseini, 'Beyond "Islam" vs. "Feminism"', in *IDS Bulletin* 42/1 (2011), pp. 67-77; V. Moghadam, 'Islamic Feminism and its Discontents: Toward a Resolution of the Debate', in *Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 27/4 (2002), pp. 1135-1171; R. Rhouni, *Secular and Islamic Feminist Critiques in the Work of Fatima Mernissi*, Brill, Leiden-Boston, 2010; S. Shaikh, 'Transforming Feminisms: Islam, Women, and Gender Justice', in Omid Safi (ed.), *Progressive Muslims on Justice, Gender and Pluralism*, Oneworld, Oxford 2003, pp. 147-162.

<sup>2</sup> Badran, *Feminism in Islam*, p. 242.

<sup>3</sup> For a reflection on the place of Islamic feminism within the broader field of modernist reform movements in Islam, see Q. Mirza, 'Islamic Feminism: Possibilities and Limitations', in John Strawson (ed.), *Law after Ground Zero*, Cavendish, London, 2002, pp. 108-122.

<sup>4</sup> Y. Haddad - B. Stowasser, 'Introduction', in Yvonne Haddad - Barbara Stowasser (eds.), *Islamic Law and the Challenges of Modernity*, Walnut Creek, Altamira Press, 2004, p. 7.

A believer's right to interpret religion derives not from social sanctions (permission from clergies or interpretive communities), but from the depths of our own conviction and from the advice the Qur'ān gives us to exercise our intellect and knowledge in reading it.<sup>5</sup>

Through a re-reading of Islam's fundamental sources – namely the Qur'ān, and to a lesser degree, the Sunna and the Islamic juridical tradition (*fiqh*) – Islamic feminism aims firstly at deconstructing the traditional and patriarchal interpretations that highlight superiority of men over women, and then at producing new readings that can be used as part of an emancipatory agenda for the establishment of gender equality. Islamic feminism first arose in Iran in the late 1980s, a decade after the creation of the Islamic Republic, and has been labelled as 'the unwanted child of political Islam';<sup>6</sup> indeed one of the main factors behind its emergence is the rise of Islamist and neo-traditionalist movements, which in most cases promote a conservative (misogynist) discourse on women's rights and gender relations, using the Qur'ān and *fiqh* to legitimize their views.<sup>7</sup> The first goal of Islamic feminism is thus enabling women to 'turn the tables' on Islamists and traditional religious authorities, beating them at their own game in their own arena.

It has to be noted, in this regard, that the idea of using religious discourse to promote feminist claims is much older; it dates back at least to the late nineteenth century, when feminist movements first emerged in the Arab-Islamic world. The new Islamic feminist discourse, however, is much more developed and elaborate than the one promoted by first-wave feminists, who 'did not have access to the education and training that would enable them to engage directly in systematic re-readings of religious texts themselves'.<sup>8</sup> With few remarkable exceptions, these first-wave feminists borrowed their arguments from

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<sup>5</sup>A. Barlas, *Believing Women in Islam: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Qur'ān*, University of Texas Press, Austin, 2002, p. 210.

<sup>6</sup>Mir-Hosseini, *Muslim Women Quest for Equality*.

<sup>7</sup>Gender ideology in Islamist movements is the topic of a wide range of studies; for a focus on Egyptian Islamism, see Y. Haddad, 'The Case of Feminist Movement', in Yvonne Haddad (ed.), *Contemporary Islam and the Challenge of History*, State University of New York Press, Albany, 1982, pp. 54-70; A. Karam, *Women, Islamism and the State*, Palgrave, New York-London 1998; G. Talhami, *The Mobilization of Muslim Women in Egypt*, University of Florida Press, Gainesville, 1996; M. Tadros, 'The Muslim Brotherhood's Gender Agenda: Reformed or Reframed?', in *IDS Bulletin* 42/1 (2011), pp. 88-98.

<sup>8</sup>Badran, *Feminism in Islam*, p. 4.

the Islamic modernist discourse, as elaborated by male scholars such as the Egyptian Muhammad 'Abduh (1849-1905).<sup>9</sup> Today's scholars benefit from the significant progress made in women's education during the twentieth century, even in the highest levels of religious science, and they are thus much better equipped in terms of both knowledge and experience. Besides profiting of a much better arsenal of arguments to answer patriarchal interpretations of Islam, they also show a greater consciousness of the relevance of their work, and they actively cooperate on a global level to promote those knowledge projects that fall under the label 'Islamic feminism'.

As the definition provided earlier clearly indicates, Islamic feminism first emerged as a *discourse*. However, over time a growing number of Women's Rights groups and organizations has increasingly referred to Islamic feminist arguments in their everyday struggle to reform discriminatory laws and customs in Muslim majority societies, at local, national, or transnational levels. The Malaysian organization Sisters in Islam and the international networks Musawah and Women Living Under Muslim Laws (WLUML) are good examples of groups that mobilized Islamic feminist discourse to support and legitimize their activities and goals.<sup>10</sup> Although these different approaches, the theoretical and the practical, have been mutually reinforcing, I believe a distinction has to be made between the two, since NGOs and activists rarely *create* knowledge, and because they usually mix the religious arguments with arguments concerning human rights and practical considerations.<sup>11</sup>

Moving on to the heated debate over the definition 'Islamic feminism', it has to be noted that since the very beginning the term has provoked strong reactions from scholars inside and outside the Muslim world. Opinions can be divided into two broad groups: one formed by those who enthusiastically support the term, the other by those who

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<sup>9</sup> On Muhammad 'Abduh and his influence on contemporary Islamic thought, see A. Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1962. For a comprehensive analysis of his view on women's issues, see M. 'Imara, *Al-mar'a wa al-Islām fi rā'y Muḥammad 'Abdūh (Women and Islam according to Muhammad Abduh)*, Al-Qāhira li-l-thaqāfa al-'arabiyya, Cairo, 1975.

<sup>10</sup>For further information, see the groups' websites: Musawah, <http://www.musawah.org>; WLUML, <http://www.wluml.org> (access 31/03/2015).

<sup>11</sup> M. Sharafeldin, 'Egyptian Women's NGOs - Personal Status Law Reform Between Islamic and International Human Rights Law', in Ziba Mir-Hosseini - Kari Vogt - Lena Larsen - Christian Moe (eds.), *Gender and Equality in Muslim Family Law*, IB Tauris, New York 2013, pp. 57-80.

vehemently oppose it, who often come from very different backgrounds. In this regard, it is worth noting that many secular feminists and patriarchal Islamists raise paradoxically similar objections, arguing that the values of religion and feminism are incompatible and therefore that the term 'Islamic feminism' is an oxymoron.<sup>12</sup> But what may seem more bizarre, at least at first glance, is that sometimes it is those who are generally considered to be 'Islamic feminists' that refuse the term most passionately.

Indeed, the rejection can be so strong that it sometimes leads to the claim that the very expression 'Islamic feminism' has been created by western feminists and imposed on Muslim women against their will, in order to categorize and control them better. Therefore, it would represent another orientalist, hegemonic attempt to name the 'Other', which should be fought fiercely. This allegation can easily be refuted; as I will demonstrate shortly, it is based on a poor knowledge of feminist history in Muslim majority countries. Moreover, as Badran points out, it was precisely in the writings of Muslim feminists, secular and religious, that the term 'Islamic feminism' first appeared.<sup>13</sup> The very first time this expression was heard in an academic context was in February 1994, when the Iranian feminist scholar Afsaneh Najmabadi gave a lecture at SOAS, University of London, and used the term to describe the reform project launched in Iran by the new women's magazines *Zanan* and *Farzaneh*. Najmabadi spoke about the project in enthusiastic terms, underlining how this new approach could open up a dialogue between religious and secular feminists.<sup>14</sup> The term gained

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<sup>12</sup> Among secular feminists, Iranian scholar Haideh Moghissi and Egyptian writer Nawal el-Saadawi have both claimed that Islam, as all Abrahamic religions, is inherently patriarchal, and that the very idea of 'Islamic feminism' is deceptive, since it leads to the idea that to be 'authentic', feminist movements in the Muslim world have necessarily to refer to religion, thus strengthening the legitimacy of Islamist and patriarchal actors. On the Islamist front, a prominent female voice to support the idea that the term 'Islamic feminism' is 'the oxymoron par excellence' is that of Nadia Yassine, spokesperson for the Moroccan Islamist movement *al-'Adl wa al-Ihsān*. See H. Moghissi, *Feminism and Islamic Fundamentalism: the Limits of a Postmodern Analysis*, Zed Books, London-New York, 1999; N. el-Saadawi, 'Muslim Women in the Market', in Adele Newton-Horst (ed.), *The Essential Nawal el-Saadawi: a Reader*, Zed Books, London-New York, 2010, pp. 114-124; N. Yassine, quoted in Rhouni's *Secular and Islamic Feminist Critiques*, p. 27.

<sup>13</sup> Badran, *Engaging Islamic Feminism*, p. 28.

<sup>14</sup> Najmabadi's speech at SOAS was later turned into in a Persian-language article and a book chapter: 'Feminism in an Islamic Republic' in John Esposito - Yvonne

rapid circulation and almost immediately sparked a debate so heated that, as the Egyptian scholar Amani Saleh noted, it caused ‘a curious paradox [...] [the] discourse around the phenomenon greatly surpasses efforts to build Islamic feminism itself’.<sup>15</sup>

That being said, one is led to wonder why this term is so passionately rejected by the very women whose work appears to fit perfectly within its definition. A good explanation is offered by the Pakistani-American scholar Asma Barlas, who has written on several occasions about why she resists being called an Islamic feminist, even though she is generally considered one of the pioneers of this movement.<sup>16</sup>

My resistance was a displacement of frustration with real, live, feminists, all of them white. Although I’m sure they were and remain well-meaning, many of them seemed utterly blind to the racial politics of speaking for women of colour like myself and that too in our presence, as if we didn’t exist. Anyone who has been silenced in the name of sisterhood can understand how strange and difficult that is, and it wasn’t until I read black feminists like bell hooks [sic] that I could give voice to my discomfort at being seen as the Sister Other. (...) [But] I’ve always been committed to concept of sexual equality, which is at the core of feminist theory.<sup>17</sup>

Barlas clearly stressed that it is not the idea of gender equality that is refused, nor the concept of feminism as a cluster of tools of analysis, but what she called the ‘Western master narrative of feminism’, which is the result of the enduring legacy of colonialism. This narrative, which is reflected in popular culture, media, and even in the politics of international development institutions, still stereotypes Islam as a violent and misogynist religion, and depicts Muslim women as powerless victims who need to be ‘saved’ by the West. This rhetoric,

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Haddad (eds.), *Islam, Gender and Social Change*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1998, pp. 59-84.

<sup>15</sup>A. Saleh, ‘Paradigms of Knowledge in Islamic Feminism’, in Oaima Abou Bakr (ed.), *Feminist and Islamic Perspectives*, Women and Memory Forum, Cairo, 2013, p. 11.

<sup>16</sup>A. Barlas, ‘Qur’anic Hermeneutics and Women’s Liberation’. Paper presented at the International Congress on Islamic Feminism, Barcelona, Spain, October 29, 2005 <http://www.asma-barlas.com/TALKS/Barcelona.pdf> (last access 31/3/2015); A. Barlas, ‘Engaging Islamic Feminism: Provincializing Feminism as a Master Narrative’, in Anytta Kynsilehto (ed.), *Islamic Feminism: Current Perspectives*, Tampere Peace Research Institute Occasional 96 (2008), pp. 15-24.

<sup>17</sup>Barlas, *Engaging Islamic Feminism*, p. 17.

cynically summarized by the Indian scholar Gayatri Spivak with the sentence ‘white men saving brown women from brown men’,<sup>18</sup> is familiar to anyone who has studied the history of British and French colonialism; both these empires strategically used the ‘woman question’ for the moral justification of imperialist attacks on Muslim countries and to claim an inherent superiority of the West over the Muslim ‘Other’.<sup>19</sup> This hypocritical exploitation of feminist arguments for colonial purposes did not end, however, with the collapse of the British and French Empires. On the contrary, as Lila Abu Lughod among others has shown, the rhetoric of ‘imperial feminism’ is still manifest in the propaganda campaign that accompanies the so-called ‘War on Terror’, which justified the military interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan on the pretence of liberating women.<sup>20</sup>

Sadly, many western feminists not only failed to ‘confront[...] imperialism and its negative implications for democracy and feminist ideals,’<sup>21</sup> but often actively contributed to spreading the stereotype of the supposed inherently misogynist nature of Islam. The ‘global sisterhood’ invoked by Western feminists is in too many cases perceived as nothing more than the imposition of their own needs on non-Western women, whose specific demands and dynamics of oppression are rarely taken into consideration.<sup>22</sup>

As a result of all this, in the Muslim world feminism has often been associated with colonialism and imperialism. This association has led to the widespread perception, shared by traditionalists, political conservatives and even certain leftists, that feminism is an ideology

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<sup>18</sup> G. Spivak, ‘Can the Subaltern Speak?’, in Cary Nelson - Lawrence Grossberg (eds.), *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, University of Illinois Press, Urbana, 1988, pp. 271-313.

<sup>19</sup> Beside Spivak, a fundamental text that analyzes the gendered character of British colonialism is L. Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1992. For the exploitation of the ‘woman question’ by the French in Algeria, see M. Lazreg, *The Eloquence of Silence: Algerian Women in Question*, Routledge, New York, 1994.

<sup>20</sup> L. Abu Lughod, ‘Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving?’, in *American Anthropologist* 104/3 (2002), pp. 783-790; D. Kumar, *Imperialist Feminism and Liberalism*, in *OpenDemocracy*, 6/11/2014, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/deepa-kumar/imperialist-feminism-and-liberalism> (last access 31/03/2015).

<sup>21</sup> M. Badran, *Feminism, Islam and the Nation: Gender and the Making of Modern Egypt*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1995, p. 246.

<sup>22</sup> For a criticism of the hegemonic attitude of western feminist discourse toward the ‘third world woman’, see C. T. Mohanty, ‘Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourse’, in *Feminist Review* 30 (1988), pp. 61-88.

elaborated by decadent, bourgeois white women, which has no relevance for their non-Western counterparts and represents a threat to the cultural and religious authenticity of Muslim societies.

But are these allegations justified? Is feminism really only a Western ideology tainted by its long-dated complicity with imperialism? Before I elaborate on this point let me offer a concise definition of feminism, borrowed from Margot Badran. She argues that feminism should be understood as a mode of analysis that includes: (1) the recognition of gender equality and of women's rights that a particular religion, nation, society or culture may affirm in its basic tenets but withhold in practice, and (2) the identification of ways to secure the practice of such rights by women and men alike.<sup>23</sup>

Taking this definition as a starting point, I would like to state again that, as a significant number of studies have already demonstrated, feminism was actually *not* imposed on the non-Western world by the West; even though the word 'feminism' was coined in Europe, in France to be precise,<sup>24</sup> feminism itself is by no means a Western concept. On the contrary,

History attests that feminism is the creation of both easterners and westerners, of Muslims and those of other religions, of the colonized and colonizers, and of women of different races and ethnicities. Those who claim that feminism is 'western' and 'white' do not know their history and perpetuate the circulation of myths.<sup>25</sup>

The history of the Egyptian Women's Rights movement also attests to the existence of an intimate link between feminist advocacy and anti-colonialist demands; a 'double struggle' against Imperialism and patriarchal oppression unknown to Western feminisms that represents a common feature of several Women's Rights movements in colonial and postcolonial countries, as Sri Lankan feminist scholar Kumari Jayawardena's has pointed out in her now classic book *Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World*.<sup>26</sup> Moreover, the very idea of a

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<sup>23</sup> M. Badran, *Feminism and the Qur'an*, in Jane Dammen McAuliffe (ed.), *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an*, Leiden, Brill, 2002, vol. 2, p. 199.

<sup>24</sup> K. Offen, 'On the French Origin of the Words "Feminism" and "Feminists"', in *Feminist Issues* 8/2 (1988), pp. 45-51.

<sup>25</sup> Badran, *Engaging Feminism*, p. 32.

<sup>26</sup> In this regard, see the pioneering work of Kumari Jayawardena *Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World*, Zed Books, London, 1986. For a focus on Egyptian

monolithic ‘Western feminism’ is reductive and deceiving. While there are definitely some strands of feminism in the West that have shown an imperialist and racist attitude, feminism in western countries is a complex phenomenon. Not only do Western feminisms include locally focused and ‘home-ground’ movements, but in the last decades new discourses have started to emerge that are highly critical of the exclusive focus on gender that Chandra Mohanty described as the major aspect in mainstream, white, upper-class western feminism.<sup>27</sup> Building on the concept of intersectionality, as elaborated by black feminist Kimberlé Crenshaw,<sup>28</sup> these new discourses call for a more comprehensive analysis of the multiple, interrelated dynamics of women’s oppression, one that also includes race, class, ethnicity, sexuality, religion and other axes of identity, examining how they interact in reproducing and reinforcing inequality.<sup>29</sup>

Ignoring this complexity and remaining blind to the ‘indigenous’ history of feminism in the Muslim world is problematic and even dangerous, because it plays into the hands of those Islamists and traditionalists who discredit Muslim women engaged in feminist activities by accusing them of being the ‘fifth column’ of western imperialism and a threat to Muslim identity and authenticity.

In short, I believe that the rejection of the term ‘Islamic feminism’ is due to the confusion and misconceptions that surround the concept of ‘feminism,’ and not to its actual meaning. Therefore, and although I recognize the problematics of using the expression ‘Islamic feminism’, I deliberately choose to use it, whether the scholars I associate with the term agree with the definition or not. At the same time, out of respect for concerns over identity politics and the problem of differences, I would like to underscore that with ‘Islamic feminism’ I do not refer to an identity, but rather to a discourse. In other words, I do not define *people* as feminists, but I categorize their work as such. With this choice, I do not mean to ignore the conceptual difficulties and

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feminism, see Badran, *Feminism, Islam and the Nation*; B. Baron, *The Women’s Awakening in Egypt*, Yale University Press, New Haven-London, 1994.

<sup>27</sup> C. T. Mohanty, ‘Cartographies of Struggle: Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism’, in Chandra Talpade Mohanty - Ann Russo - Lourdes Torres (eds.), *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1991, pp. 1-50.

<sup>28</sup> K. Crenshaw, ‘Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color’, in *Stanford Law Review* 43/6 (1991), pp. 1241-99.

<sup>29</sup> Anna Carastathis, ‘The Concept of Intersectionality in Feminist Theory’, in *Philosophy Compass*, 9/5 (2014), pp. 304-314.

ideological biases that Muslim women engaged in promoting Women's Rights experience with regard to certain attitudes of western feminism. However, I insist on using the label 'Islamic feminism' because I strongly believe that it may help to bridge the gap between different expressions of feminism and can go beyond the polarization between 'secular' and 'religious' when describing a commitment to Women's Rights. Indeed, as a number of studies have already demonstrated,

[s]ecular and Islamic feminism have been mutually re-enforcing. Not only is there an important secular past behind Islamic feminism but also an on-going side-by-side presence of the two feminisms.<sup>30</sup>

As a growing number of women from all over the world are pointing out, there is a strong need to reconfigure the contours of feminism and elaborate a new understanding of this concept, more inclusive and cross-cultural, one that acknowledges the specificities of different groups of women and recognizes the varying forms of feminist praxis. I do not refer here to a 'global sisterhood' built on the presumption of a universal womanhood that in practice reflects the reality of a particular group of women, but rather to an intersectional, non-essentialist 'feminism' that recognizes cultural diversity, supports multiple feminist epistemologies, and pays attention to the specificities and particularities of women's different contexts. The aim of this new understanding of feminism is to build 'a common context of struggle which facilitates the formation of politically oppositional alliances and coalitions in the face of specific exploitative structures', as South African scholar Saadiya Shaikh says, thus enabling

varying groups of women to share and learn from each other's experiences, whether this is an exchange of feminist tools of analysis, or of varying ways of implementing activist initiatives, or simply an exposure to other forms of justice-oriented gender practices.<sup>31</sup>

I would like to conclude this terminological analysis with a final reflection. Although I claim the legitimacy of the concept of 'Islamic feminism', I would recommend a more cautious use of the label. Indeed, two decades after the term first appeared in academic literature on women and Islam, it has now become widespread not only in

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<sup>30</sup> Badran, *From Islamic Feminism to Muslim Holistic Feminism*, p. 82.

<sup>31</sup> Shaikh, *Transforming Feminisms*, pp. 154-155.

academic literature, but also in media and in non-specialist publications. As a result, its meaning has expanded so much that it is now used to describe almost all active Muslim women, 'even though their activities might not even fit the broadest definition of feminism',<sup>32</sup> thus losing all analytical effectiveness. Because of the above, I believe that the meaning of 'Islamic feminism' should be narrowed, because, as premised, not all women's exegetical works can be considered feminist, even if this last concept is understood in its broader sense. As a matter of fact, the writings of the famous Islamic scholar 'Āisha 'Abd al-Raḥmān (1913-1998, better known under her *nom de plume* of Bint al-Shāṭī'), who did not pay special attention to issues such as Women's Rights and gender relations,<sup>33</sup> and who employed a neo-traditional methodology of exegesis, cannot in my opinion be defined as feminist, despite her fundamental contribution to the history of women in Egypt.<sup>34</sup> Even more so, the work of women interpreters who deal with women's issues but explicitly support a complementary-hierarchical view of gender relations, claiming that this hierarchy is divinely ordained, *cannot* be defined as feminist. This distinction is fundamental, in my opinion, if we want the label 'Islamic feminism' to maintain its significance. That being said, it is worth remarking that distinguishing between feminist and non-feminist writings is not always easy, since the lines between these two are often blurred. In fact, even those scholars who affirm to be committed to gender equality and justice don't always agree on the exact meaning of these words, and it is important not to fall in the trap of considering the western elaboration of these concepts the only legitimate one. Similarly, those scholars who

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<sup>32</sup> H. Moghissi, 'Women, Modernity and Political Islam', in *Iran bulletin* 19-20 (1998), p. 42.

<sup>33</sup> During her long academic career, Bint al-Shāṭī' published more than sixty books and hundreds of articles, including Qur'anic exegesis, poems, novels, short stories, an autobiography and various literary criticism articles. Only a few of these publications take into account issues like Women's Rights or gender relations, showing a rather conservative perspective. See, for instance, 'Aisha Abd al-Rahman, 'Islam and the New Woman', in *Alif - Journal of comparative poetics*, 19 (1999), pp. 194-202; 'A. Abd al-Rahman, 'The Islamic Concept of Women's Liberation', in *al-Raida* 125 (2009), pp. 37-43.

<sup>34</sup> Among the numerous studies that took into examination Bint al-Shāṭī's contribution to the science of *tafsīr*, see I. Boullata, 'Modern Quranic Exegesis: a Study of Bint al-Shati's Method', in *The Muslim World* 64/2 (1974), pp.103-113; for her view on women's rights and gender relations, see R. Marcotte, « Emancipation de la femme et exégèse Qur'anique chez Bint al-Shati' (1913-1998) », in *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses* 30 (2001), pp. 277-292.

refuse the idea of gender equality in favour of more nuanced concepts such as gender equity or gender complementarity cannot be hastily defined as promoting a normative patriarchal discourse, since they often criticize the attitude shown by Islamist movements and parties towards women. Another example from Egypt, offered by the Islamist scholar Heba Raouf Ezzat, is enlightening: Heba Raouf is a political scientist who has worked as assistant professor in the Department of Political Science of Cairo University, as affiliate professor at the American University in Cairo, and is currently a visiting researcher at the London School of Economics. She is a public figure renowned in Egypt and abroad, especially due to her intense cyber-activism. She is an independent intellectual and activist, which means she is not a member of any party. However, when asked about her ideological background, doctor Raouf once defined herself as an Islamist, though specifying that ‘This doesn’t mean I accept the dominant discourse about women inside the Islamist movement’.<sup>35</sup> Her research interests include democracy and citizenship, critique of authoritarianism, human rights, civil society, and women’s social and political rights.<sup>36</sup>

Concerning this last topic Raouf generally agrees with feminist scholars and activists in acknowledging that the conditions of women in Egypt, and more generally in Muslim societies, have to be improved, yet she adamantly refuses the label of feminist. She also stresses that the means to improve these conditions can and have to be found within Islam, and she advocates the necessity of promoting women’s *ijtihad* in order to reach this goal. However, while the main goal of feminists –

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<sup>35</sup> K. El-Gawhary - H. Raouf Ezzat, ‘An Interview with Heba Ra’uf Ezzat’, in *Middle East Report* 191 (1994), pp. 26-27.

<sup>36</sup> Among her numerous publications on the subject of women, see H. Raouf Ezzat, *Al-mar’a wa al-‘amal al-siyāsi: ru’ya islāmiyya (Women and Politics: An Islamic Perspective)*, IIIT, Washington DC, 1995; H. Raouf Ezzat, ‘Al-Mar’a wa al-Ijtihād: Naḥw Khitāb Islāmiyy Jadīd’ (Women and Ijtihād: toward a New Islamic Discourse), in *Alif - Journal of Comparative Poetics* 19 (1999), pp. 96-120; H. Raouf Ezzat, ‘The Silent Aisha: an Egyptian Narrative’, in Bayes - Tohidi (ed.), *Globalisation, Gender and Religion: the Politics of Women’s Rights in Catholic and Muslim Contexts*, Palgrave, New York, 2001, pp. 231-257; H. Raouf Ezzat, ‘On the Future of Women and Politics in the Arab World’, in John Donohue - John Esposito (ed.), *Islam in Transition: Muslim Perspectives*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2007, pp. 184-196. On the topic of feminism, it is worth mentioning the book co-written with secular feminist Nawal al-Saadawi, though it presents two separate and rather opposite positions, while it lacks dialogue or discussion between the two authors. N. Al-Sadaawi - H. Raouf Ezzat, *Al-Mar’a wa al-Dīn wa al-Akhlāq (Women, Religion and Morals)*, Dar Al-Fikr Al-Mu’āsir, Beirut 2000.

by definition – is that of discarding patriarchal institutions, laws and customs, Raouf recognises the legitimacy of a gendered hierarchy, affirming, for instance, that:

Patriarchal systems are necessary in our societies. They uphold the family and take care of women. But what we have today is not patriarchy, nor is it anything. It is a mixed salad of ideas we took from the West and the East. Women are neither honoured by patriarchal norms nor are they protected by secular regimes. They are in the worst possible situation. *The answer is to uphold the values and obligations of Islamic patriarchy* [Italics mine, MP]. This is where an old woman will find respect and honour.<sup>37</sup>

Her arguments in favour of Women's Rights usually focus on political rights, but when it comes to laws and rules concerning gender relations within the family, she is generally in compliance with the most conservative Islamist discourse. This is in contrast to many scholars of Islamic feminism whose struggle aims precisely at achieving gender equality *inside* the family: as I will explain shortly, reform of Muslim family laws is one of the main purposes of their work.

To conclude, while I do not consider 'Islamic feminism' to be an oxymoron, I believe that the idea of 'Islamist feminists' is a contradiction in terms.

However, women such as Heba Raouf 'might be more appropriately seen as incipient Islamic feminists, especially if they become disaffected by male Islamists' treatment'<sup>38</sup> and when they engage in a productive dialogue with more progressive scholars, leading one to hope that in the future they may become closer to Islamic feminism and then attempt a reform of Islamist movements from within.

### **Islamic feminism in Egypt: Key Actors and Peculiarities**

Islamic feminism is a pluralistic and global phenomenon; scholars who engage in this discourse come from Muslim majority and Muslim minority societies in Africa and Asia as well as from diasporic and convert communities in the West. Hence, although all these scholars have lot in common and are in constant communication with each other,

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<sup>37</sup> Heba Raouf, quoted in S. Hafez, *The Terms of Empowerment: Islamic Women Activists in Egypt*, American University of Cairo Press, Cairo, 2003, p. 102.

<sup>38</sup> Badran, *Engaging Islamic Feminism*, p. 32.

Islamic feminist discourse is characterized by a great diversity of opinions and ideas.

It is worth noting, in this regard, that a significant number of contemporary scholars and groups that refer to Islam in promoting gender equality are based outside the Arab world. It was in Iran, for instance, that in 1992 the already mentioned women's journal *Zanan*, the first of its kind in the contemporary Islamic world, began publishing.<sup>39</sup> Amina Wadud, who wrote a groundbreaking work in gender-sensitive Quranic hermeneutics, significantly titled *Qur'an and Women: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective*, is an Afro-American convert.<sup>40</sup> Moreover, it was at the Claremont Main Road Mosque of Cape Town, in South Africa, that in 1994 Wadud delivered the *khutba*, the Friday sermon, becoming the first woman in the modern era to perform this task. Again, it was in New York that, on Friday 18 March 2005, she led the Friday prayer for a mixed-gender audience, breaking the taboo in Islamic tradition of women leading men in prayer.<sup>41</sup> Finally, the previously mentioned group Sisters in Islam, the first association that started transforming Islamic feminism from a purely theoretical discourse into a praxis-oriented movement, was founded in Malaysia in 1987.<sup>42</sup> As a consequence, most of the literature on Islamic feminism has focused mainly on non-Arab scholars, with the remarkable exception of the Moroccan sociologist Fatima Mernissi, a pioneer of Islamic feminism, whose work is considered to be 'one of the most innovative in [this] field'.<sup>43</sup>

Should we deduce, from all this, that Arab scholars and groups play a secondary role in the landscape of Islamic feminism? Such a conclusion would be particularly astonishing if we take into consideration that it was in the Arab world, more specifically in Egypt and Lebanon, that in the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the

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<sup>39</sup> Najmabadi, *Feminism in an Islamic Republic*.

<sup>40</sup> A. Wadud, *Qur'an and Women: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1999 (First published in 1992 by Penerbit Fajar Bakati Sdn. Bhd., Kuala Lumpur).

<sup>41</sup> For further information on these episodes, and more generally on Wadud's biography and activism, see A. Wadud, *Inside the Gender Jihad - Women's Reform in Islam*, Oneworld, Oxford, 2006.

<sup>42</sup> Z. Anwar, 'Sisters in Islam and the Struggle for Women's Rights', in Fareshteh Nourai-Simone (ed.), *On Shifting Ground: Muslim Women in the Global Era*, The Feminist Press of the City University of New York, New York, 2005, pp. 233-247.

<sup>43</sup> Rhouni, *Secular and Islamic Feminist Critiques*, p. 12. At this day, Rhouni's excellent book is the most extensive analysis of Fatima Mernissi's work.

20<sup>th</sup> century Muslim women started reclaiming their agency in a religious discourse dominated by men. Maybe the most famous of these early women interpreters is the Lebanese Nazira Zayn al-Dīn (1908-1976), author of two pioneering works, published respectively in 1928 and 1929. She passionately argued against women's full veiling and claimed the right for women to fully participate in society and engage in any field of culture, including the interpretation of religious sources.<sup>44</sup> The outstanding books of Zayn al-Dīn are currently considered the first attempt by a woman to engage in Quranic exegesis; indeed, a figure of her calibre has no precedents in the contemporary Islamic world, but the roots of modern Islamic feminism go even deeper. As a matter of fact, almost forty years before the appearance of Zayn al-Dīn's books, another woman, the Egyptian poet and novelist 'Āisha Taymūr (1840-1902), dared to question the widespread view that gender hierarchy is grounded in the Qur'ān. In a small pamphlet named *Mir'āt al-ta'mul fī al-umūr* (*A Contemplative Mirror on some Issues*), published in 1892,<sup>45</sup> Taymūr argued that men are not superior to women due to some innate characteristic of masculinity; on the contrary, this superiority is conditional upon men's assumption of their responsibility toward their families, as it is 'required by the Quranic text (*al-naṣṣ*) and by the consensus of scholars (*ijmā'*)'<sup>46</sup> - in fact, were they to neglect their duties, they would lose all their privileges.

Taymūr's attempt to engage in *ijtihād* was in many aspects crude, and by encouraging men to take up their marital responsibilities instead of squandering their money in following the latest European fashion, she voiced a rather conservative and elitist view – a view consistent with her position in the Turkish upper class. However, her conditioned understanding of men's authority over women was indeed innovative at that early historical stage, and it is still very inspirational to contemporary feminist scholars in their criticism against patriarchal

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<sup>44</sup> Both of Nazira Zayn al-Dīn books have been recently reprinted: see N. Zayn al-Dīn, *Al-sufūr wa al-ḥijāb* (*Unveiling and Veiling*), Al Mada, Nicosia-Damascus, 1998; and N. Zayn al-Dīn, *Al-fatāt wa al-shuyūkh* (*The Young Girl and the Shaykhs*) Al Mada, Nicosia-Damascus, 1998. For further information on her life and work, see M. Cooke, *Nazira Zeineddine: A Pioneer of Islamic Feminism*, Oneworld, Oxford, 2012.

<sup>45</sup> Taymūr's pamphlet has been recently reprinted by the Women and Memory Forum: see A. Taymūr, *Mir'āt al-ta'mul fī al-umūr* (*A Mirror on Contemplation*), Women and Memory Forum, Cairo, 2002.

<sup>46</sup> Taymūr, *Mir'āt al-ta'mul fī al-umūr*, p. 30.

readings of Quranic verses concerning gender relations.<sup>47</sup> As I will explain shortly, Egyptian family laws are still built on the assumption that men hold authority over their families, an assumption presented by conservative religious scholars as divinely ordained. Contesting these claims is one of the main challenges for contemporary feminist groups and scholars, which has led to a rediscovery of Taymūr's work and especially of her pamphlet *Mir'āt al-ta'mul fī al-umūr*.<sup>48</sup>

We could claim, then, that Egypt was the place of birth of gender-sensitive approach to religious texts. Nowadays, however, we have to acknowledge that Egyptian Islamic feminist literature is not as well developed and does not have the same impact, on an international level, as literature produced in countries such as Iran, Malaysia, South Africa, and the United States. This clearly does not mean that Islamic feminism is absent in Egypt, or more generally in the Arab world; on the contrary, it is active and alive, though it does not receive much attention in the West and it faces particularly difficult challenges, as I will illustrate in the following paragraphs.

Concerning Islamic feminism as a knowledge building project, the leading scholar in Egypt can be easily identified as being Omaima Abou Bakr, professor of English and comparative literature at Cairo University. Abou Bakr was one of the first scholars to analyze the concept of Islamic feminism, affirming that despite its faults, it is useful for the purpose of de-homogenizing feminism and reclaiming the legitimacy of promoting gender equality from within the Islamic tradition.<sup>49</sup> Abou Bakr is well known at an international level, thanks to her proficiency in English and her participation in cross-national

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<sup>47</sup> O. Abou Bakr, 'The Interpretative Legacy of *Qiwamah* as an Exegetical Construct', in Ziba Mir-Hosseini - Mulki al-Sharmani - Jana Rumminger, *Men in charge? Rethinking Authority in Muslim Legal Tradition*, Oneworld, London, 2015, pp. 44-64.

<sup>48</sup> A conference held in Cairo in 2002 to commemorate the centenary of Taymūr's death opened the way to this rediscovery. Conference proceedings were later published by the Women and Memory Forum: see H. Elsadda (ed.), *'Ā'isha Taymūr: Taḥdiyyāt al-thābit wa al-mutaghayyir fī al-qarn al-tāsi' 'ashar*, Women and Memory Forum, Cairo, 2004. A few years later, the Egyptian historian Mervat Hatem published a book in English on 'Ā'isha Taymūr, allowing also non-Arabic speaking scholars to deepen their knowledge of Taymūr. See M. Hatem, *Literature, Gender and Nation Building in Nineteenth-Century Egypt: The Life and Works of Aisha Taymur*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2011.

<sup>49</sup> Abou Bakr, *Islamic Feminism: What's in a Name*.

projects and publications.<sup>50</sup> She has not engaged directly in Quranic hermeneutics, but rather has focused on the history and the genealogy of *tafsīr*, her goal being twofold: on the one hand to underline the contradictions in the mainstream exegetical tradition (not to discredit it, but rather to show how the personal worldviews and prejudices of different scholars have influenced their interpretation of verses concerning gender relations) and on the other to shine light on alternative discourses that have been marginalized throughout history. Besides her focus on the history and genealogy of *tafsīr*, her research interests include women's history in the Middle East, mysticism in Christianity and Islam, masculinity and (Islamic) feminist theory.<sup>51</sup> Abou Bakr is also one of the founding members of the Women and Memory Forum (WMF), a non-governmental organization composed of women academics, researchers and activists, whose mission is 'the production and dissemination of alternative knowledge concerning women in the Arab Region'.<sup>52</sup> The women who established WMF in 1995 come from various backgrounds and use different methodologies, integrating secular as well as religious feminist perspectives.

In fact, WMF is active in a number of projects focused on both the local and international level, and even though its publications are written mainly in Arabic, some of its scholars regularly publish in English to target an international academic audience. At the local level, the WMF's projects can be divided into two broad categories: one focused on the idea of re-reading and re-writing histories, which includes the building of an oral history archive, the collection of storytelling, the reprinting of important women's publications from the beginning of the twentieth century,<sup>53</sup> and the publication of a series of

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<sup>50</sup> Abou Bakr, *The Interpretative Legacy of Qiwwamah*; O. Abou Bakr, « Le Féminisme Islamique et la Production de la Connaissance: Perspectives dans l'Égypte Postrévolutionnaire », in Zahra Ali (ed.), *Féminismes Islamiques*, La Fabrique, Paris, 2012, pp. 165-184.

<sup>51</sup> The complete list of her publications can be found at <http://www.wmf.org.eg/member/omaima-abou-bakr/?lang=en> (access 31/3/2015).

<sup>52</sup> For further information on WMF's mission, see <http://www.wmf.org.eg/about-us/?lang=en> (last access 31/03/2015).

<sup>53</sup> Beside the previously mentioned pamphlet written by Aisha Taymūr, WMF has also reprinted: the complete collection of *al-Fatat*, the first women's magazine in Egypt, originally published by Hind Nawfal between 1892 and 1893; the autobiography of the pioneer of girls education Nabawiyya Musa *Tārikhī bi qalamī (My history, by my Pen)*, originally published serially from 1938 to 1942; the collection of essays *al-Nisā'iyāt (Feminist Writings)* by Malak Hifni Nassef, originally published in 1910; and finally, the biographies of famous women published

books on women's history in modern and medieval Egypt.<sup>54</sup> The second refers to projects focused on the spread of feminist knowledge and the study of gender, which includes the organization of workshops in various Egyptian universities and NGOs offering specialized training in gender studies, and a series of translations of fundamental texts on feminism and gender from English to Arabic.<sup>55</sup>

Besides these local projects, the WMF also works to keep Islamic feminism scholars at a global level connected with each other: one of the most successful initiatives in this regard has been a conference titled 'Feminism and Islamic Perspectives: New Horizons of Knowledge and Reform' held in Cairo on March 17-18, 2012 with participants from the Arab world and Europe. The papers presented at the conference were then collected in a volume edited by Omaima Abou Bakr, which was published in English and Arabic.<sup>56</sup> Moreover, the WMF collaborates closely with the previously mentioned Musawah, a global network initiated in 2009 by Sisters in Islam with the twofold aim of building knowledge about Women's Rights in Islam and to coordinate initiatives for the reform of Muslim family laws that discriminate against women and the resistance to regressive amendments demanded by conservative groups within society.

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by Qadira Husayn in 1924, with the title *Shahirāt al-nisā' fi-l-'ālam al-islāmiyy* (*Famous Women in the Muslim World*).

<sup>54</sup> The series, realized by Omaima Abou Bakr and Hoda el-Saadi, is called 'History notebooks' (*awrāq al-dhākira*) and includes four occasional papers: O. Abou Bakr - H. el-Saadi, *Al-nisā' wa miḥnat al-ṭibb fī al-mujtami'āt al-islāmiyya* (*Women and the Medical Profession in Islamic Societies*), Women and Memory Forum, Cairo, 1999; H. el-Saadi - O. Abou Bakr, *Al-marā wa al-ḥayyā al-dīniyya fī al-'uṣūr al-waṣṭa bayna al-Islām wa al-gharb* (*Women and Religious Life in the Middle Age between Islam and the West*), Women and Memory Forum, Cairo, 1999; H. el-Saadi - R. al-Khawali, *Al-junūn wa al-marā fī Miṣr nihāyat al-qarn al-tāsi' 'ashar* (*Madness and Women in 19<sup>th</sup> Century Egypt*), Women and Memory Forum, Cairo, 2005; O. Abou Bakr - Hoda el-Saadi, *Al-nashāt al-iqtisādiyya al-ḥaḍriyy li al-nisā' fī Miṣr al-islāmiyya* (*Urban Economic Activities of Women in Muslim Egypt*), Women and Memory Forum, Cairo, 2007.

<sup>55</sup> The series includes: M. Hatem (ed.), *Naḥw dirāsāt al-naw' fī al-'ulūm al-siyāsiyya* (*Toward the study of Gender in Political Sciences*), Women and Memory Forum, Cairo, 2010; O. Abou Bakr (ed.), *Al-Niswiyya wa al-dirāsāt al-dīniyya* (*Feminism and Religious Studies*), Women and Memory Forum, Cairo, 2012; H. Elsadda (ed.), *Al-Niswiyya wa al-dirāsāt al-tārīkhiyya* (*Feminism and Historical Studies*), Women and Memory Forum, Cairo, 2015.

<sup>56</sup> O. Abou Bakr (ed.), *Feminist and Islamic Perspectives: New Horizons of Knowledge and Reform*, The Women and Memory Forum, Cairo, 2013.

This intersectional approach goes beyond the precise, original definition of ‘Islamic feminism’, and it is better described by what Margot Badran has defined a ‘Muslim holistic feminism’, one that mixes the languages and the discourses of secular and religious feminism and aims at surpassing national borders and coordinating efforts at a global level with individuals and organizations coming from different backgrounds.<sup>57</sup>

Another organization that has been prominent in the production of Islamic feminism scholarship in Egypt is the Women and Civilization group, established in 2000 by Mona el-Fadl, professor of Literature at Cairo University. In the two years following its establishment, the group published a journal named after the organization (*al-Mar’a wa al-Ḥaḍāra*) that collected many outstanding articles on Quranic exegesis, women’s history in Islam, and feminist theory. However, the publication of the journal was interrupted after only three issues, as the association drastically reduced its activities after Mona el-Fadl suddenly passed away in 2002. Despite its limited span of existence, the Women and Civilization Journal is still remembered by many as one of the most influential Islamic feminist publications in Arabic.<sup>58</sup> Moreover, some of the members of the group – namely Amani Saleh, professor in political science at Misr International University, and Hind Mustafa, writer and researcher for the Arab Women Organization – have remained active, working closely together with the Women and Memory Forum, and are now thinking about publishing a fourth issue of the journal, focused on *ḥadīth*.<sup>59</sup>

Scholars of WMF and Women and civilization are not the only ones to have reclaimed agency by participating in the religious discourse on the issues of Women’s Rights in Islam. However, these are the only groups that are *currently engaged in the country* in producing *significant* knowledge that can be associated with Islamic feminism.

### Potentials and Challenges of Islamic Feminism in Egypt

The question then arises of why Egypt, having been at the forefront of the feminist movement in the Arab-Islamic world at the beginning of the twentieth century, finds itself today in a relatively secondary

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<sup>57</sup> Badran, *From Islamic Feminism to Muslim Holistic Feminism*.

<sup>58</sup> Personal interviews with Oaima Abou Bakr and with the historian Hoda el-Saadi from WMF, 29/01/2014 and 23/03/2014.

<sup>59</sup> M. al-Sharmani, ‘Islamic Feminism: Transnational and National Reflections’, in *Approaching religion* 4/2 (2014), pp. 83-94.

position in the global landscape of Islamic feminism. One of the main reasons can be identified as the dominant political and religious climate in Egypt; as a matter of fact, unlike their colleagues active in countries and communities where they can enjoy a high degree of freedom of expression, Egyptian scholars operate in an environment where the historical limitations of political liberties are reflected in a dominant religious discourse that is highly conservative.

Indeed, while there have been a handful of Islamic liberal thinkers who in the last decades integrated notions of democracy, civil society and human rights into their doctrines, their social impact remains negligible, while the dominant voice on the religious scene remains that of the conservative wing of Al-Azhar.<sup>60</sup> In this environment, scholars who attempt radical innovation face censorship, threats, and even charges of apostasy – the most famous case in this regard being that of Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd (1943-2010), a central figure in contemporary Islamic reformism.<sup>61</sup> His innovative yet rigorous exegetical methodology has been inspiring for many liberal scholars, including those of Islamic feminism, in Egypt and abroad;<sup>62</sup> but it also sparked controversy in academic, religious and political circles. A wave of protests led not only to his ousting from academia, but also to his sentencing for apostasy by an Egyptian court and to the consequent forced nullification of his marriage on the grounds that, according to the *sharī'a*-based Egyptian family laws, a Muslim woman cannot be married to a non-Muslim (or apostate) man. Before and after the trial, Abu Zayd received several death threats and eventually left to live in exile with his wife, settling in Netherlands.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> A. Bayat, *Making Islam Democratic: Social Movements and the Post-Islamist Turn*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 2007.

<sup>61</sup> Among his many outstanding contributions to contemporary Islamic thought, it is worth mentioning his English book *Rethinking the Qur'an: Toward a Humanistic Hermeneutics*, Humanistic University Press, Utrecht, 2004.

<sup>62</sup> Among the numerous writings that Abu Zayd dedicated to the issue of gender relations in the Quran, see N. Abu Zayd, *Dawā'ir al-khawf - Qirā'a fī khitāb al-mar'a (Circles of Fear – Reading the Discourse about Woman)*, Casablanca-Beirut, al-Markaz al-Thaqāfi al-'Arabi, 2004; N. Abu Zayd, 'The Status of Women Between the Qur'an and Fiqh', in Mir Hosseini - Vogt - Larsen - Moe (eds.), *Gender and Equality in Muslim Family Law*, pp. 153-168.

<sup>63</sup> On Abu Zayd trial and conviction, see M. Abaza, 'Civil Society and Islam in Egypt: The Case of Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd', in *Journal of Arabic, Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies* 2/2 (1995), pp. 29- 42.

Probably as a consequence of the dominance of religious conservatism, scholars of Islamic feminism in Egypt are extremely cautious in expressing revolutionary views concerning gender relations and Women's Rights in Islam, and avoid pushing forward too audacious claims that could shock the public. For instance, to find an Egyptian scholar who openly speaks about a woman's right to act as *imām* and lead a mixed-gender prayer, we must refer to Nevin Reda, who was born in Egypt, still collaborates with WMF and other Egyptian scholars, but is currently based in Canada and publishes mainly in English.<sup>64</sup> Another example of the overall caution shown by Egyptian scholars in dealing with sensitive issues can be seen in the conceptualization of gender, as developed by scholars such as Omaina Abou Bakr and Amani Saleh. Both these scholars discussed this topic at length in their works and expressed views that can be considered conservative in many aspects. Indeed, reading their writings leaves one with the impression that they do not really move away from the gender construct of 'different but equal', which leaves room for essentialist interpretations of gender difference not too distant from those elaborated by Muslim traditionalists and fundamentalists. Moreover, these two scholars conceptualize gender in a strictly binary way. Amani Saleh, for instance, in her widely celebrated *Qaḍayat an-naw' fī-l-Qur'ān* (*The Issue of Gender in the Qur'ān*), praises the usefulness of gender for distinguishing between the innate characteristics of biological sex and the social constructs associated with it, but she also warns against the risk inherent in the western elaboration of the concepts of gender, since 'the existence of a first and a second sex does not protect against the appearance of a third sex, a fourth or even more'.<sup>65</sup> Abou Bakr, then, brushes off homosexual rights as 'irrelevant', an issue specific to a 'Western agenda or discourse on gender and feminism' that 'we need not to subscribe [to]'.<sup>66</sup> These kinds of statements reveal clearly that Egyptian Islamic feminism remains

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<sup>64</sup> N. Reda, 'What Would the Prophet Do: The Islamic Basis for Female-Led Prayer', 2005, [http://www.irfi.org/articles/articles\\_351\\_400/islamic\\_basis\\_for\\_femaleled.htm](http://www.irfi.org/articles/articles_351_400/islamic_basis_for_femaleled.htm) (last access 31/03/2015).

<sup>65</sup> A. Saleh, 'Qaḍayat al-naw' fī al-Qur'ān: manzumāt al-Zawjiyya bayna qutḅay al-jindir wa al-qiwwāma (The Issue of Gender in the Qur'ān: Couple Systems Between the Two Poles of Gender and Qiwwāma)', in *Al-Mar'a wa al-Ḥaḍāra* 3 (2002), p. 25.

<sup>66</sup> O. Abou Bakr, 'Gender Perspectives in Islamic Tradition', talk given at the Second Annual Minaret of Freedom Institute Dinner, Gaithersburg, Maryland on June 26, 1999, <http://www.minaret.org/gender.htm> (last access 31/03/2015).

impervious to queer theories or LGBTI rights, subjects that are receiving increasing attention from prominent scholars of global Islamic feminism such as Amina Wadud and Kecia Ali.<sup>67</sup> We might say, then, that Islamic feminism in Egypt is characterized by what we can define as ‘conservative liberalism’ which advocates for liberty and equality between the sexes on a normative basis and which refers to Islamic *sharī‘a* to a great extent. However, it is not completely clear whether this caution is motivated by strategic reasons – in order not to face the fury of traditionalists – or by a sincere conviction on behalf of those putting forth this discourse.

None of this means, however, that Islamic feminism in Egypt lacks originality. On the contrary, it has developed some peculiar reflections that might be of inspiration to other scholars of Islamic feminism on an international level.

A particularly interesting aspect of the research done by scholars affiliated with WMF or Women and Civilization is the special focus on historical research to support the interpretative-religious project that, as stated before, represents the core of Islamic feminism in its original meaning. In the work of Abou Bakr and the Women and Civilization group, this meaning is expanded to include a different methodology for the production of knowledge, which focuses on re-reading history and historical sources.<sup>68</sup>

According to Abou Bakr, this historical approach has a double goal: on the one hand, it is meant to underline the active role that women have played throughout history in Egyptian economic, cultural, religious, social and even political life, thus revising the official historical records that have marginalized women’s contribution and have focused solely on men. It comes without saying that the goal of this kind of literature is not purely academic; on the contrary, it is mainly political, since by rereading historical sources and producing a new, alternative history on women’s public role, these scholars aim to fight the marginalization of women in *today’s* Egypt. Secondly,

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<sup>67</sup> K. Ali, *Sexual Ethics and Islam: Feminist Reflections on Qur’an, Hadith and Jurisprudence*, Oneworld, Oxford 2006; A. Wadud, ‘LGBTQI Muslims and International Movements for Empowerment’, in *Feminism and Religion*, 20/09/2014, <http://feminismandreligion.com/2014/09/20/lgbtqi-muslims-and-international-movements-for-empowerment-by-amina-wadud/> (last access 31/03/ 2015).

<sup>68</sup> Abou Bakr, *Le Féminisme Islamique*; T. Sharif, ‘Sīrat al-Mar’a fī al-Tārīkh al-Islāmiyy’ (Women’s Story in Islamic History), in *Al-Marā’ wa al-Ḥadāra* 2 (2001), pp. 5-14.

historical research is aimed at strengthening the strictly religious study with a perspective meant to help understand in which context certain interpretative works have been produced. This approach, based on the notion of intertextuality as elaborated by Julia Kristeva,<sup>69</sup> associates the study of religious texts with the analysis of other kinds of texts such as historical records, private memoirs, and philosophical essays, thus extending the reflection from the issue of ‘women in Islam’ to the study of the Islamic tradition and cultural history of Islamic societies.<sup>70</sup>

Another element of originality in the Egyptian Islamic feminist discourse can be found in its special focus on masculinity, manhood and maleness in Islam, a new trend of study that has started to appear in the last fifteen years but still needs to be studied in depth.<sup>71</sup> It has been noted that the vast amount of contemporary literature on the family and on gender relations in Islam has focused exclusively on women, without undertaking a deep analysis of men’s duties and responsibilities toward the family.<sup>72</sup> As a result,

The modern preoccupation with continuous redefinitions of women’s ‘Islamic’ conduct and characterization led to an exaggerated focus on *her* duties, *her* good qualities, *her* mistakes, *her* responsibilities, and *her* special burden of preserving and advancing the family, the community, and the whole *Umma*. In this separatist view, *she* alone will also be blamed for imperfections and failures.<sup>73</sup>

As a reaction to this trend, some Muslim women scholars started to ‘turn the tables’ on Muslim men, producing a new discourse that redefines men as domestic beings and holds them accountable for the wellbeing of the family on equal grounds with women.<sup>74</sup> In Egypt, one

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<sup>69</sup> J. Kristeva, *Semeiotike: recherches pour une sémantique*, Seuil, Paris, 1969.

<sup>70</sup> Abou Bakr, *Le Féminisme Islamique*.

<sup>71</sup> To this day, we can find only three books dealing with this subject in depth: M. Ghoussoub - E. Sinclair-Webb (eds.), *Imagined Masculinities: Changing Patterns of Identity for Middle Eastern Men*, Saqi, London, 2000; L. Ouzgane (ed.), *Islamic Masculinities*, Zed Books, London-New York, 2006; A. De Soudy, *The Crisis of Islamic Masculinities*, Bloomsbury, London-New York, 2014.

<sup>72</sup> O. Abou Bakr, ‘Turning the Tables: Perspectives on the Construction of a “Muslim Manhood”’, in *Journal of Women of the Middle East and the Islamic World* 11 (2013), pp. 89-107.

<sup>73</sup> Abou Bakr, *Turning the Tables*, p. 90.

<sup>74</sup> As a good example of this trend, see K. Ali, “‘Beautiful Example’”: The Prophet Muhammad as a Model for Muslim Husbands’, in *Islamic Studies* 43/2 (2004), pp. 273-291.

of the first to use this approach was the previously mentioned Aisha Taymūr, who put men at the source of the general crisis in familial and social values witnessed by colonial Egypt, unlike ‘pro-feminists’ such as Qasim Amin or Muhammad ‘Abduh, whose invocation for change and reform was directed at women only. Nowadays, Omaima Abou Bakr is building on the legacy of Taymūr and is conducting research focused on the analysis of how male writers have conceived the characteristics of Islamic manhood throughout history. Balancing between studying men’s and women’s rights and duties in the family will help, says Abou Bakr, in affirming the principle of shared responsibility of both genders in every structure of society, from the familial unit to the public sphere.

### **From Knowledge Production to Legal Activism: Egyptian Trajectories**

Thus far my analysis has focused on Islamic feminism as a knowledge building project, or an intellectual movement. However, as mentioned before, the arguments and the findings of these kinds of projects have been used to give legitimacy to the endeavours of various organisations and activists that seek to amend and reform patriarchal laws currently enforced in Egypt by the secular State, especially in the field of Muslim family law, known as Personal Status Law (PSL). The term PSL is equivocal, since it does not refer to a single law, but rather to various laws that concern marriage, divorce, maintenance, custody, paternity and guardianship.<sup>75</sup> The first modern codification of these laws took place with the decree law 25/1920; the provisions contained therein were gradually amended during the following decades, with a slowness that clearly indicates ‘the historical difficulty, due to societal resistance, of changing it comprehensively’.<sup>76</sup>

Women’s struggle to reform the PSL dates back to the 1920s, when organizations such as the Egyptian Feminist Union, founded by Hoda Shaarawi in 1923, started lobbying for reforming provisions that were particularly detrimental to women. As Badran has pointed out, from its very beginning the Egyptian feminist movement has drawn on the Islamic modernist discourse, as elaborated by Muhammad ‘Abduh, to push for reform; nevertheless, for the most part their demands were not

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<sup>75</sup> For an overview of the different laws and provisions contained in the so-called PSL and their evolution over time, see N. Bernard-Maugiron, *Personal Status Laws in Egypt: FAQ*, German Technical Cooperation Office, Cairo, 2010.

<sup>76</sup> Sharafeldin, *Egyptian Women’s Rights NGOs*, p. 58.

met.<sup>77</sup> Hence, reform of the PSL remains one of the main challenges of women's organisations to this day.

A galaxy of small and medium-sized organizations has developed in the last decades, engaging in a multileveled and complex undertaking that includes pressuring for reforms, spreading legal awareness, and providing legal assistance to women.<sup>78</sup> While operating independently on different projects, some of these groups strive for greater effectiveness through networking on a local level (for instance through NWRO, the Network of Women's Rights Organization), and/or on an international level, through international networks such as the abovementioned Musawah or the London-based Women Living Under Muslim Laws. In the case of Musawah, particularly, the cooperation with Egyptian NGOs has been so close and fruitful that for some time there was discussion of moving the Musawah Secretariat – currently based in Malaysia – to Egypt, to the headquarters of CEWLA, the Center for Egyptian Women Legal Assistance, probably the leading NGO in practically oriented Islamic feminism in Egypt.<sup>79</sup>

Women's Rights activists contest several aspects of the PSL, starting with the underlying philosophy on which laws that regulate marital relations are built: that is, the 'maintenance-obedience' model, where men hold *qiwwāma* (guardianship) and *wilāya* (authority) over their family. This model is based on the idea that in return for providing for their families, men have the right to command obedience from 'their' women and have authority over them. It finds its roots in an androcentric interpretation of the oft-examined Quranic verse 4:34, which states that 'men are responsible (*qawwāmūn*) for women', combined with the traditional idea that women are weak and emotional beings that need to be guided for their own good.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Badran, *Feminism, Islam and the Nation*, pp. 124-143.

<sup>78</sup> An in-depth analysis of the work of these NGOs goes beyond the scope of this study; for further information on this subject, I refer to Marwa Sharafeldin's work *Egyptian Women's Rights NGOs*, and her chapter 'Islamic Law Meets Human Rights: Reformulating *Qiwamah* and *Wilayah* for Personal Status Law Reform Advocacy in Egypt', in Mir-Hosseini - al-Sharmani - Rumminger (eds.), *Men in Charge?*, pp. 163-196.

<sup>79</sup> Personal interview with Marwa Sharafeldin, 12/6/2014. Unfortunately, the plan was later abandoned due to the increasing difficulties that NGOs face in Egypt and the secretariat will be moved to Rabat instead.

<sup>80</sup> For a comprehensive analysis of the concept of *qiwwāma* and its effects on Muslim family laws, see the recently published collection edited by Mir-Hosseini -

This particular conception of male authority over women is reflected in many provisions contained in the Egyptian PSL that appear unfair from a modern perspective, such as the ease in getting a divorce for men and its difficulty for women; the possibility of polygamy for men; the wife's obligation by law to obey her husband; the acceptance of the husband's right to discipline the wife; and the father's automatic right of financial guardianship over the children in exclusion of the mother.

The primary reasons given by Egyptian activists to advocate for the reform of these norms are not theoretical or ideological, but refer to the harmful effect these provisions have on women in their everyday life. In other words, the advocacy of NGOs is not based on an abstract commitment to gender equality, but on the grounds that the PSL provisions are no longer suitable in the current Egyptian context, where women actively contribute in providing for their families, and also because they clash with contemporary understandings of equality and justice.

NGOs exercise pressure to change the laws using several means: first of all, demonstrating with statistical evidence that the 'Islamic model' described above (providing for his family being the task of the husband and obedience that of the woman) sharply contrasts with the lived reality of Egyptian families; indeed, this model is applied to the exclusive advantage of men, who claim the right to *qiwwāma* even when they do not provide for their families. Besides pressuring for reform, Islamic feminist arguments are used to raise consciousness among lower-class women about their own rights within Islam, with the hope of empowering them by providing them with the ability to counter the patriarchal attitudes of their fathers and husbands by using arguments compliant with Islam.

In the last few decades, the lobbying activities of these NGOs have been essential, according to many observers, in pushing the Mubarak government to implement a series of 'women-friendly' reforms to the PSL, the most important of which probably being the so-called *khul'* law (law 1/2000). For the first time in modern Egypt, this law allowed women's unilateral, no-fault, judicial divorce, in exchange for renouncing some of their financial rights. In the wake of the *khul'* law, other reforms were implemented, including an amendment of the same law, in May 2000, leading to the re-inclusion of a previously abolished

article on the imprisonment of non-providing husbands; and to the implementation in August 2000 of a new marriage contract introducing the right to include substantive stipulations in the contract itself; the implementation of a clause allowing women to travel without the consent of the husband, in November 2000; the appointment of the first female judge in January 2003; the recognition of the right for Egyptian mothers to pass on their nationality to their children, in 2004; the opening of a new family court system in October 2004; and finally, the appointment of thirty women judges in the lower courts in early 2007.<sup>81</sup>

The activities of the NGOs did not stop after achieving these results; on the contrary, their advocacy work continued with a series of demands outlined in a detailed document entitled *Guiding Manual for a Most Just and Comprehensive Family Law*, published in 2010 in Arabic and then translated into English in order to reach a wider audience.<sup>82</sup> Among the many proposals, the document suggests a restriction to polygamy, stating it should be allowed by a judge only in 'exceptional' circumstances; easier access to divorce for women; the institution of the principle of shared responsibility between spouses in caring for the family; the right for women to retain custody of children after remarriage; and a regulation concerning the division of wealth accumulated within the marriage. As Sharafeldin has pointed out, the approach used by NGOs in their advocacy work is cautious, and even contradictory in some aspects: for instance, it does not contest the principle of wifely obedience *per se*, but it simply proposes to change its name.<sup>83</sup> This hesitancy can again be explained as a prudent strategy in order to seek negotiation and compromise with conservative forces instead of shocking the public. Despite its undeniable advantages, this strategy is problematic, since it does not seriously attack the obedience-maintenance model as described above and thus risks reinforcing prejudices and weakening the effectiveness of the proposed reforms.

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<sup>81</sup> For further information on the *Khul'* law and the public debate that surrounded it, see N. Sonneveld, *Khul' Divorce in Egypt*, American University in Cairo Press, Cairo, 2012.

<sup>82</sup> *Guiding Manual for a More Just and Comprehensive Family Law*, Anonymized Network for PSL reform advocacy, Cairo, 2010. The document is efficaciously summarized in Sharafeldin, *Islamic Law Meets Human Rights*, pp. 170-175.

<sup>83</sup> Sharafeldin, *Islamic Law Meets Human Rights*.

### **Feminisms, Islam and the State in Post-Revolutionary Egypt**

The impact of January 2011 Revolution on Egyptian women and its significance concerning their rights, duties and political role present ambiguities and contradictions that have been analyzed, with different approaches and conclusions, in several studies.

Some of the research has highlighted the positive effects of the revolution in promoting women's agency, how it has increased the awareness of gender as a political problem, both in the institutional sphere, where the gender gap is immense, and in the public space. Between 2011 and 2013, women were highly visible in street demonstrations, strikes and sit-ins, and rediscovered their ability to participate and mobilize in the public sphere as an integral part of the political community; a presence that has been noted by local and foreign observers and compared to the noteworthy female participation in the great Egyptian Revolution of 1919.<sup>84</sup> It has also been observed that the massive participation of women in the revolution and the media coverage of the brutal repression they faced from the police forces were also useful in shedding light on the issue of sexual harassment and sexual assault as a political tool for intimidating women, a subject that was a complete taboo until very recently.<sup>85</sup> However, the importance of the contribution of women to the Egyptian revolution was not recognized by all political forces; on the contrary, as the historian Mervat Hatem remarked, women's demands were 'betrayed' in the political process, when almost all parties and groups marginalized women's issues, not considering them a priority in their political, social and cultural agendas.<sup>86</sup> After Mubarak's resignation, no women were appointed to the committee created by the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) to review the Constitution; and the first elections held after the Revolution witnessed an incredibly low number of

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<sup>84</sup> L. Sorbera, 'Challenges of Thinking Feminism and Revolution in Egypt between 2011 and 2014', in *Postcolonial Studies* 17/1 (2014), pp. 63-75.

<sup>85</sup> N. Pratt, 'Gender Paradoxes of Egypt's Transition', in *OpenDemocracy*, 2/2/2015, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/5050/nicola-pratt/gendered-paradoxes-of-egypt-s-transition> (last access 31/3/2015). For a detailed review of gender violence against women protesters, see *Sexual Assault and Rape in Tahrir Square and its Vicinity: a Compendium of Sources 2011-2013*, El-Nadeem Center for Rehabilitation of Victims of Violence and Torture; Nazra for Feminist Studies; New Woman Foundation, 2013, [http://nazra.org/sites/nazra/files/attachments/compilation\\_of\\_sexual-violence\\_testimonies\\_between\\_2011\\_2013\\_en.pdf](http://nazra.org/sites/nazra/files/attachments/compilation_of_sexual-violence_testimonies_between_2011_2013_en.pdf) (last access 31/03/2015).

<sup>86</sup> M. Hatem, 'Gender and Revolution in Egypt', in *Middle East Report* 261 (2011), pp. 36-41.

women entering parliament, where they held less than 1% of the seats.<sup>87</sup> In another article, Hoda Elsadda has analyzed how this newly elected parliament actually pushed to repeal the legal gains obtained by women during the presidency of Mubarak, claiming that they were implemented to please the whim of the former First Lady, and were thus to be considered authoritarian impositions by a corrupted dictatorship. It is remarkable that these claims did not come from the Islamist ranks only, but also from allegedly democratic, liberal, and pluralist political forces.<sup>88</sup>

Yet even the emergence of this neo-patriarchal rhetoric had positive side effects. In fact, the short reign of president Morsi promoted a new wave of religious consciousness among women, directed at confronting the Muslim Brotherhood on religious grounds. During the year when the *Ikhwān* were in power, secular and Islamic feminist NGOs and activists fought a particularly hard battle against the abovementioned proposals to change back the family law, against a constitution that failed to recognize sex or gender as grounds for prohibiting discrimination and only referred to women in relation to the home and the family,<sup>89</sup> and against the attempt to re-legitimize female genital mutilation (FGM), a practice outlawed in 2008 and declared un-Islamic by respected religious figures such as Muhammad 'Imara, 'Ali Gomaa and Mohammad Selim el-'Awa.<sup>90</sup> This struggle gained a relatively high level of visibility in post-revolutionary Egyptian media and it allowed the (Islamic) feminist discourse to be heard by people who would never have been able to be aware of it or interested in it otherwise.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Abou Bakr, *Le Féminisme Islamique*, p. 178.

<sup>88</sup> H. Elsadda, 'Women's Rights and Activism in Post-Jan 25 Egypt: Combating the Shadow of the First Lady Syndrome in the Arab World', in *Middle East Law and Governance* 3 (2011), pp. 84-93.

<sup>89</sup> E. Mc Larney, 'Women's Rights in the Egyptian Constitution: (Neo)Liberalism's Family Values', in *Jadaliyya*, 22/3/2013, [http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/11852/womens-rights-in-the-egyptian-constitution\\_\(neo\)li](http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/11852/womens-rights-in-the-egyptian-constitution_(neo)li) (last access 31/03/2015).

<sup>90</sup> M. Badran, 'Keeping FGM on the Run? Between Resolution and Constitution', in *Ahram Online*, 10/1/2013, [http://english.ahram.org.eg/News\\_Content/4/0/62152/Opinion/0/Keeping-FGM-on-the-run--Between-Resolution-and-Con.aspx](http://english.ahram.org.eg/News_Content/4/0/62152/Opinion/0/Keeping-FGM-on-the-run--Between-Resolution-and-Con.aspx) (last access 31/03/2015); M. Tadros, 'Mutilating Bodies: The Muslim Brotherhood's Gift to Egyptian Women', in *OpenDemocracy*, 24/5/2012, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/5050/mariz-tadros/mutilating-bodies-muslim-brotherhood-s-gift-to-egyptian-wome> (last access 31/03/2015).

<sup>91</sup> Personal interviews with Marwa Sharafeldin and S.A., activist from CEWLA, 12/6/2014 and 4/9/2014.

However, not everyone saw the Islamists' rise to power as a threat to women's agency. Indeed, in the years immediately preceding and following the 25<sup>th</sup> of January Revolution, some scholars drew attention to the existence of a new generation of women active within the Muslim Brotherhood, well-versed in religious as well as in secular knowledge, who were pushing for more recognition of their role inside the Islamic movement.<sup>92</sup>

There were signs in 2011 that these young activists could have paved the way for a sort of 'feminization' of the Islamic movement, providing new avenues for female authority and pushing for further reformist thinking on women's issues from within the Islamist movement itself. However, this hope has completely vanished after the dramatic fall of the Muslim Brotherhood, which within a timeframe of a few months lost its power, was declared a terrorist organization, and became the main target of ruthless repression by the new government led by former Field Marshal 'Abd al-Fattah al-Sisi. Under these circumstances, it seems unlikely that women's issues will be considered a priority in the Islamist movement, at least for the foreseeable future.

This does not mean that women will not play an important role within the Brotherhood in the future; history suggests that it might rather be the opposite. In fact, it was precisely during the years of Nasser's harshest repression that a woman, Zaynab al-Ghazali, became one of the main leaders of the *Ikhwān*, organizing their underground activities, a role that cost her six years in prison.<sup>93</sup> It is difficult to claim with certainty, considering the fact that current circumstances do not facilitate any investigation on this subject, but there is evidence suggesting that it is currently the women of the Muslim Brotherhood who are keeping the movement alive while men activists are in jail, or have fled to other countries.<sup>94</sup> However, this participation by no means implies an actual empowering of women members of the outlawed *Ikhwān*; more likely, this is simply an 'emergency strategy', meaning women will step back immediately the day the Brotherhood regains its

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<sup>92</sup> O. Abdel-Latif, *In the Shadow of the Brothers: the Women of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Washington, 2008.

<sup>93</sup> See her autobiography Z. al-Ghazali, *Return of the Pharaoh*, Leicester, The Islamic Foundation, Leicester, 1994.

<sup>94</sup> Personal interviews with the Muslim Sisters WH and MA, 28/10/2014. See also L. Noueihed, 'Sisters in the Vanguard as Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood Battles to Survive', in *Reuters*, 15/12/2014, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-egypt-brotherhood-women-idUSKBN0JT1PD20141215> (last access 31/03/2015).

legal right of existence. As a matter of fact, Egyptian history has already taught us that a repressive climate favors the emergence of an extremist and radical wing of Islamism, and definitely does not encourage any liberalization of its discourse.

The future does not seem much brighter for Egyptian Islamic feminism either. In the aftermath of the fall of the *Ikhwān*, some activists showed cautious optimism, expressing the hope that outlawing Islamism would facilitate the emergence of alternative, more liberal voices on the religious scene.<sup>95</sup> However, after a few months this small hint of hope has been crushed by the reality of a blatant re-authoritarianization of the political scene, where all dissenting voices are systematically repressed by the regime, regardless of whether they belong to Islamist or other political groups.

Although it is too soon to declare the failure of the Egyptian revolution, at least on a cultural level, the new government has already demonstrated its ruthless determination to completely control all civic groups and subordinate them to security and administrative bodies. Since Al-Sisi rose to power, a growing number of reports have expressed serious concerns about the widespread and systematic human rights abuses committed in the name of the war on terror. The controversial counterterrorism legislation issued in February 2015 which legitimizes these actions, contains an extremely vague definition of the term 'terrorism' according to which every party, civil society organization or student group runs the risk of being accused of being a terrorist entity and face brutal repression.<sup>96</sup>

Another example of the government's intention to silence all dissenting voices can be seen in the new NGO draft law, which, according to a press release signed by numerous organizations, 'has not been this repressive for almost half a century (Law 34, 1964)'.<sup>97</sup> The prohibitions in the law are both vague and absolute, which will allow the government to interfere in associations' activities or to deny them a license at any time and for any reason. More seriously, the bill sets a penalty of at least one year in prison and/or a fine of at least LE100,000

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<sup>95</sup> Personal interview with Omaima Abou Bakr, 29/01/2014.

<sup>96</sup> E. Hamed, 'Egypt's Terrorism Law Whittles Down Opposition', in *al-Monitor*, 2/3/2015, available at <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2015/03/egypt-sisi-anti-terrorism-law-opposition.html> (last access 31/03/2015).

<sup>97</sup> *Proposed Government Law Makes NGOs Subordinate to Security and Ministry Control*, 9/7/2014, <http://eipr.org/en/pressrelease/2014/07/09/2154> (last access 31/03/2015).

for any person who establishes an association or entity performing activities in violation of the law. In short, the new law legitimizes complete control by the security apparatus of the activities of all kinds of NGOs, leaving their fate to the whims of those in power and depriving them of any form of autonomy or liberty - and consequently, destroying their capacity for action.<sup>98</sup>

## Conclusion

The significance of the increased political consciousness that Egyptian women experienced after January 2011, and more generally of the historical experience of the revolution, cannot be fully evaluated to this day. If the political revolution set off by the demonstrations in Tahrir Square appears to have failed, the cultural revolution in Egypt is still on-going and will not be stopped overnight. The Egyptian population has become aware of its strength and its capacity for change during the last few turbulent years, and this rediscovered awareness has an undeniable value. However, the vast repressive campaign which, after striking down Morsi's supporters, was then directed at all dissenting voices, secular as well as religious, demonstrates that no alternative discourse will be allowed to develop in the future. Therefore, it seems clear to me that if any further reform of the PSL will be promoted in the coming years, this will happen again exclusively on the initiative of the state, as was the case under the rule of Sadat and Mubarak. Once again the state will monopolize the right to exercise *ijtihād*, as it has already shown its readiness to openly intervene in religious affairs. A first move in this direction was made in February 2014, when a governmental decree imposed unified guidelines for Friday sermons in all of Egypt, in an attempt to strengthen the control of the state over the religious discourse in the country, specifically aimed at the opposition hidden in non-governmental mosques.<sup>99</sup> This religious interventionism was confirmed even more clearly when president Al-Sisi himself, on the 1<sup>st</sup> of January 2015, spoke at the university of Al-Azhar, in front of all the main religious authorities of the country. In his speech, Al-Sisi expressed his wish for a 'religious

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<sup>98</sup> A. Accorsi - G. Piazzese, 'Egyptian Draft Law Set to Criminalise the Activities of NGOs', in *Middle East Eye*, 3/10/2014, <http://www.middleeasteye.net/news/egyptian-draft-law-set-criminalise-activities-ngos-446005592> (last access 31/03/2015).

<sup>99</sup> A. Fouad, 'Egyptian Government Introduces Unified Friday Prayer Guidelines', in *al-Monitor*, 7/2/2014, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2014/02/egypt-government-control-unified-mosque-sermons.html> (last access 31/03/2015).

revolution' within Islam, one that can rejuvenate religious discourse and fight extremism and jihadism with an authoritative voice. In this respect, it is worth remembering that women's issues have been historically used by Egyptian political forces to fight their enemies: for instance, it was precisely during the harshest days of its battle against Islamists that former president Sadat issued a decree-law revising Personal Status Laws and another that introduced a quota for women in parliament.<sup>100</sup> Hence, the coming years might witness a further facade feminization of the political and religious system, in what Nicola Pratt termed a 'patriarchal bargain' where 'women who are obedient to the new regime are deemed worthy of the State's protection'.<sup>101</sup> This approach would perhaps legitimize the regime in the eyes of Western policy-makers and donors; however, a top-down reform imposed by an authoritarian regime would unlikely have an effect on the real life of ordinary women, who rarely have full knowledge of their rights according to the law, and heavily depend on the work of those same NGOs that the regime is trying to shut down or completely control. Worse still is the fact that such facade feminization would run the risk of reinforcing the claims of those who identify the promotion of Women's Rights with political authoritarianism – an association that, as we have seen, has historically constituted a serious obstacle for the spreading of feminist theories and the Women's Rights movement in Muslim majority countries.

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<sup>100</sup> M. Badran, 'Competing Agenda: Feminists, Islam and the State in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Egypt', in Margot Badran, *Feminism in Islam: Secular and Religious Convergences*, Oneworld, Oxford, 2009; M. Hatem, 'Secularist and Islamist Discourses on Modernity in Egypt and the Evolution of the Postcolonial Nation-State', in Yvonne Yakbek Haddad - John Esposito (eds.), *Islam, Gender and Social Change*, Oxford University Press, New York - Oxford, 1998.

<sup>101</sup> Pratt, *Gendered Paradoxes of Egyptian Revolution*.

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# Intellectuals and Activists Writing under the Sign of Hope: Radwa Ashour and Ahdaf Soueif's Manifestos of the 2011 Revolution

Pervine ELREFAEI

## Abstract:

The present article aims at conducting a comparative study of Ahdaf Soueif's 2012 memoir *Cairo: My City, Our Revolution*, entitled *Cairo: Memoir of a City Transformed* in the 2014 edition, and Radwa Ashour's 2013 autobiography: *Athqal min Radwā*, (*Heavier than Radwa: Excerpts from an Autobiography*). The works that document the 2010-2013 state of flux from the perspective and experiences of both writers, interwoven with various recollected historical periods, are examined in the light of an interdisciplinary approach that combines cultural studies, postcolonial and autobiography theories. Scrutinized within the scope of the intellectuals' other writings and interviews, I argue that the selected texts that depict the issues of identity, the self and nationalism as pivotal points can be regarded as acts of literary activism or textual spaces of resistance. First, in delineating the history of the nation, intertwined with the cartography of the self, the works unmask the history of oppression to which the individual and public self/identity have been subjected. Second, they document the intellectuals' resistance to the ongoing counterrevolutionary discourse in the post 2011 period. Third, they interrogate and condemn the human rights' violations, and concomitantly extol their anxiety about an authoritarian future. Fourth, in portraying the gradual fragmentation of the previously homogeneous nationalist discourse characteristic of the first eighteen days of the revolution, the works depict the intellectuals' gradual detachment from the prevalent nationalist discourse they critique as hegemonic.

## Introduction

The 2011 revolution and its aftermath have been a threatening temporal space to the Egyptian intellectuals. The state of flux, ambivalence, hysteria and menace, fueled by the struggle over authority and power and over Egypt's identity, civic or Islamic,<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For an analysis of the development of the conflict over Egypt's identity as represented in the cartoons and graffiti of the 2011 revolution and its aftermath see Pervine Elrefaei's paper 'Egyptian Women in the Cartoons and Graffiti of the 2011 Revolution: A Janus-faced Discourse', in *Proceedings of the 11<sup>th</sup> International*

intertwined with the presence of ISIS in parts of the Arab world, have culminated in manufacturing a nationalist discourse anchored in fear of a mysterious future. Egyptian writers and thinkers have manifested different stances towards such a transitional period.<sup>2</sup> Ahdaf Soueif (1950- ) and Radwa Ashour (1946-2014) are two prominent Egyptian intellectuals and activists whose contribution to the literature of the 2011 revolution cannot be ignored.<sup>3</sup>

The present paper aims at conducting a comparative study of Ahdaf Soueif's 2012 memoir *Cairo: My City, Our Revolution*, entitled *Cairo: Memoir of a City Transformed* in the 2014 edition, and Radwa Ashour's autobiography: *Athqal min Raḍwā* (2013), (*Heavier than Radwa: Excerpts from an Autobiography*).<sup>4</sup> The works that document

*Symposium on Comparative Literature 13-15 November 2012*, Department of English Language and Literature, Cairo University, Cairo University Press, Cairo, 2014, pp. 751-783.

<sup>2</sup> See Samia Mehrez's study of the role and position of intellectuals before the 2011 revolution in her book *Egypt's Culture Wars: Politics and Practice*, Routledge, London, 2008.

<sup>3</sup> The choice of both writers is dictated by their oppositional stance that sets them in contrast to many intellectuals at that time. Anxiety about national security culminated in accusations being hurled at Soueif, Ashour and the like-minded intellectuals. In being outspoken, those intellectuals have not only challenged authority but also all the masses overpowered by the inflamed state of fear aggrandized by the media. The people's change of perspective is signified by the transformation of chants and slogans from 'Down with the military rule' in the early phase of the revolution, to 'The army, the people, one hand' (Soueif 2014, p. 224, qtd. in R. Bromley, "'Giving Memory a Future": Women, Writing, Revolution', in *Journal of Cultural Research* 19/2 (2015), p. 7) in the last days of the Muslim Brotherhood's rule.

<sup>4</sup> The academic research has witnessed the publication of three recent papers on Ahdaf Soueif's memoir in relation to Mona Prince's book *Ismī Thawra (My Name is Revolution)*, focusing on the 18 days of the revolution, by Kamal, Mazloun - Elmarsafy: H. Kamal, 'Women's Memoirs of the Egyptian Revolution: Mona Prince's Ismi Thawra and Ahdaf Soueif's Cairo: My City, Our Revolution', in *Creativity and Revolution: Proceedings of the 11<sup>th</sup> International Symposium on Comparative Literature: 577-597*, Cairo University, Department of English Language and Literature, Cairo, 2014, pp. 577-59; S. F. Mazloun, 'To Write/to Revolt: Egyptian Women Novelists Writing the Revolution', in *Journal for Cultural Research* 19/2 (2015), pp. 207-220; Z. Elmarsafy, 'Action, Imagination, Institution, Natality, Revolution', in *Journal for Cultural Research* 19/2 (2015), pp. 130-138. A fourth paper by Bromley compares Soueif's book to Samar Yazbek's *A Woman in the Crossfire: Diaries of the Syrian Revolution*. Kamal argues that Soueif's book is 'an autobiographical hybrid text' (2014, p. 586) 'occupying an inter-generic location, where autobiography intersects with diary, memoir, history and journalism' (2014, p. 591). Bromley studies 'the links between writing and revolution, whilst

the 2010-2013 state of flux from the perspective and experiences of both writers, interwoven with various recollected historical periods, are examined in the light of an interdisciplinary approach that combines cultural studies, postcolonial and autobiography theories. The paper situates both writers first within Edward Said's and Patricia Hill Collins' definitions of the intellectual in dissent against the status quo, and second as writers of autobiographical manifestos. Hence, the autobiographical strategies of the manifesto and its 'emancipatory politics' used by both writers to pull together the scattered threads of the threatened individual and collective self are major points of focus.<sup>5</sup>

Scrutinized within the scope of the intellectuals' other writings and interviews, I argue that the selected texts that depict the issues of identity, the self and nationalism as pivotal points can be regarded as acts of literary activism or textual spaces of resistance. First, in delineating the history of the nation, intertwined with the cartography of the self, the works unmask the history of oppression to which the individual and public self/identity have been subjected. Second, they document the intellectuals' resistance to the ongoing counterrevolutionary discourse in the post 2011 period. Third, they interrogate and condemn the human rights' violations, and concomitantly extol their anxiety about an authoritarian future. Fourth, in portraying the gradual fragmentation of the previously homogeneous nationalist discourse characteristic of the first eighteen days of the revolution, the works depict the intellectuals' gradual detachment from the prevalent nationalist discourse they critique as hegemonic.

In his book *Representations of the Intellectual* (1994), Edward Said highlights the intellectuals' mobilizing role in both revolutions and counterrevolutions. On the one hand, 'herded' by authority, the 'professional' intellectual, Said contends, assumes the role of the 'pacifier and consensus-builder',<sup>6</sup> and hence can be utilized as a counterrevolutionary force.<sup>7</sup> On the other hand, the real intellectual is

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exploring how the acts of writing/witnessing/remembers can metaphorically 'give memory a future' in Paul Ricœur's words' (2014, p.1). Mazloum focuses on the homogeneous eighteen days of the revolution from a feminist perspective based on Judith Butler and G. Spivak. Elmarsafy, by contrast, examines the memoir from the context of Hannah Arendt's notion of natality.

<sup>5</sup> S. Smith - J. Watson, *Women, Autobiography, Theory: A Reader*, University of Wisconsin Press, Madison, 1998, p. 433.

<sup>6</sup> E. Said, *Representations of the Intellectual*, Vintage, London, 1994, p. 17.

<sup>7</sup> *Ib.*, p. 17.

an ‘amateur’ who possesses a free independent mind that can never be molded or pressured by authority.<sup>8</sup> In the dark transitional moments the amateurish intellectual should publically interrogate the hegemonic discourse of ‘patriotic nationalism’<sup>9</sup> that controls the nation in the name of ‘loyalty’.<sup>10</sup> Dedicated to the universal principles of human rights, the intellectual should transcend borders and side with the marginalized, downtrodden and silenced everywhere.<sup>11</sup>

Said’s perspective is adopted by many thinkers. Patricia Hill Collins defines the title of her book *On Intellectual Activism* (2012) as ‘the myriad ways the people place the power of their ideas in service to social justice’.<sup>12</sup> Similarly, Collins contends that the engaged revolutionary intellectual should speak truth to both power and the people.<sup>13</sup> The intellectual’s role has been the subject of autobiography. In *Autobiography as Activism* (2000), Margo V. Perkins argues that autobiographies are acts of political activism that challenge ‘hegemonic history’ since ‘in writing their lives activists seek to document their experiences, to correct misinformation, to educate their readers, and to encourage the continuation of struggle’.<sup>14</sup> In a similar vein, Sidonie Smith writes that ‘Assembling an experiential history can function as counter-memory, a means to re-narrativize the past and to break the silences of official history’.<sup>15</sup> Smith contends that such autobiographies can be described as manifestos that act as ‘a revolutionary gesture poised against amnesia’.<sup>16</sup> In elaborating the term, Janet Lyon points out that the ‘liberatory’ manifesto depicts the experiences of the silenced and marginalized in ‘a putatively democratic political culture’.<sup>17</sup> In representing the discrepancy between democratic dreams or goals and oppressive reality, the manifesto struggles against oppression for the reconstruction of

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<sup>8</sup> *Ib.*, p. xi.

<sup>9</sup> *Ib.*, p. xii.

<sup>10</sup> *Ib.*, p. 27.

<sup>11</sup> *Ib.*, p. 17.

<sup>12</sup> P. H. Collins, *On Intellectual Activism*, Temple University Press, Philadelphia, 2012, p. ix.

<sup>13</sup> *Ib.*, p. xiii.

<sup>14</sup> M. V. Perkins, *Autobiography as Activism: Three Black Women of the Sixties*, University Press of Mississippi, Jackson, 2000, p. 70.

<sup>15</sup> Qtd. in Golley, *Reading Arab Women’s Autobiographies*, p. 158.

<sup>16</sup> Smith - Watson, *Women, Autobiography, Theory: A Reader*, p. 438.

<sup>17</sup> J. Lyon *Manifestoes: Provocations of the Modern*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca (NY), 1999, p. 2.

self/identity.<sup>18</sup> In this respect, ‘autobiographical strategies’ are used ‘for the staging of resistance’,<sup>19</sup> and hence for ‘political empowerment’.<sup>20</sup>

Seen in this light, the selected works, as well as the intellectuals’ activism and political agency, do intersect and share much in common. Both Ahdaf Soueif and Radwa Ashour are novelists, short story writers, translators, political activists and critics who have lived between different cultures. Both represent a counter hegemonic discourse that struggles against colonial and imperial powers, on the one hand, and Arab rulers’ authoritarianism on the other. Both belong to families whose members are mostly activists.<sup>21</sup> The struggle for the democratic rights of the Egyptian people they belong to, universal human rights, and the rights of the Third World, specifically Occupied Palestine, constitutes the crux of their writings.<sup>22</sup> Their aim to create consciousness of the need for political transformation, and hence alternative history, can be clearly detected in their manifestos.

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<sup>18</sup> *Ib.*, pp. 3-4.

<sup>19</sup> Smith - Watson, *Women, Autobiography, Theory: A Reader*, p. 434.

<sup>20</sup> *Ib.*, p. 433.

<sup>21</sup> As the selected works portray, Soueif is sister of Laila Soueif, a Cairo University Professor and activist married to the late activist and human rights’ advocate and lawyer Ahmed Seif, and a founding member of ‘March 9’ Group, and hence is Ashour’s colleague. Laila Soueif is also mother of Mona Seif, the founder of the ‘No To Military Trials for Civilians’ Group in the post revolution period, and Alaa Abdel Fatah and Sanaa Seif, imprisoned in the Muslim Brotherhood period and later in the post Muslim Brotherhood period for violating the ‘protest law’, issued 24<sup>th</sup> November 2013, prohibiting peaceful protests.

<sup>22</sup> Ashour and Soueif’s constant references to the Palestinian cause set them in contrast to the other thinkers and writers in such a transitional period. The cause that has galvanized the majority of the Egyptian intellectuals for decades, constituting an integral part of their nationalist discourse, has witnessed a gradual transformation that is documented in the selected works. The attacks on Gaza by the Israeli forces in the post revolution period were met by silence on the part of many Egyptian intellectuals who were repelled by the threatening and increasing power of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, and concomitantly harbored fears about the Muslim Brotherhood in Gaza and their impact on Egypt’s national security. In a 2012 interview, Soueif, by contrast, represents her reading of the Egyptian-Palestinian relation and how things should be like in the post revolution period. She declares, ‘In Gaza, you should see clearly what Egypt should do. It should stop acting as a jailor and it should stop being Israel’s thug. [...] The whole Egypt-Israel relationship has to be recalibrated’ (Shackle, 30/5/2012). Soueif’s perspective remains unchanged, consolidated by her constant visits to Gaza in support of the Palestinian Festival of Literature.

On the one hand, Soueif was an ex scholar of English Literature at Cairo University. She moved to Britain years ago and married a British. A journalist for *The Guardian* newspaper, Soueif is also an advocate for Palestinian rights and the Founding Chair of Palestine Festival of Literature (PalFest) initiated in 2008. Adopting Edward Said's perspective, Soueif aims, as she puts it, at asserting 'the power of culture over the culture of power'.<sup>23</sup> She is also the translator into English of Mourid Bargouti's Arabic memoir *I Saw Ramallah*, forwarded by Edward Said.

Radwa Ashour, on the other hand, was a graduate of Cairo University and Professor of English and Comparative Literature at Ain Shams University in Cairo. Married to the renowned Palestinian writer and poet Mourid Barghouti (Murīd al-Barghūtī), and mother of poet Tamim Bargouti (Tamīm al-Barghūtī), Ashour was a member of the *Committee for the Defense of National Culture*, formed in the wake of the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty in 1979, and a founding member of the *9 March Group for the Independence of the Universities*. Ashour's humanism that transcends borders and gender is epitomized by her words 'All the oppressed of the earth have wings'; a statement written on the cover of her novel *Faraj* (2008),<sup>24</sup> translated as *Blue Lorries* (2014). On her death on 30<sup>th</sup> November 2014, Marina Warner describes her as 'a powerful voice among Egyptian writers of the post war generation and a writer of exceptional integrity and courage'.

### **The Intellectuals' Identity Issue**

The similarities and differences between the selected writers who represent the nation as far as the identity issue is concerned are worthy of note. On the one hand, in contrast to Soueif who lives on the cusp of both cultures, East and West, Ashour has always been adamant to

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<sup>23</sup> Qtd. in K. Sharma, 'I've Written no Fiction since my First Visit to Palestine in 2000: Ahdaf Soueif', in *The Hindu*, 4/1/2015, <http://www.thehindu.com/features/lit-for-life/ive-written-no-fiction-since-my-first-visit-to-palestine-in-2000-ahdaf-soueif/article6751332.ece> (access 9/1/2015).

<sup>24</sup> For an analysis of Ashour's novel *Faraj* see Elrefaei's paper 'Egypt and the Prison as Dual Space of Repression and Resistance: The Dialectics of Power Relations in Literature and Film', in Mohamed Osman Elkhosht - Amani Badawi (eds.), *Essays in Language and Literature: in Honour of M. M. Enani*, Cairo University Center for Languages and Professional Translation, Cairo, 2012, pp. 277-297.

consolidate her Arab identity and defend her cultural heritage. As she declares,

I'm an Arab woman and a citizen of the Third World and my heritage in both cases is stifled. ... I write in self-defence, and in defence of countless others with whom I identify or who are like me.<sup>25</sup>

Addressed to Arab readers, Ashour's works and resistant voice have achieved international recognition through translation. Writing in Arabic is an intrinsic constituent of her identity that provides her, as she puts it, with 'the security of a stable anchorage and the fluidity of open potential'; it makes her feel 'less alienated, less confused, and less orphaned'.<sup>26</sup> In the opening pages of *Athqal min Raḍwā*, she delineates the cartography of identity through tracing her family tree and the genealogy of her name. Her name is that of a mountain near Al-Madīna Al-Munawwara in Saudi Arabia. The mountain is rumored to be the space eternally inhabited by Muḥammad al-Ḥanafīyya, the Muslim Imam, who would reemerge on doomsday to spread justice on earth.<sup>27</sup> Her eldest brother Tarek, she adds, is named after another mountain that recalls Islamic power and civilization associated with the Arab leader Ṭāriq b. Ziyād. The love of Arabic language and culture was instilled into her by her parents and grandparent, the academic translator of Persian literature and the founder of the first university in Saudi Arabia. Deeply rooted in history, geography and Arabic culture, both names, Radwa and Tarek, constitute the borders of the Arab world from East to West.

As Ashour herself puts it, 'the personal and the general were interlocked to a degree that made it difficult to distinguish one from the other'.<sup>28</sup> Her 2013 individual/nationalist narrative documents her activism and agency before the 2011 revolution. As the narrative proceeds, on her arrival to Egypt following the revolution, Ashour reassumes her role as an eyewitness, a scribe and a citizen-activist on the ground. However, she is also adamant to delineate herself as a

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<sup>25</sup> Qtd. in M. Warner, 'Radwa Ashour Obituary', in *The Guardian Online*, 8/12/2014, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2014/dec/08/radwa-ashour> (access 2/12/2016).

<sup>26</sup> Ashour, 'Eyewitness', p. 89.

<sup>27</sup> Ashour, *Athqal min Raḍwā*, p. 6.

<sup>28</sup> R. Ashour, 'My Experience with Writing', *Human Rights and People's Rights in Literature and the Humanities*, in *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics* 13 (1993), p. 173.

liberal multi-culturalist. In contrast to Soueif, in her autobiography, she takes her readers on a journey into world museums, culture and history. Integrating famous artistic works and paintings, Ashour utilizes them symbolically to create a universal self that struggles for justice and human rights. Knowledge in general is depicted as an empowering strategy for the self. However, the book's cyclical structure is intricately anchored in the issue of identity as it starts and ends with home, family, Egypt and roots.

On the other hand, Soueif's Egyptian identity has always been controversial. Her 'interstitial' position is highlighted by many critics who see her as an ambivalent writer possessed by divided loyalties.<sup>29</sup> The critics' contention is emphasized by Soueif herself who admits: 'The fact (is) that I'm more writing from within a European tradition'.<sup>30</sup> In her 2012 memoir, she reflects on her previous conflicting feelings, her love for, yet disappointment with her city: 'Cairo/London, London/Cairo, and Cairo was being constantly downgraded'.<sup>31</sup> 'All I could do was look and listen and stay and march and insist that I loved her'.<sup>32</sup> To her, the city was attractive and protective as a mother, yet repulsive and oppressive for being passive in front of dictators and corrupt politicians:

...the city was there, close to me, looking over my shoulders, holding up the prism through which I understood the world, inserting herself into everything I wrote.<sup>33</sup>

In reflecting on the rebellious city on the 28<sup>th</sup> January, she writes:

This is the reality that we've been living for decades, finally risen to the surface. At last our capital reflects the true condition of the country and of our lives: burned and broken and almost ruined.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Mazloum, 'To Write/to Revolt: Egyptian Women Novelists Writing the Revolution', pp. 212-213.

<sup>30</sup> Qtd. P. Philipose, 'Cairo's Literary Daughters, Ahdaf and Radwa', 11/4/2010, *Boloji*, <http://www.boloji.com/index.cfm?md=Content&sd=Articles&ArticleID=6855> (access 1/8/2014).

<sup>31</sup> Soueif, *Cairo: My City, Our Revolution*, p. 43.

<sup>32</sup> *Ib.*, p. 45.

<sup>33</sup> *Ib.*, p. 9.

<sup>34</sup> *Ib.*, p. 24.

In contrast to Ashour, it is only when the city rebels against a long history of dictatorship and corruption that Soueif's sense of belonging is retrieved.

Though this paper agrees with the reality of Soueif's state of inbetweenness, the critics' views can be regarded as accusations that may delegitimize her voice. In declaring her oppositional stance in Arabic in *Al-Shorouk* newspaper, Soueif is classified as a British, a foreigner and a 'fifth columnist' who fabricates lies and conspires against Egypt.<sup>35</sup> Hence, I argue that Abdul JanMohamed's notion of the 'specular border intellectual' is illuminating in comprehending Soueif's cultural positionality, granting her voice both power and legitimacy. Like her mentor Edward Said, Soueif has maneuvered to change her cultural space into a space for 'agency'; 'a vantage point' to struggle for 'other utopian possibilities'.<sup>36</sup> Her 'border-crossing' empowers her to embark on 'positive missions' and achieve 'significant cultural acts' (p. 220). Working for the *Guardian* as a 'specular site' (p. 219) enabled her to travel for the first time to Palestine as a reporter on the *Intifāda* (Uprising). In an interview, she points out the journey as an 'eye opener' and 'a turning point' in her life as it has driven her into 'cultural activism'.<sup>37</sup> Jacques Testard's observation is worth noting as he states that she 'has grown into Egypt's – and perhaps the Arab World's – foremost political voice in Britain'. In her 2012 edition of her memoir, Soueif highlights the objectives beyond her narrative. First, she aims at proudly representing the right and positive image of the culture of resistance manifested by the Egyptian people in the first eighteen days of the revolution to the West. Second, she aims at correcting the misconceptions of internal and external hegemonic media, and hence destabilizing both Western and Egyptian official narratives. As she states:

On my Jaipur hotel TV, I could only get CNN, but there the Americans were, transmitting from Tahrir, and the whole world was

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<sup>35</sup> See A. Gamal 'A Miracle Documented by the British', *Elbasher*, 15/11/2014, [Elbasheronline.com](http://Elbasheronline.com).

<sup>36</sup> A. R. JanMohamed, 'Worldliness-Without-World, Homelessness-as-Home: Toward a Definition of the Specular Border Intellectual', in Michael Sprinker (ed.), *Edward Said: A Critical Reader*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1992, p. 219.

<sup>37</sup> Qtd in G. Hariharan, 'Githa Hariharan in Conversation with Radwa Ashour and Ahdaf Soueif pt 1', Online video clip, Youtube, 5/4/2010, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CfZQvc0Fgq8> (access 2/12/2016).

wondering what was going on, and the spokesperson for the Egyptian government, Hossam Zaki, was cheerily dismissing the crowds.<sup>38</sup>

Coming to Egypt as a reporter on the revolution was another turning point in her life. In a May 2012 interview, Soueif, in contrast to Ashour, comments on the experience of writing for the first time in Arabic in the Egyptian newspaper *Al-Shorouk*: ‘That’s been a discovery, and I don’t think it would have happened without the revolution’.<sup>39</sup> On her role in the revolution she writes in the *Guardian*,

You, the citizen, need to be present, there, on the ground, marching, supporting, talking, instigating, articulating. Your talent – at the time of crisis – is to tell the stories as they are, to help them to achieve power as reality not as fiction.<sup>40</sup>

Soueif’s words shed light on the revolution’s role in driving her to reclaim her Egyptian citizenship. On 11<sup>th</sup> February, she consolidates her hybridity yet Egyptianness through the detailed description of the practical, yet symbolic, clothes she wears. Getting ready for the battle, underneath her modern European clothes, she dons ‘cotton trousers’, ‘the pants Egyptian farmers and laborers wear under their galabeyyas’ to protect her from ‘baltagis (thugs) and Central Security’.<sup>41</sup> Like Ashour, she perceives her struggle as an intrinsic part of the struggle for universal human rights. As she puts it at the end of her 2014 edition: ‘When you read these words, many months from now, maybe we’ll be farther down the road toward its great, human aims’.<sup>42</sup>

Ashour’s mapping of her individual and collective identity, by contrast, aims at creating consciousness and educating her readers in the necessity of knowing one’s roots, history, geography and culture as indispensable empowering strategies to combat amnesia and

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<sup>38</sup> Soueif, *Cairo: My City, Our Revolution*, pp. 9-10.

<sup>39</sup> A. Soueif, Interview by Samira Shackle, ‘The NS Interview: Ahdaf Soueif, Egyptian Author and Activist’, *NewStatesman Online*, 30/5/2012, <http://www.newstatesman.com/politics/international-politics/2012/05/ns-interview-ahdaf-soueif-egyptian-author-and-activist> (access 2/12/2016).

<sup>40</sup> A. Soueif, ‘In Times of Crisis, Fiction Has to Take a Back Seat’, in *The Guardian Online*, 17 August 2012, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2012/aug/17/ahdaf-soueif-politics-fiction> (access 2/12/2016).

<sup>41</sup> Soueif, *Cairo: My City, Our Revolution*, p. 177.

<sup>42</sup> Soueif, *Cairo: Memoir of a City Transformed*, p. 226.

political oppression during threatening transitional periods. As she puts it,

History ... was a living experience of everyday life: consecutive wars, 1948, 1956, 1967, 1973, 1978, 1982, 1991; massacres too many to be cited here, heavy losses, traumatic changes, fractures and disjunctures, and the constant insecurity of a human will negated, and of subjects acted upon rather than acting. Our present was lived history, an oppressive and haunting historical reality with which we wrestled and which we labored to grasp.<sup>43</sup>

For Ashour writing is part of her identity and role 'as a national recorder'.<sup>44</sup> Elaborating her perspective which situates her in the context of the intellectual and writer of the autobiographical manifesto, Ashour declares:

...The need to record, for the writers of my generation, was also a response to a growing awareness of the constant threat of word manipulation, what I would call ultra-modern germ warfare tactics. What we lived through was denied and disfigured. Our collective memory was subjected to a double pressure, it was attacked from within and without, with the kind of political language which Orwell once described as 'designed to make lies sound truthful and respectable'... This endeavor has been a kind of cultural resistance, which partly implies the protection of collective memory, a kind of cultural conservation in the face of the double threat of cultural imposition and cultural disintegration; to challenge the dominant discourse, (a challenge in my case, mounted by the triple periphery of nation, class and gender): to attempt to give history visibility and coherence, to conjure up unaccounted for marginalized and silenced areas of the past and the present, this has been my endeavor.<sup>45</sup>

Ashour's words sum up her cultural/political activism. In her 2013 autobiography, she documents a period of political upheaval, collective mobility and personal difficulty in which both herself and the nation are in critical conditions. Oppressed by medical instruments and successive operations, her mental space that suffers from brain cancer runs parallel to a country threatened by a tumor that has grown

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<sup>43</sup> Ashour, 'Eyewitness', p. 88.

<sup>44</sup> *Ib.*, p. 89.

<sup>45</sup> Ashour, 'Eyewitness', pp. 88-89.

wild and uncontrollable. Thus, her meticulously selected ‘excerpts’ represent her struggle to piece together and re-appropriate ‘a threatening history’, ‘a threatened geography’,<sup>46</sup> and, hence, a threatened identity, besides a determination to embrace life and resist power, oppression, defeat and personal predicament.

Similarly, Soueif’s narrative is anchored in recollecting the fragmented temporal and spatial map of self and nation. However, her deliberate depiction of her individual identity formation, construction and reconstruction is geared towards creating consciousness of how the individual self-identity and the sense of dislocation are the product of a long history of oppressive power structures. Though different, Soueif’s and Ashour’s works thus converge on depicting individual and collective identity struggling with oppressive authority for subjectivity and wholeness. As Kay Schaffer and Sidonie Smith put it:

In the midst of dislocations and relocations, personal and collective storytelling can become one way in which people claim new identities ... It can be enlisted in witnessing to the failures of democratic nations to realize and live up to their democratic principle of inclusive citizenship ... In all cases storytelling functions as a crucial element in establishing new identities of longing (directed toward the past) and belonging (directed toward the future).<sup>47</sup>

Having put that, an examination of the intellectuals’ autobiographical strategies of the manifesto in relation to the issue of identity and nationalism is in order.

### **Historicizing Identity: The Autobiographical Strategies of the Manifesto**

In their narratives, both intellectuals assume a number of autobiographical strategies. First, ‘mimesis’, a strategy that is shared in common, is described by Smith as follows:

... the autobiographer positions herself as the subject of traditional autobiography: that is, she mimes the subjectivity of universal man. Speaking from this location proffers authority, legitimacy, and readability. It also proffers membership in the community of the fully

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<sup>46</sup> *Ib.*, p. 88.

<sup>47</sup> K. Schaffer - S. Smith, *Human Rights and Narrated Lives: The Ethics of Recognition*. Palgrave MacMillan, Basingstoke, 2004, p. 19.

human. For oppressed peoples, such membership can be psychologically and politically expedient and potent.<sup>48</sup>

Thus, conscious of addressing the Western audience, Soueif begins her memoir with reference to Jean Genet. The feelings of anxiety and fear she harbors, detaining her from writing a book about Cairo, ‘my Cairo’, as she puts it, recalls to her mind Genet’s experience:

Jean Genet in his book that I most admire, *Un captif amoureux* writes: ‘I’m not an archivist or a historian or anything like it ... This is my Palestinian revolution told in my own chosen order’ I cannot say the same. This story is told in my own chosen order, but it is very much the story of our revolution.<sup>49</sup>

The opening sets the tone for the whole memoir, granting it a historical and universal dimension as Soueif situates her narrative within the universal struggle against power and authority for the consolidation of the principles of human rights. Genet’s appearance in the preface recalls the literature and figures of resistance like Sartre, Foucault and the Palestinian leaders he associated himself with.

Ashour’s opening of her autobiography, by contrast, is more personal. Chapter one opens with the birth of her brother Tarek and ends with the death of both mother and brother. However, similarly, Ashour draws an analogy between herself/name and the mythical story of the previously mentioned Muslim Imam, Muḥammad Ibn al-Ḥanafīyya, the icon of justice who will reemerge to spread justice on earth.<sup>50</sup> The analogy implicitly underscores her consciousness of her empowering interrogative voice that will be transmitted to posterity. The opening of both works, thus, consolidates ‘the politicization of the private and the personalization of the public’.<sup>51</sup>

Second, as Smith rightly argues, in ‘historicizing identity’ the manifesto ‘insists on the temporalities and spatialities of identity and, in doing so, brings the everyday practices of identity directly into the floodlights of conscious display’.<sup>52</sup> Highlighting the manifesto’s use

<sup>48</sup> Smith - Watson, *Women, Autobiography, Theory: A Reader*, p. 433.

<sup>49</sup> A. Soueif, *Cairo: My City, Our Revolution*, Bloomsbury, London, 2012, p. xiii.

<sup>50</sup> R. Ashour, *Athqal min Raḍwā: maqāṭi’ min sīrah dhātīyah* (Heavier than Radwa: Excerpts from an Autobiography), Dar El Shorouk, Cairo, 2013, p. 6.

<sup>51</sup> Smith - Watson, *Women, Autobiography, Theory: A Reader*, pp. 436-437.

<sup>52</sup> *Ib.*, p. 437.

of the fluidity of time, Mary Ann Caws states, 'making known past actions and explaining the motives for actions announced as forthcoming' represent part of 'the poetics of the manifesto'.<sup>53</sup> As Ashour points out, 'To tell my story, was to include that composite experience which constantly incorporated the old in the new'.<sup>54</sup> She later states, 'There is the geography of a place. There are no places without history. Both of us are Egyptians, we are Cairenes, and Cairo is a place full of a multi-layered history. Every corner, every street has a story'.<sup>55</sup> Thus, both writers embark on a mental and physical journey backward and forward in time and space, intertwined with a journey inward, to piece together the individual and collective self that has been drifting with the state of flux characteristic of that transitional period. Such fluidity is delineated by the water, the Nile, the bridge, and the hospital as shared settings. The selected works represent the endeavor to transform oppressive geographical and temporal spaces into spaces for agency, transformation and resistance.

With the coming of the 2011 revolution, Ashour finds herself as both insider and outsider. Compelled by her critical condition to seek diagnosis and medication, she has to leave Egypt a couple of months before the revolution. Thus, unlike Soueif's narrative, the first four months of the revolution are filtered through the eyes of friends as well as the news she, her son Tamim and husband Mourid, follow on the satellite and internet. Soueif rightly pinpoints the variation in Ashour's technique. In narrating her personal experience of suffering, Ashour maintains distance between herself and the readers so as not to get them emotionally involved. However, in documenting the suffering of the nation, the deaths and the calamities, the narrator emotionally attracts the readers in an attempt to create consciousness of the ongoing status quo ('Athqal min jabal').

Like Ashour, Soueif was abroad at the time of the revolution, only to join it later on the 28<sup>th</sup> January as a reporter for the *Guardian* and an activist in Tahrir Square. Her 2012 edition represents an act of cultural resistance that struggles to reclaim space from both the Egyptian regime and the United States as the superior imperial power. As she puts it in her interview with Shackle on 30<sup>th</sup> May 2012,

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<sup>53</sup> M. A. Caws, *The Manifesto: A Century of Isms*, University of Nebraska, Lincoln, 2000, p. xix.

<sup>54</sup> R. Ashour, 'Eyewitness, Scribe and Story teller: My Experience as a Novelist', in *The Massachusetts Review* 41/1 (2000), p. 87.

<sup>55</sup> Quoted in Philipose, 'Cairo's Literary Daughters, Ahdaf and Radwa'.

‘Western governments should stay out of things. They have done so much damage; it surprises us how they have the gall to comment. They have failed to deliver the societies people want’.<sup>56</sup> In mapping Tahrir Square for the Western reader in her 2012 memoir, she depicts the historical dimension of a space rampant with what she describes as ‘the symbols of military and political power’.<sup>57</sup> Tahrir Square becomes a microcosm of the whole country; a space of oppression that has turned with the 2011 revolution into a space for agency:

Since Egypt’s ruler Khedive Ismail established it in 1860 ... control of Tahrir has seemed central to controlling the country. Ismail himself stationed the Egyptian army and the Ministry of Defense here, and when the British occupied Egypt in 1882 their army took over the barracks and the Ministry on one side of Qasr el-Nil Bridge and they put their embassy on the other. The Americans were to follow suit and put their increasingly fortress-like embassy next to the British...<sup>58</sup>

The reader is again reminded of the Western colonial and imperial powers through Soueif’s recollection of an interview in India on the 24<sup>th</sup> January, a day before the revolution. Triggered by a question on the Tunisian revolution, she reflects on Egypt’s internal and external affairs, pinpointing the political and social mobility that were taking place before the revolution. Soueif highlights the discourse of power and authority that governs relations between the Egyptian people, on the one hand, and the Egyptian regime, the United States and Israel on the other. She declares:

... for a very long time now, our perception is that (Egypt) is not being run in the interests of the Egyptian people. And the primary motivation of the people who are governing us is that they should remain in power in order to continue ransacking and looting the country. Now, the main support that they have to remain in power is of course the Western powers – particularly the United States. And the price that they have to pay in order to be supported is to run policies that favor Israel...<sup>59</sup>

Soueif’s 2012 memoir opens with a Western Orientalist discourse that is soon subverted. The traditional oriental image of a stagnant

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<sup>56</sup> Soueif, Interview by S. Shackle, ‘The NS Interview’.

<sup>57</sup> Soueif, *Cairo: My City, Our Revolution*, p. 11.

<sup>58</sup> *Ib.*

<sup>59</sup> Soueif, *Cairo: My City, Our Revolution*, p. 8.

river/space symbolizes a long history of oppression and authoritarianism. The opening scene is an answer to the western question she recalls 'Will Egypt move? ... Egypt is too big ... too heavy'.<sup>60</sup> The representation of the 28<sup>th</sup> January, or the 'Day of Wrath', is a refutation of the Western image of a country cemented in time and space. Beginning in medias res, with herself and her two nieces riding a 'small motor boat' in 'the river' that is depicted as 'steely grey, a dull pewter',<sup>61</sup> Soueif almost recalls Dante's journey in the *Inferno*, Conrad's river in the *Heart of Darkness*, or Lawrence Durrell's *Mountolive* in his boat journey in the third part of the *Alexandria Quartet*. The image is soon replaced by the following state of mobility, dynamism and agency, epitomized by the resistance of Soueif, her nieces and the masses to power and authority. The scene that delineates all three women 'coughing and choking'<sup>62</sup> in the midst of an ambivalent limbo space 'heavy with tear gas', and struggling to push 'into mid-stream' sets the tone for the journey in quest of self and national rights.

Soueif, together with her nieces, endeavor to maneuver their way through the battle ground. Her 'embrace'<sup>63</sup> of the right of return to the city/homeland that has repelled her is signified by the religious metaphor of the exodus at the hands of the Pharaonic dictator. Soueif writes:

Down in the embankment, with the soldiers facing us and behind them the cornice road littered with stones and charred cars and the Hilton dark and shuttered... We run down the embankment steps and jump into a boat: to Giza, please. Drop us next to Galaa Bridge. We'll go home.<sup>64</sup>

Galvanised by Tahrir Square, all three women drift back to the epicenter. Water imagery is utilized to signify the state of in-betweenness and the oscillation between fixity and fluidity: 'Qasr el-Nil Bridge' is depicted as 'a mass of people, all in motion, but all in place'.<sup>65</sup> 'There's something of Dante about the spectacle. Isolated

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<sup>60</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>61</sup> Ib., p. 5.

<sup>62</sup> Ib., p. 6.

<sup>63</sup> Soueif, *Cairo: My City, Our Revolution*, p. 21.

<sup>64</sup> Ib., p. 22.

<sup>65</sup> Ib., p. 5.

figures drift. Smoke drifts. ... We drift together, embrace ...'.<sup>66</sup> The battle for subjectivity is consolidated by the geographical map of space she meticulously draws before her journey, and the mental map she depicts in words. She adds, 'Our friends had won us another couple of meters and we followed them and held our ground'.<sup>67</sup> As the narrative unfolds and the state of flux prevails, the boat and the bridge reappear as constant settings that signal the transitional period and the historical dimension. The opening that takes the reader from the present into the past and anticipates the future shifts from land to water and back again with the bridge as a real and symbolic connecting space.

The battle over space is carried over in 'Lazoghli', the whereabouts of the State Security Intelligence Bureau. The interconnectedness of the public and private is conspicuous. The ongoing brutal death of the revolutionaries at the hands of the police on that day is juxtaposed to the peaceful past history of the individual self in space. The reader is taken into Soueif's psyche to reflect on the source of her feeling of estrangement and exile from a city she has severed her ties with. Soueif highlights the impact of the encroachment of such oppressive spaces of authority over the rights of the citizen. 'Lazoghli' was the 'childhood landscape' where she, as an eight year old girl, used to visit her aunt Awatef where she lived. Unlike her parents' home that stood for regulations, the old Lazoghli represented freedom, art, creativity, love and a whole dream world epitomized by the old movies she used to watch from her aunt's balcony that overlooked the neighborhood's cinema: 'exclusively Lazoghli for me was the bridal setting up of a new home; a home that was an alternative to how my parents did things' (p. 29). The transformation of home into an oppressive, repulsive space is intertwined in her memory with the oppression of the Palestinians. She adds,

... in 2000, when Egyptians started mobilizing in support of the Palestinian *Intifāda*, it came back: "Lazoghli" was disappearances, "Lazoghli" was torture, "Lazoghli" was the Dakhleyya and the State Security Intelligence Bureau ...<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> *Ib.*, pp. 20-21.

<sup>67</sup> *Ib.*, p. 23.

<sup>68</sup> Soueif, *Cairo: My City, Our Revolution*, pp. 30-31.

The nightmarish present is again overshadowed by the imperial presence of the US as the supreme power at the back of a corrupt oppressive regime. Surrounded by the wounded in the makeshift hospital in Tahrir Square, Soueif voices their agonies and demands; her gaze of power unmasks the reality to the world and transforms the space of death into a space of empowerment:

I look. Wounded young men everywhere ... I write fast; their message is urgent: They are using live ammunition... Look: empty cartridges, *Made in the USA*. Look. Look: .... This is what we get from the US Aid. This is the 'aid' they hold over us.<sup>69</sup>

The multi-layered past takes her back to the present as she manages to maneuver her way guided by her experience in Palestine. Hence, the Western reader is time and again reminded of the Palestinian condition. Warned by the men around her to turn back, she is determined to move on: 'I can hear the shots and smell the acrid smoke, but a lesson from time spent in Palestine is that unless there's an insurmountable physical obstacle ... keep going'.<sup>70</sup> Soueif implements the Palestinian tactic of '*ṣumūd*' or 'steadfastness' as a tactic of resistance.<sup>71</sup> The physical journey in space is a psychological journey into the deep recesses of the self; the old city with its 'pedestrian passages that run between or through buildings' provides her with the right exit from the threatening reality of the new urban space. Reclaiming space, in this sense, is an endeavor to reclaim the lost self/identity from the historical maze of political oppression.

Like Ashour, Soueif is conscious of the role of memory and history as resistant tactics. The historical/political events and the economic conditions leading to the geographical changes of the city due to tremendous urbanization and capitalism have destabilized the self. As she puts it: 'Tahrir is about dignity and image as much as it is about the economy and corruption'.<sup>72</sup> Losing its authenticity during the Nasser, Sadat and Mubarak eras, the city has become increasingly oppressive to the individual and collective self. With the loss of Abulela Bridge, the space that used to connect her home in Zamalek to downtown Cairo, Soueif is uprooted and the self splits. Gazing at

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<sup>69</sup> *Ib.*, p. 33.

<sup>70</sup> Soueif, *Cairo: My City, Our Revolution*, p. 25.

<sup>71</sup> *Ib.*, p. 32.

<sup>72</sup> *Ib.*, p. 59.

her city from her new home, London, she feels more and more detached. 'In Cairo, every time I come home, home goes a bit more bitty on me'.<sup>73</sup> The relation between the corrupt, dictatorial political leaders and the city is cast in the light of a male-female patriarchal relationship in which the city is depicted as an enslaved female body that is abused, harassed and brutalized: 'Degraded and bruised and robbed and exploited and mocked and slapped about: my city'.<sup>74</sup> However, the bridge has always been there as a temporal and spatial reality; a place of hope, energy and connectivity sought by citizens, authenticating their right to the city. An eyewitness to their past, the bridge has generated a voice and has galvanized the masses in anticipation of a changed future. As she optimistically reflects:

Green spaces vanished but every night the bridges would be crammed with Cairenes taking the air. We suffered a massive shortage of affordable housing but every night you'd see a bride starring in her wedding procession in the street. Unemployment ran at 20 per cent and every evening there was singing and drumming from the cheap, bright, noisy little pleasure boats criss-crossing the river.<sup>75</sup>

The people are an extension of their land and its trees; a force of nature that can never be overpowered. As Soueif puts it, 'if they (corrupt politicians) cut a tree down, it grew shoots'.<sup>76</sup> Reconstructing the borders of the 'Midan', Soueif relegates all spaces of power and authority to the periphery and locates the masses at the center. The Midan becomes both liberated and liberating, watched over and energized by symbols of agency and resistance, 'Omar Makram, Simon Bolivar and Abd el-Menem Riyad', besides 'the Nile' as the most energizing force.<sup>77</sup>

In contrast to Soueif and her fluidity of identity signified by the water imagery, Ashour's rootedness is signified by the land that is mapped and embraced from beginning to end. Like Soueif's home that was close to Abulela Bridge, Ashour's childhood home is strategically located close to Abbas Bridge. However, water and the bridge figure differently in Ashour's writings. Her words in 2000 are worth

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<sup>73</sup> *Ib.*, p. 41.

<sup>74</sup> *Ib.*, p. 45.

<sup>75</sup> Soueif, *Cairo: My City, Our Revolution*, p. 45.

<sup>76</sup> *Ib.*, p. 57.

<sup>77</sup> *Ib.*, p. 58.

mentioning in this respect. As she puts it, 1946, the year she was born witnessed the death of the students who demonstrated against British occupation on Abbas Bridge. The bridge was, therefore, a space of oppression and resistance: 'The bridge was a familiar view: I could see it from the bedroom window. I could also see the Nile and observe the late summer flood waters, rising heavy with brownish red silt'.<sup>78</sup>

Ashour draws an affinity between the Pharoanic practice of *wafā' al-Nīl*, 'human sacrifice' for the Nile, and the sacrifice of the revolutionaries at the hands of authoritarian dictators: 'The original was a girl like me who drowned like the boys of the demonstration'.<sup>79</sup> Thus, in contrast to Soueif's stagnant river that has finally erupted with the revolution, Ashour's river has never been stagnant. It has always been an energizing space of resistance and an eyewitness to martyrs despite historical oppression. At the end of her autobiography, Ashour reiterates the same view and draws upon the Nile as a personal and political resistant space:

Life frames death, precedes it, comes after it and dictates its borders. It embraces it from its top, bottom and margins. This is my conviction. I do not know if this conviction is related to spending my early childhood till the age of nine in a house overlooking the Nile. The Nile was strongly present ... Later on, we will slowly realize that the Nile has infinitely been there in the past and will infinitely and mysteriously be there in the future ...<sup>80</sup>

Like Soueif's memories of home, Ashour's childhood home instilled into her the first seeds of political awareness. Similarly, Palestine emerges in association with home; Ashour's private balcony opened up at the 1948 War and the occupation of Palestine: 'From that same window, I saw the war planes'. She adds, 'It was then that I heard the word Palestine for the first time'.<sup>81</sup>

In a similar vein to Soueif, Palestine and Jerusalem constitute part of Ashour's identity and one of her major life battles. In meticulously depicting her university's office and desk in her autobiography, Ashour transforms her academic space into a space for agency,

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<sup>78</sup> Ashour, 'Eyewitness', p. 86.

<sup>79</sup> Idem.

<sup>80</sup> Ashour, *Athqal min Raḍwā*, p. 391. All translations of Ashour's text from Arabic are mine.

<sup>81</sup> Ashour, 'Eyewitness', p. 86.

resistance and identity. Underneath the glass on her desk lies a copy of one of the famous paintings of the Syrian Artist Borhan Eddeen Karkotly, stenciled in black ink, representing Jerusalem with its minarets, domes and churches; the words 'Jerusalem is ours and the victory is ours' emanate from the sun, occupying center space in the painting.<sup>82</sup> Moreover, the Egyptian support of the Palestinians in the early phases of the revolution in response to the attacks on Gaza is meticulously depicted. In August 2011, the Israeli embassy in Giza was besieged by the demonstrators. Ashour dedicates almost ten pages of her narrative to document the successful attempt of the young Egyptian Ahmed Elshahat, or the Spiderman, to climb the thirteen floors of the building where the embassy was located without a rope to substitute the Israeli flag with its Egyptian counterpart. Delineated heroically by Ashour as 'an icon in our nationalist history', the young man, the people, and the whole scene are cast in the light of the historical struggle between Egypt and Israel over decolonization.<sup>83</sup> Ashour in those pages is adamant to verify the identity of 'the Spiderman' that, as she writes, the state has endeavored to stigmatize and erase from collective memory. Moreover, Ashour's politics of inclusion extends to encompass the Palestinians themselves, granting them voice through the recurrent presence of figures like Mahmoud Darwish (Maḥmūd Darwīsh) and Najy Al-'Ali (Nājī al-'Alī) and the Palestinian art of resistance.

Like Soueif who loses her mother and mentor Edward Said before writing her memoir, Ashour writes her narrative following the personal loss of roots, embodied by the recent deaths of her mother and brother. However, as an insider, Ashour, by contrast, begins her autobiography with a November 2010 scene that documents the academic activism of the March 9 Group in the two months prior to the January revolution. Depicting the university as a space for agency, political mobility and activism, Ashour represents her self-determination and struggle against institutional repression, bureaucracy and state authority. The recollected episode culminates in the sixty four year old Ashour being beaten, amongst other academics, by the thugs inside the university campus. The scene that caused tremendous rage amongst many university scholars then became the subject of social media and television networks. The struggle on her

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<sup>82</sup> Ashour, *Athqal min Raḍwā*, p. 137.

<sup>83</sup> Ashour, *Athqal min Raḍwā*, pp. 186-196.

part, as well as on the part of those academics to reclaim academic space, paved the ground for the coming of the revolution. Ashour's counter narrative subverts the official narrative propagated by the state media; the circulated discourse was that the academic professors were strangers and trespassers, accused of committing acts of 'thuggery' and vandalism.<sup>84</sup> Documenting her resistance, she quotes the letter she wrote in response to the oppression of authority:

The declaration of the President of the University is motivated by security vision which dictates that every individual, be it a student or a professor, should be confined to an assigned space. It, nonetheless, regards those who dare to step out of it as transgressors, strangers and sneaking minorities. Such a perception, does not only signify a captivating perspective that divides the society and its institutions into small prisons, but, more importantly, deconstructs the idea of a university altogether.<sup>85</sup>

Ashour's personal/political academic experience is followed by the attempts of the president of the university and the Minister of Education to break her will by depriving her of the right to medical leave; a thing she rejects. The oppression Soueif used to experience in her country leading to her detachment and alienation has, by contrast, a different impact on Ashour. The nation's sick body has its impact on Ashour's body, pinpointed by Ashour herself. In one of her interviews, Ashour admits:

Sometimes I have the illusion that I fall ill for psychological reasons. In 1991, after the bombardment of Iraq, I got a liver infection and I was, and still am convinced, that this was bound to happen. In October when they conferred in Madrid, I was very ill; I couldn't get out of bed. That's roughly the time when the book *Granada* was written.<sup>86</sup>

Ashour highlights how her medical investigations preceding the diagnosis of her malignant brain tumor synchronized with her brother's malady and death. Dying on his sixty seventh birthday, the eldest brother brings to her mind the traumatic memory of the 1967

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<sup>84</sup> Ashour, *Athqal min Raḍwā*, p. 19.

<sup>85</sup> Ashour, *Athqal min Raḍwā*, p. 19.

<sup>86</sup> Quoted in Y. Rakha, 'Radwa Ashour: Profile', in *Al-Ahram Weekly Online* 466, 27 Jan.-2 Feb. 2000, <http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/Archive/2000/466/profile.htm> (access 22/12/2016).

war; a historical date that is engraved in the collective consciousness of the Arabs. In chapter three, Ashour writes:

Six days later, Tarek passed away; he died on his 67<sup>th</sup> birthday... I stopped at that date and almost told myself...something about our relation with that murderous date. In June 1967, Tarek was not yet twenty-four years old when he suffered from pleural effusion and was bedridden for weeks. Regardless of any medical opinion, I associated his illness with his grief over the loss of thousands of his own generation; some of whom were friends and acquaintances who were deported to Sinai and never got back. Later, in September 1981, I was deeply convinced of that when I fell sick with the same disease following Sadat's famous campaign in which he incarcerated 1536 oppositional figures, including many of my friends. At that time, I was abroad with my husband, compelled by health problems to have two consecutive surgeries.<sup>87</sup>

Ashour's oppositional stance towards Sadat's policy is similarly adopted by Soueif. In her 2014 edition, Soueif adds a part entitled 'A Brief and Necessary History' to her memoir.<sup>88</sup> Critiquing Sadat's era and tactics that culminated in the increase of oppression, the rise of Islamists, and the stronger grip both USA and Israel have over Egypt in the name of the peace process, she writes:

Sadat's overall project was to remove Egypt from the nonaligned camp, to adopt the free market capitalism, and to make peace with Israel. To do all this, he needed to discredit the Nasser era and disempower the Left, the Nasserites, and the Progressives. The instrument he chose was the Muslim Brotherhood.<sup>89</sup>

The use of political Islam as an oppressive tactic utilized by both the Egyptian regime and the external imperial powers against the masses in times of political instability is a major point highlighted.

The US similarly figures in Ashour's autobiography as an imperial power. However, the space she travels to seeking medical help is transformed by the whole resistant family into a space for agency. Joining her son Tamim, a lecturer of political science at Georgetown University, she depicts the image of a family desperate to go to Egypt

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<sup>87</sup> Ashour, *Athqal min Raḍwā*, pp. 24-25.

<sup>88</sup> Soueif, *Cairo: Memoir of a City Transformed*, pp. 227-235.

<sup>89</sup> Soueif, *Cairo: Memoir of a City Transformed*, p. 231.

at such a crucial moment of time. Tamim's famous mobilizing poem 'The People of Egypt', broadcast to the whole world on 27<sup>th</sup> January 2011, takes its moment of utterance in the US. Ashour realizes the sharp gap between generations through comparing her revolutionary feelings to those of her son. Filled with anxiety about three lines in his poem where he condemns those who do not participate in the Tahrir demonstrations as traitors, she advises him to delete them. Later she realizes the power of those same lines in mobilizing passive Egyptians to take to the streets. It is here that she confesses: 'I'm a woman in her sixties who does not necessarily possess the wisdom of the youth who participate in the revolution; some are as old as her children and others may be as her grandchildren'.<sup>90</sup>

Ashour, thus, testifies to the power of the youth as the leaders of the revolution who have accomplished what their predecessors failed to do. Though Ashour constantly associates herself with old age, her actions betray her words as her resistance and vitality despite hardships never betray her. Soueif, by contrast, never ruminates on old age; on the contrary, we see her endeavors to merge with the youth and act the role Ashour has always assumed and from which she has for so long been deprived.

On the 9<sup>th</sup> February 2011, Ashour is under anesthesia following her surgery. Her very first words when she is struggling to get back to consciousness, as her husband Mourid later tells her, delineate her deep down worries about the youth of the revolution. 'Did they beat the kids?',<sup>91</sup> is the question she asks Mourid, casting light on her image as a mother of all the youth and martyrs of the revolution. In the intensive care unit, she recites lines from an Afro-American song to the Afro-American nurse that sum up the US imperial history of slavery. Exchanging roles, Ashour the mother becomes an exiled lost orphan; a child slave yearning for home and roots:

Sometimes I feel like a motherless child  
A long way from home  
Sometimes I feel like I'm almost gone  
A long way from home.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Ashour, *Athqal min Raḍwā*, p. 63.

<sup>91</sup> Ashour, *Athqal min Raḍwā*, p. 73.

<sup>92</sup> Ashour, *Athqal min Raḍwā*, p. 74.

The bedridden Ashour transforms her desperate ailing voice, her sense of alienation and anguish, and the hospital she is in through her cultural memory into a voice and a space of resistance to oppression and authority. The two failed brain surgeries followed by a third she undergoes to eliminate the tumor run parallel to the nation's surgery to deracinate Mubarak. The sense of sorrow she experiences for not being physically part of the revolution and her nostalgia for the Square and the people are documented in another chapter of her autobiography. In contrast to Soueif who struggles to reclaim space/self, Ashour psychologically embraces home wherever she goes. Assuming a bird's eye view, the nostalgic activist plays the role she misses of the mobilizing mother of the revolutionaries. In her mental map, her home becomes the nation's home; the nest where the protesters as flocking birds seek refuge.

The narrative thus is filled with stories within stories in which Ashour assumes multiple roles. As a second Shehrezad, she struggles with death, power and authority and casts a 'mythical' framework on the revolution and its aftermath.<sup>93</sup> Ashour, the human being, the activist and the narrator, stops in the middle of both experiences, the personal and the political, and assumes the role of the scholar of literature to educate the Arab reader in Western and American culture by referring to world museums, paintings and literature amongst other things. Ashour, the member of the Committee for Protecting National Culture, to whom history, geography, Arabic culture and language are tools of resistance that constitute the borders of the self, educates her reader in the history of space. Meticulously selecting space that conjures up memories, Ashour becomes the reservoir of Egypt's culture and identity.

Ashour finally arrives at Cairo on the 24<sup>th</sup> May, 2011. Her first visit to Tahrir Square takes place on the 26<sup>th</sup> May, the day of her birthday, when she documents the euphoric spirit that envelops her as part of a collectivity. Mapping the revolutionary surroundings, she takes the reader on a guided tour from her home to the Square. Her excitement and longing for the energizing space, as well as her perception of the national ground fertilized by the people's dreams of freedom, equality and dignity, are documented as follows:

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<sup>93</sup> Ashour, *Athqal min Radwā*, p. 168.

The street is the same, with its permanent things and its people. What is new? I count on my fingers: The new thing is that there are passersby like me who head to the Square ...because it is the Square. They will go to it on Friday to raise the flag and their voices and demand. I count again. The new things are the vendors at its entrance who do not sell socks or ordinary underclothes but big and small banners and flags of Egypt, Palestine and Tunisia... The new thing in the Square is the martyrs' blood absorbed by its ground, or maybe not yet absorbed but stuck between its exterior and interior ground, waiting to permeate it and shape its soil.<sup>94</sup>

Driven by euphoria, Ashour weaves more stories within stories as she documents the testimonies of revolutionaries from all walks of life. Unlike Soueif, the threat she is exposed to in the Square stems from her ailing body. As she puts it, her visits to the Square have to be taken with precaution as she has to spread ointment on the place of her surgery to avoid the sun. Nonetheless, she is adamant to assume her role in the collectivity and participate in the demonstrations. Holding a much longer flag than herself and dressed in a big, funny hat, she embarks on her consecutive resistant visits to the Square for months when things start to get dismal and bleak.

### **A Fragmenting Strategy**

The tactics utilized by the regime to overpower the masses and regain power are examined by both writers. First, the books document the gradual remapping of space in the post revolution era. The construction of walls for security reasons is delineated by both as a constant attempt on behalf of authority to fragment the demonstrators and the Ultras, and abort the revolution. Ashour represents a more detailed description of the changed map. Walls are represented by her as a kind of occupation, casting the whole relation between the demonstrators and authority in the light of the Palestinian-Israeli condition. Like the walls constructed by Israelis to imprison Palestinians in their limited space, the demonstrators down town are not allowed free movement in space (pp. 198, 204). However, walls are resisted and deconstructed through the demonstrators' creativity and the liberating graffiti that bring life and freedom to death and imprisonment. Ashour's individual-collective self struggles over space and rights. Her narrative rewrites 'the official narrative' that, she

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<sup>94</sup> Ashour, *Athqal min Radwā*, pp. 115-116.

believes, fabricates lies and stereotypes the demonstrators as thugs who destroy and burn their country (p. 202). Voicing her view of the whole thing, Ashour interprets the tactics and policy implemented in the post revolution era in the light of a 'conspiracy theory' (p. 211).

Women's role in the nationalist narrative is not the major focus of both writers but is intricately interwoven as part of the struggle of the whole nation. In an interview on April 2010 the two writers highlight their perspective. Ashour declares,

Feminism for us is much more than ideas, it is a lived experience... So we wouldn't like to confine ourselves to writing about women or writing about women's issues. I always think one of the great things about literature is that it can transcend gender.<sup>95</sup>

Similarly, Soueif points out,

I suppose neither Radwa nor I have had problems about being women... issues that impact women have to do with issues that impact wider society. When society has problems, then they tend to be played out on women. When there is a recession, it is women who suffer the most. So the answer is to look at society as a whole.<sup>96</sup>

Seen in the previous light, utilizing women's bodies as a medium to repress the masses is the second tactic exposed and documented in the selected works; the story of the girl who was subjected to the virginity test, for example, is shared in common.<sup>97</sup> However, Ashour, in contrast to Soueif, dedicates a whole chapter to document her journey to the girl's village to represent a detailed counter narrative (p. 224). As Ashour puts it,

It is reiterated that the number of civilians hired by the State Security Police, (I mean thugs), amounts to 300, 000. Even if this number is exaggerated, there is, definitely, an army of thugs whose wide and extended task involves stereotypical harassment in a manner that stigmatizes the icons and spaces of the revolution so that the Tahrir Square becomes desolate and bleak and the university the abode of violence.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Philipose, 'Cairo's Literary Daughters, Ahdaf and Radwa'.

<sup>96</sup> *Ib.*

<sup>97</sup> Elrefaei, 'Egyptian Women'.

<sup>98</sup> Ashour, *Athqal min Radwā*, p. 373.

SouEIF, similarly voices the same conviction. In an interview she states,

Women were very careful to say that they were taking part in the revolution as citizens. Social problems such as harassment on the streets vanished during the eighteen days. They're back now. What is new is the way women respond. There's graffiti, stickers, women taking self-defense classes, so the fight back is on (The NS Interview).<sup>99</sup>

In their narratives, both writers document their rejection and critique of both the Muslim Brotherhood and the military in power. In chapter 25 (pp. 291-308), Ashour utilizes her knowledge of visual culture to cast the nationalist narrative in a global historical light (p. 295) through writing a detailed description of Picasso's black and white painting 'Guernica'. The painting that was produced in response to the Spanish Civil War has become a symbol of the suffering of the masses at the hands of oppressive powers as well as a condemnation of and a struggle against oppression. Picasso's lines and 'symbolism', Ashour writes, 'go back to the Pharaonic times' (p. 295). The depicted painting takes the reader to the down town map and the battle field. Ashour spots Mohamed Mahmoud Street, known then as 'The Eyes of Liberty Street' where many young people lost their eyesight, and Qasr Edoubara Church, located near to Omar Makram Mosque, where the makeshift hospital moved to (p. 299). The suffering, deaths of martyrs like Mina Daniel and struggle of Egyptians are, therefore, associated with the historical suffering and struggle of the Spanish people. Testimonies of revolutionaries like Nawara Negm, Malek Adly and Mohamed Abulgheit are meticulously documented (pp. 304-307). Picasso's painting is followed by the Mexican artist David Alfaro Siqueiros' famous mural 'Tropical America' in relation to the graffiti of the revolution in chapter 26. Time and again global culture is utilized by Ashour to symbolize the suffering of the Egyptians and the power of the art of resistance to empower the people and document history (pp. 311-322).

As an academic and activist, Ashour pinpoints the university as a major space subjected to a long history of repression. In chapter 13 of her autobiography, for instance, she takes the reader on a historical journey into the Zaafarana Palace, the whereabouts of the Ain Shams

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<sup>99</sup> SouEIF, Interview by S. Shackle, 'The NS Interview'.

University administration, highlighting the distant colonial past overshadowing the postcolonial present. The historical oppression of the university students culminates at the end of the chapter in memorizing the martyrs throughout the ages, starting from the martyrs of the 1935 Students' Uprising to the 2011 martyrs like Alaa Abdelhady and Abulhasan Ibrahim (p. 158). The title of the chapter 'al-Safran (al-Za'farān)' (p. 145), 'Saffron', is meticulously selected to undermine and disempower the oppressive authoritarian space. The space is transformed into a space for agency that will immortalize the martyrs who are the saffron of all ages: 'I tell myself, as long as the land has memory, then the saffron must have memory; ... it (the Zaafrana Palace) no longer belongs to an old lady living in a palace, but to the amazing youth, emerging despite departure' (p. 159).

The similarities and differences between the symbolic conclusions of both narratives are worth mentioning. In their analysis of Soueif's 2012 memoir, critics rightly highlight the structure of the first edition as it begins and ends with the revolution while the dark period of the violation of human rights is compressed in the middle.<sup>100</sup> Clarifying her perspective, Soueif states, 'I believe optimism is a duty'.<sup>101</sup> Kamal rightly points out that the first edition ends with Mubarak's ousting on 11<sup>th</sup> February 2011, followed by an epilogue that comprises the voices of her nieces, nephew and son, to whom she dedicates the 2012 edition, seeing them as the real revolutionaries.<sup>102</sup> Thus, despite her recognition of the violations of human rights and the changed nature of Tahrir Square occupied by Islamists and the Muslim Brotherhood, Soueif chooses to end her 2012 edition with Tahrir Square and her son's optimistic vision of the revolution, anticipating a promising democratic future: 'Inclusive, inventive, open-source, modern, peaceful, just, communal, unified and focused. A set of ideals on which to build a national politics'.<sup>103</sup>

As a temporal map for public consciousness, her 2014 edition/manifesto, by contrast, ends with what she entitles 'A Brief and Necessary History'.<sup>104</sup> Documenting the history of oppression,

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<sup>100</sup> Kamal, 'Women's Memoirs of the Egyptian Revolution', pp. 582-584; Bromley, "'Giving Memory a Future': Women, Writing, Revolution", pp. 226-227.

<sup>101</sup> Soueif, *Cairo: My City, Our Revolution*, p. 186.

<sup>102</sup> Kamal, 'Women's Memoirs of the Egyptian Revolution', p. 584.

<sup>103</sup> Soueif, *Cairo: My City, Our Revolution*, p.194.

<sup>104</sup> A. Soueif, *Cairo: Memoir of a City Transformed*, Bloomsbury, London, 2014, p. 227.

Soueif begins with the 16<sup>th</sup> century defeat of Mameluk kings at the hands of the Ottoman Turks, passing through French and British occupation, Nasser and Sadat's Egypt, and ending with the Mubarak era. Her second edition comprises two more chapters. 'Revolution II, Eighteen Days Were Never Enough, October 2012'<sup>105</sup> starts from where she has stopped at in the first edition, her nephew's trial at the military court in October 2011. The second part she adds is 'Revolution III: Postscript, 31<sup>th</sup> July 2013'<sup>106</sup> in which Soueif, the political commentator, analyses the gloomy and tragic period of Morsi's rule and failure: 'The economic situation worsened and Morsi outdid Mubarak in opacity and cronyism'.<sup>107</sup>

It is worth noting that the epilogue and voices of the young revolutionaries previously published in the 2012 edition are no longer included in the 2014 edition, signaling a changed period that has witnessed the silencing of those voices by the collective. Hence, the juxtaposed tone between both editions is detectable. Soueif's deep anxiety about a dictatorial future that threatens Revolution III, and her anxiety about the overpowering fingerprints of the counterrevolutionary forces are conspicuously fleshed out as she begins the last part, 31<sup>th</sup> July 2013, with her words, 'waiting for Armageddon. Hope it won't come'.<sup>108</sup> The detachment from the collective self, repulsion from and condemnation of a nationalist discourse she and her family believe to be oppressive, are signaled by her choice of the sea as a setting she chooses to end her narrative with. Therefore, while in the first edition the nationalist narrative takes its point of departure from the river in Cairo and culminates in the ground of Tahrir Square, consolidating the continuity of the struggle and the deeply entrenched aims of the revolution, the journey of the self in the 2014 edition begins with the river in Cairo and ends at the 'sea', located 'seventy kilometers west of Alexandria'.<sup>109</sup> Soueif delineates herself and her family members as a collectivity deracinated from the Tahrir nationalist narrative and setting themselves against both the masses and the regime: 'We have persuaded ourselves to take three

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<sup>105</sup> Soueif, *Cairo: Memoir of a City Transformed*, pp. 153-216.

<sup>106</sup> Soueif, *Cairo: Memoir of a City Transformed*, pp. 217-226.

<sup>107</sup> Soueif, *Cairo: Memoir of a City Transformed*, p. 224.

<sup>108</sup> Soueif, *Cairo: Memoir of a City Transformed*, p. 219.

<sup>109</sup> *Idem*.

days out of Cairo; away from the jingoism and army-worship of a Tahrir where we don't, for the moment, feel we belong'.<sup>110</sup>

The second edition's changed spatial politics of water-land-water is, thus, rendered in cyclical terms as the state of fluidity prevails. To Soueif, Cairo becomes again oppressive and repulsive. The transformation of the definite article in 'the Tahrir Square' into the indefinite 'a' in 'a Tahrir' in the previous sentence signals her vision of the fragmented nationalist discourse, the splitting of the collectivity, and hence the end of the myth of the 2011 'Tahrir Square' as the 'Holy Grail',<sup>111</sup> the epicenter of the revolution.

Nonetheless, the optimism and perseverance of the intellectual-activist still prevails. As she puts it in her 2012 edition, 'A revolution is a process, not an event... Our Egyptian revolution is ongoing. And its path has not been smooth. How could it have been when the interests we are seeking to break free of are so powerful and so pervasive?' (p. xiv). The detached space the family occupies at the end is depicted as a therapeutic haven and an energizing space intrinsic for honing their revolutionary spirit. 'We'll be back on the streets, helping our revolution in its difficult path' (p. 226), she writes. As an intellectual, Soueif believes that the people's digression from the goals of the revolution is but a temporary phase. Her concluding words thus consolidate her rejection of both, 'military rule' and 'the rule of the Brotherhood'. The 2014 edition, in contrast to 2012, opens and ends with the martyrs; dedicated to them at the beginning and glorifying them in the concluding sentences: 'And glory to our martyrs forever'. Soueif's narrative is in this light a manifesto, a declaration of the rights of the citizens and the martyrs inscribed by their 'blood' (p. 226). The martyrs as 'the still centre' in the 2012 edition (p. 181) are given voice in the beginning and end of her second edition in which Soueif speaks the truth, as she sees it, to both power and the people.

Ashour opens and ends her book with home, family and children. Her indoor setting that stands for roots and solidity is set in contrast to Soueif's space that signifies fluidity. On the 9<sup>th</sup> May 2013, things get more tragic. Wrestling with a fragmented world and an active brain tumor, she, nonetheless, retains her militant, rebellious and obstinate spirit. Hope and optimism are similarly her resistant weapons that

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<sup>110</sup> Idem.

<sup>111</sup> Soueif, *Cairo: My City, Our Revolution*, p. 10.

energize and empower her and the readers in the darkest moments. She writes:

Despite everything, life regenerates itself ... This is my belief, and this was how in the darkest moments before the revolution I believed that things would never be the same. It was consolidated when the youth took to the streets on the 25<sup>th</sup> January ... and the demonstrations culminated in the revolution. Though the direction has been destabilized, my belief has not been shaken...because at the end life wins, though it shows the opposite; and because human beings are mature, no matter how confused and disturbed they get, or how their steps falter;...and because endings are not endings; they intermingle with new beginnings. Now, I do not think of my father, mother and their offspring...I expand in my talk to encompass all the martyrs... and I know that their tombs... will keep on sending underground messages that permeate the earth and water the preserved orchard, surprising us with its product.<sup>112</sup>

In the light of my argument, water, hospitals and bridges are represented by both intellectuals as major spaces that embody and symbolize the state of inbetweenness felt by both self and nation, its oppression and resistance. The construction and reconstruction of the self/identity run against the recurrent reference to different hospitals in relation to different generations. The hospitals where Ashour, the representative of the older generation, struggles to receive treatment abroad and in Egypt run parallel to the makeshift hospital in Tahrir Square. The makeshift hospital is depicted by both writers as a space for agency that witnesses the struggle of the second generation represented by the youth of the revolution, the martyrs, as well as the Egyptian doctors/activists, led by Mona Mina, the founder of the group *Physicians without Rights*. The hospital where Soueif was born is recurrently referred to all through and is spotted as a major space on the map she attaches to her memoir.

Moreover, hospitals in the selected works witness the birthplace of the new generation, symbolizing hope in the future. The hospital features in the second part, *Revolution II*, Soueif adds to the 2014 edition. The celebration of Alaa's new born son takes place in Tora prison while Alaa is still detained under Morsi's rule. The prison is transformed through the celebration of birth into a space for agency. Soueif is depicted documenting history on her computer and

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<sup>112</sup> Ashour, *Athqal min Raḍwā*, pp. 132-133.

communicating with the outside world; her son Omar is likewise filming the whole scene. Though Ashour, by contrast, experiences pain in hospitals and associates the space with memories of Mahmoud Darwish, Mohamed Anis (Muḥammad Anīs) and Frantz Fanon, figures of resistance who all died in hospitals following major operations,<sup>113</sup> she, nonetheless, similarly, ends her autobiography with a meeting of the different generations of her family at her parents' home. Like Soueif's description of her sister's grandchild flying his kite with the help of his grandfather as his tutor and guide at the end of her 2014 edition,<sup>114</sup> Ashour ends with a detailed description of the scene of her brother's grandchild taught how to play the drum by her son Tamim.<sup>115</sup> Ashour meticulously selects the energized space that speaks of life and continuity to voice her final words that subvert death and defeat.

### Conclusion

In the light of what has been put forward, the selected works can be read as autobiographical manifestos that interweave the intellectuals' individual identities with a collective national identity subjugated to a long history of political repression, violation of human and citizenship rights. The narratives represent the intellectuals' perspective of truth and document the resistance and repression of the activists in the post revolution period. In a nutshell, the texts disseminate an oppositional discourse to mobilize the readers. In contrast to Soueif's voice, Ashour's narrative represents not only her voice but the global voices of the marginalized and silenced. Soueif's comments on Ashour's autobiography, her role as a revolutionary, a storyteller, and her individual-collective and larger than life self are worth mentioning in this respect. In a May 2014 article in Al-Shorouk newspaper, Soueif writes:

Radwa's self expands to envelop not only her family, her loved ones, her students and work, but also the poems of poets, the drawings of artists, the earth's stones, the people's buildings, and human history at large.

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<sup>113</sup> Ashour, *Athqal min Raḍwā*, p. 347.

<sup>114</sup> Soueif, *Cairo: Memoir of a City Transformed*, p. 219.

<sup>115</sup> Ashour, *Athqal min Raḍwā*, p. 388.

Highlighting the resistant discourse disseminated by Ashour in her 2013 autobiography, intertwined with her humanism, Soueif adds, 'I feel happy and proud that Radwa represents me'. From her perspective, Ashour is the guide, mentor, and mother of Egyptians. Her narrative, she adds, is thus a 'maternal, educational, revolutionary and artistic act' (*Athqal min jabal*).

Despite the tragic air that has enveloped the whole transitional period, the selected manifestos foreground hope as a strategy that perpetuates the belief in the historical regeneration of more activists. Hence, the martyrs occupy the center of both nationalist narratives as the seeds that will shoot more trees of resistance. Smith's words are illuminating in this respect:

The "I" writes under the sign of hope and what Helene Cixous calls "the very possibility of change",... the manifesto attempts to actively position the subject in a potentially liberated future distanced from the constraining and oppressive identifications inherent in the everyday practices of the Ancien régime.

The fluidity of time and space characteristic of the manifesto, thus, attests to the look 'forward' in the affirmative positivity of its politics to new spaces of subjectivity'.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> Smith - Watson, *Women, Autobiography, Theory: A Reader*, p. 438.

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# Urban Space, Power Struggle, and the Remaking of the City

Mounira SOLIMAN

## Abstract

In the wake of the 25<sup>th</sup> January 2011 revolution and the ensuing uprisings, Egyptian cities became platforms for political activism. Henri Lefebvre, David Harvey and others argue the importance of urban space for political activism. For Lefebvre, the centrality of urban space allows for political action, as Harvey argues, of a larger predominant population (2013). It is the congregation of this predominant population that the government constantly fears and tries to fight by denying it access to that space which rightfully belongs to it. In this paper, I argue that the youth movement of the 25<sup>th</sup> January revolution set out to reclaim urban public space through a cultural movement that depended on the utilization of different forms of popular culture, from graffiti to beautifying the city and coloring through corruption initiatives, from street fairs to public concerts and popular performances. Through these and other forms of popular culture, the younger generation attempts to give birth to a new city and sustain a platform for political engagement. In the process they ultimately clash with an older generation that tries to forestall development, and maintain a corrupt status quo.

## Introduction

In Chloe, a great city, the people who move through the streets are all strangers. At each encounter, they imagine a thousand things about one another; meetings which could take place between them, conversations, surprises, caresses, bites. But no one greets anyone; eyes lock for a second, then dart away, seeking other eyes, never stopping.<sup>1</sup>

I close my eyes and Italo Calvino's description of his invisible cities brings to mind Cairo, and just as Venice remains Marco Polo's port of reference, Cairo, the city victorious, is mine. For the longest

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<sup>1</sup> Italo Calvino, *Invisible Cities*, Harcourt Brace & Company, New York-London, 1972, p. 51.

time, Egyptians have had to maneuver their way around their cities, constantly facing blocked roads, barricaded streets, fenced gates, and closed off parks, and continually negotiating access to both officially restricted areas as well as to subtle exclusion from upscale urban places as in gated communities, private clubs, upmarket shopping centers, etc. Consequently, the space they manage to craft for themselves in the face of this blocked landscape is tinted with feelings of estrangement, neglect, and a sense of uncaring towards both the place they occupy and the fellow citizens who share the same space with them. This is manifested in the increased level of uncleanliness, waste trash visible everywhere on the streets, obvious signs of ugliness in the loss of architectural harmony, scarce public recreational facilities, and above all a feeling of disrespect for the rights of citizens for a clean, aesthetically beautiful and congenial life.

In 'City Watching: Closed Circuit Television Surveillance in Public Spaces', Nicholas R. Fyfe and Jon Bannister argue that the idea of urban public space implies citizens' unrestricted access and right of way to places,<sup>2</sup> a notion that is arguably problematic for two reasons. First, places accommodate different groups of people at different historical times; and second, unrestricted access or what is generally perceived as the democratization of public space is constantly met by attempts from the state to protect public places from citizens for reasons pertaining to physical security.<sup>3</sup> Both reasons result in the loss of public access and the marginalization of unwanted groups of people. While successful access to public space, it has been argued, nurtures the growth of public life and creates a healthy communal environment that allows for social, cultural, and political expression, the restriction of access to public space, on the other hand, invariably creates an atmosphere of repression whereby citizens' rights are usurped under the pretext of the welfare and security of the nation. Eventually, the protection and preservation of space itself becomes more important than the citizen who, as a result of such measures, finds himself/herself partaking in the pseudo protection of the space at the expense of his/her own rights and needs.

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<sup>2</sup> N.R. Fyfe - J. Bannister, 'City Watching: Closed Circuit Television Surveillance in Public Spaces', in *Area* 28 (1996), pp. 37-46.

<sup>3</sup> For more information on this topic see M. Davis, *The City of Quartz: Excavating the Future of Los Angeles*, Vintage, New York, 1990 and S. Zukin, *The Cultures of Cities*, Blackwell, Cambridge-Oxford, 1995.

For the past thirty years or more, Egypt has witnessed both subtle and blatant attempts to confiscate public space, and limit people's access to shared platforms that would foster a sense of communal life while retaining individual personal space. Such attempts were meant to restrict the coming together of citizens for fear that such congregations may initiate expressions of dissent against an authoritarian regime that has worked hard on separating people to disempower them, and, consequently, maintain control over them. The loss of civic sites for cultural and political expression, I would argue, not only created a sense of isolation where people ceased to be aware of the existence of fellow citizens who are just as entitled as they are to the same rights but perhaps, more importantly, it has led to the loss of the communal sense that unites people who live together and occupy the same space, and consequently to a loss of identity. In this essay, I discuss some of the initiatives undertaken to reclaim urban space in Egypt after the 25<sup>th</sup> January revolution through creative art projects that bring people together, and challenge the attempts of the state to confiscate voices of dissent by limiting their access to public spaces. I examine several of these projects, and focus on the example of *El Fan Midan* (Art is a Square), arguing that the ensuing struggle over reclaimed space is indicative of a deeper struggle between the old guards of the deposed regime and the new forces of change that strive to overcome the counter revolution.

In the few years leading up to the 25<sup>th</sup> January 2011 revolution, a number of cultural initiatives taking place in, and making use of, public space mainly in Cairo and other major cities became quite noticeable as a new phenomenon quite uncommon to the Egyptian landscape, and unfamiliar to its citizens. For the first time musical bands would be seen performing on the streets of Cairo. The soft rock band *Wust el Balad* (Downtown Cairo), for example, which was formed in 1999 by a group of young musicians started performing the popular songs of Sayed Darwish, the famous Alexandrian musician, on the streets of downtown Cairo. This was a very uncommon sight then. The band, which takes its name from the Cairo downtown area itself, was able to do so because of the recent renovation projects in Downtown Cairo, turning streets into pedestrian areas, and refurbishing buildings, shops, and restaurants that have long suffered from neglect and decline, and thereby creating an open-air museum accessible to ordinary people who visit downtown for business and

pleasure.<sup>4</sup> Other cultural initiatives which utilized public space back in 2007 was the inauguration of *El Korba* annual street festival in the old, prestigious district of Heliopolis. The modern day festival of street art and performances created a space for self-expression where, according to its organizers, the ‘common factor was the energy that filled the air, the smile on every face adult or a child’.<sup>5</sup>

In 2008, graffiti artist, Aya Tarek, would initiate the ‘Alex Street Art’ project with a group of young artists based in Alexandria ‘to build an organised Egyptian street-art movement’,<sup>6</sup> since in her own words the ‘majority of Egyptians have never been to an art gallery in their lives’.<sup>7</sup> She explains that ‘[a]rt should not be limited, it should be open to everyone, and so if Egyptians still fail to reach art, we will bring art to them, to a wall just around the corner’.<sup>8</sup>

Ahmed Abdallah would feature the initiative in his 2010 film *Microphone*, documenting the underground artistic and musical youth movement in Alexandria. Abdallah explains that *Microphone* was inspired by the graffiti on the walls facing the Alexandria ‘cornice’ which

Seemed to conjure up the image of a mental battle-expressed in writing and in drawing-between the street artists and their intended audiences. Some messages encouraged you to restrain yourself and use your head while others asked you to rebel.<sup>9</sup>

In spite of their different agendas and political orientation, these examples of cultural intervention attempted to infiltrate the blocked landscape of Egypt. While some were able to reach out to fellow citizens like *Wust el Balad* band who sang of ordinary people crossing paths daily in downtown Cairo, and so were able to connect with them, other examples were not so successful. *El Korba* festival, for

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<sup>4</sup> For further discussion on this point see ‘Alismaelia’, [www.al-ismaelia.com](http://www.al-ismaelia.com).

<sup>5</sup> ‘El Korba Festival 2007: Talk about Positive Energy’, in *Nermeena*, 17/3/2007, <https://nerro.wordpress.com/2007/03/17/el-korba-festival-2007-talk-about-positive-energy/> (access 2/12/2016).

<sup>6</sup> Heba Habib, ‘Vigilante Art - Graffiti in Egypt’, in *Ahramonline*, 1/11/2010, in <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/5/25/117/Arts--Culture/Visual-Art/Vigilante-art--Graffiti-in-Egypt.aspx> (access 2/12/2016).

<sup>7</sup> Habib, *Ahramonline*.

<sup>8</sup> *Ib.*

<sup>9</sup> An online interview with Ahmed Abdallah, the director of the film *Microphone* in <http://youtu.be/JL5Qg8JyEKg> (access 2/12/2016).

example, was perceived as creating an exclusive space that accommodates the gentrified and fails to connect with ordinary people, causing a wider rift in the Egyptian social fabric. Despite these differences in perspective though, it is interesting that most of these early initiatives to reclaim public space were undertaken by Egyptian youth.

In the wake of the Arab spring, public space emerged as a key player in the revolutions and uprisings that overtook the region. From Tahrir Square all the way to Pearl monument, Habib Bourgiba Avenue, Green Square, and Gezi Park, young people came together from all walks of life overcoming the fear that has kept them apart and reclaiming, in their own way, the very space from which they have been constantly pushed away, opening it up for fellow citizens who responded in turn by joining in, and lending their support. Art was certainly one of the tools they used to reclaim space. I argue that what has been dubbed as the cultural revolution which accompanied the 25<sup>th</sup> January 2011 revolution and manifested itself in overtaking, ‘occupying’, and manipulating urban space to enforce change, has in fact heralded the revolution rather than being its by-product. I’ve based this reading on Henri Lefebvre’s Marxist stance regarding urban revolution and the social production of space, where he maintains that any revolution is dependent upon an urban revolution and they both depend upon a revolution of everyday life. Lefebvre argues that ‘a revolution takes place when and only when, in such a society, people can no longer lead their everyday lives’.<sup>10</sup>

Aya Tarek’s graffiti initiative in Alexandria draws upon this notion when she explains her strategy in subverting state hegemony and making art available to everybody. She also makes the connection between physical and virtual public space as alternative and ‘alternating’ sites of resistance that lead to the reconfiguration of the meaning of public space and of activism.<sup>11</sup> Tarek explains that possibilities of transferring graffiti work to the virtual public space of various social media platforms allows for a different kind of exposure and interaction to take place.

In the following section, I will attempt to envision a working definition that takes into consideration Lefebvre’s idea of the urban

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<sup>10</sup> H. Lefebvre, *Everyday Life in the Modern World*, Athlone Press, London, 2000, p. 32.

<sup>11</sup> A. Tarek, *Words of Women from the Egyptian Revolution Episode 11*, <http://youtu.be/gI1sBiWaPhM> (access 30/11/2016).

revolution and Charles Landry's concept of the Creative City and offer a reading of the intersection of art and urban space in the context of the pre and post Egyptian revolution. In *The Production of Space*, Lefebvre explains that every city produces its own space, that space is a social product which affects spatial practices and perceptions, and 'serves as a tool of thought and of action'.<sup>12</sup> He argues that change cannot happen without changing the very space where it occurs, and that new social relations require in turn new space. The production of space he maintains is 'a means of control, and hence of domination, of power'.<sup>13</sup> We see this very clearly, as I explained above, in the way the state controls access to public space, whereby if people want to subvert this control, as in the case of Aya Tarek for example, they need to engage in the production of their own space.

Lefebvre argues further that urban reality cannot exist without a center, a gathering, or an encounter of the subjects and objects that exist within that space. Centrality therefore becomes crucial to political activism, since free dialogue ensues only when groups and classes 'succeed in meeting face to face',<sup>14</sup> achieving what the state tries to control at all costs.

Charles Landry in *The Creative City: A Toolkit for Urban Innovators* also emphasizes the importance of public space as a platform for citizens to meet, interact, and exchange ideas. He propagates the notion of increasing urban quality through what he calls 'soft creative infrastructure' which he defines as an 'overall mental infrastructure and mindset of the city. This is the way in which a city approaches opportunities and problems'.<sup>15</sup> This is different from hard infrastructure which is concerned with the construction of roads, houses, buildings, etc. The soft creative infrastructure instead highlights the innovative role of the city planner in creating such a space, and the collaborative nature of this process. This city, according to Landry, 'wants dynamic thinkers – creators as well as implementers as creativity is not only about having ideas, it is about making them happen too'.<sup>16</sup> Towards this end, Landry highlights five

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<sup>12</sup> H. Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, Blackwell, Oxford-Cambridge, 1991, p. 26.

<sup>13</sup> *Ib.*, p. 26.

<sup>14</sup> Lefebvre, *Everyday Life in the Modern World*, p. 185.

<sup>15</sup> C. Landry, *The Creative City: A Toolkit for Urban Innovators*, Comedia, London, 2000, p. xxiv.

<sup>16</sup> *Ib.*, p. xxiii.

key attributes which fashion the creative city of imagination: curiosity, imagination, creativity, innovation and invention. Based on Lefebvre and Landry's reading of urban space as a center for political, social and cultural interaction, art becomes a means of creating a rupture in the fabric of an otherwise confiscated public space with the aim of producing alternative sites, thus gaining power over the state. The creative city becomes a place where innovative citizens engage in the counter production of alternative public space relying on such attributes as outlined by Landry: curiosity, imagination, creativity, innovation, and invention. If we look back at the first eighteen days of the 25<sup>th</sup> January 2011 revolution, we see this manifested in the occupation of Tahrir square and its transformation into a makeshift creative city through graffiti work, street art, performances, concerts, etc. The newly forged space allowed citizens from different walks of life to come together face to face, and engage in creative and innovative expressions of dissent against the ruling regime. These peaceful expressions which called out for the downfall of the regime were more powerful and threatening than any violent encounter between the protestors and the security forces because they succeeded in subverting the power of the state.

The revitalized urban space which emerged after the first wave of the 25<sup>th</sup> January revolution, and the continued ability of the people to reclaim public places through independent creative initiatives was understood by the state as a strong political statement that had more power than violent demonstrations. In turn this ensued a struggle over the control of urban space. This was clear in the attempts to whitewash the graffiti work produced during the revolution, sometimes even layering it with state-directed messages to subvert the power of the original meaning of the work. Perhaps the most obvious example is the attempt to demolish the Mohamed Mahmoud graffiti work, which was not only a documentation of the atrocities of the regime but also a platform for political expression by those who did not necessarily engage in the artistic production of the graffiti, yet nevertheless found in the space a means for interacting and exchanging political views with fellow citizens.

Similarly, the 'No Wall' project was a creative attempt to subvert the erection of walls in downtown Cairo to block the streets leading to Tahrir Square. The walls were built by the army in 2012 to circumvent demonstrations, and prevent protesters from having access to the square. The 'No Wall' project was initiated by a group of artists who

engaged in the metaphorical removal of these state-erected walls by painting a series of landscapes on the slab blocks to open up the blocked streets and create an optic illusion whereby you can see a continuation of the street (see Morayef for a description of the project). As Mohamed El Moshir, one of the artists involved in the project, explains '[w]e're simply stating that the streets are open. And at the same time, we're telling a story'.<sup>17</sup> In doing this, the artists reclaim space in an innovative manner. They are documenting the different forms of aggression exercised against protesting voices, and also reaching out, at least symbolically, to the people who are trapped behind these walls, and who in many cases have limited access to their homes, their work, and daily activities. Most of these walls still stand but the encouraging images which created a sense of hope trying to keep alive the spirit of resistance have been removed by the state, leaving instead a blocked landscape.

'Coloring through Corruption', a social awareness campaign against corruption, is another example of the power of creativity to create a rupture in the fabric of an otherwise confiscated space that prevents people from coming together to discuss the issues and problems that concern them as fellow citizens sharing the same place. The campaign started with a group of artists who decided to paint walls, water pipes, plastic fences in different areas of Cairo and other cities in Egypt, to draw attention to the different forms of government corruption either by stealing people's money or by forfeiting its role in providing state services. Amr Nazeer, the leader of the group explains that:

We're not painting to make life pretty – on the contrary, this is our way of drawing your attention to the reality of the situation. The government is stealing your money... We're painting corruption to draw people's attention and then tell them our message.<sup>18</sup>

Indeed, seeing young people on the streets splashing bright color on decrepit, old, and crumbling walls, bridges, and public utilities draws attention to the idea of corruption which can be seen

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<sup>17</sup> M. El Dahshan, 'Art Conquers Walls in Cairo', in *Foreign Policy*, 19/3/2012, [foreignpolicy.com/2012/03/19/art-conquers-walls-in-cairo/](http://foreignpolicy.com/2012/03/19/art-conquers-walls-in-cairo/) (access 30/11/2016).

<sup>18</sup> 'Graffiti for a Social Cause: Zeft, Nazeer, Nemo and Mona Lisa Brigades', in *Suzeeinthecity*, 11/3/2013, <https://suzeeinthecity.wordpress.com/2013/03/11/graffiti-for-a-social-cause-zeft-nazeer-nemo-and-mona-lisa-brigades/> (access 30/11/2016).

everywhere in Egypt, '[c]orruption is black, brown, grey, devoid of color'.<sup>19</sup> To circumvent the success of the campaign though, the state has started its own efforts of, what it perceives as, beautifying Egypt. Interestingly, whitewashing graffiti, and sometimes substituting it with state-sponsored murals is part of its beautification plans for Egypt, and so is the arrest of artists who dare to voice their dissent in creative ways that appeal to the masses and therefore bring them together.

The struggle over who controls public urban space is particularly clear when it comes to the project of *El Fan Midan* (Art is a Square). The project was initiated in April 2011, two months after the ousting of Hosni Mubarak, a time when hopes were still high and the demands of the revolution, uppermost of which remains, freedom, human dignity, and social justice seemed to be an attainable dream. The Independent Culture Coalition, a group of artists from various mediums who work together to reshape the Egyptian cultural and artistic scene, and create more independent, free of state-control platforms, announced, and publicized, the first event of *El Fan Midan* as 'a cultural celebration in the squares and streets of Egypt'.<sup>20</sup> It was held on the first Saturday of every month in Midan Abdeen (Abdeen Square), and other squares in different cities in Egypt, seeking to establish a public cultural dialogue amongst people through sharing various forms of art, music, and theater. It was inaugurated in Midan Abdeen (Abdeen Square) which is located approximately one and a half mile south of Tahrir Square. The square takes its name from Abdeen palace which resides in the heart of the square with a public garden in front of it. The palace was constructed in 1863 by Khedive Ismail as part of his project to modernize Cairo. In 1874, the royal family moved to the palace, and the government headquarters, which had always been housed in the Citadel of Cairo where the Khedive resided, were also transferred to the palace. Eventually the area came to be recognized as downtown Cairo. The palace remained the seat of the government until 1952 when the military coup of the Free Officers brought an end to the monarchy, and Egypt became a republic.

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<sup>19</sup> 'Graffiti Artists Color Egypt's Soul-Crushing Corruption', *Green Prophet*, 16/4/2013, [www.greenprophet.com/2013/04/graffiti-artists-color-egypt-corruption/](http://www.greenprophet.com/2013/04/graffiti-artists-color-egypt-corruption/) (access 30/11/2016).

<sup>20</sup> D. Hamza - M. Heikal, 'Egyptians celebrate the revolution with street art', *Ahramonline*, 3/4/2011, <http://english.ahram.org/News/9211.aspx> (access 30/11/2016).

Since then, the palace has been recognized as one of the official presidential residences, and office of the president of Egypt. Since 1952, however, the palace has never been used as a presidential residence but as an official office particularly during Anwar Sadat's presidency, and also to accommodate visiting foreign dignitaries on official visits to Egypt. Ultimately this meant an increased limited access to the square as the security forces set up fences and barbed wire to control access to the place and prohibit citizens from venturing closer to the palace and the public garden. Historically, Abdeen Square, being the seat of the government, has been a site of protest since the end of the nineteenth century. From Aḥmad 'Urabi in 1881 to Sa'd Zaghlūl in 1919 to the 1952 events, were all protest movements that ended up at the gates of Abdeen palace demanding freedom and liberation from the Ottoman and British hegemony. Aḥmad 'Urabi, an Egyptian army officer, would give his infamous speech in front of the ruler of Egypt, Khedive Tawfīq (1879-1892), delivering his famous words '[o]ur mothers bore us free; we were not created as slaves to anybody'.

The choice of Abdeen Square, therefore, as a site for the inauguration of *El Fan Midan* is very significant because of its socio-historical and political context. Karima Mansour, one of the organizers of *El Fan Midan*, explains that the notion of space is integral to the initiative,

The choice of the street as space for performance is very important as there is a socio-political statement; we are reclaiming the street, and its meaning, freeing the art scene and voicing an opinion.<sup>21</sup>

*El Fan Midan* worked on developing the creative spirit which emerged out of Tahrir Square during the first eighteen days of the 25<sup>th</sup> January revolution, and promoting an artistic scene that is accessible to everybody. The initiative was perceived as a modern day festival, a much more inclusive version of *El Korba* festival referred to above. By reaching out to people living in the downtown area, *El Fan Midan* worked on decentralizing the cultural scene in Egypt as Mansour, explains:

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<sup>21</sup> 'El Fan Medan: Egypt Takes to the Streets for Culture & Fun', 5/5/2011, <http://www.cairo360.com/article/artsandculture/1899/el-fan-medan-egypt-takes-to-the-streets-for-culture-and-fun> (access 30/11/2016).

The festival aims to open up spaces for independent and underground artists to present their work, to recreate the relationship that once was between people and art... It's about re-appropriating the artistic space – art doesn't happen behind closed doors or in black boxes only.<sup>22</sup>

It is significant to observe that the organizers of *El Fan Midan* described the project as a festival that calls for a celebration, and designates families and young people as its audience. The idea of a festival recalls the rural experience of religious celebrations that take place in small villages and towns, and bring together communities of people living in nearby areas. In a religious festival, people experience various forms of artistic production that cater to the young and the old. The festivals are also participatory in nature, allowing for those who are interested in watching performances to do so, at the same time creating a space for those who wish to partake in the process of artistic production. These features were reproduced by *El Fan Midan* which was held on the first Saturday of every month in six different Egyptian cities: Cairo, Alexandria, Assuit, Port Said, Suez and Luxor. It included music performances, poetry recitals, art exhibitions, craft workshops, book fairs, and a market, and brought together people from different parts of the city.

In Cairo, for example, people living in Abdeen, a middle class area, would find themselves occupying the same space as people belonging to higher and lower social classes coming especially for the event. This is not easily realized at other times since the state works against the congregation of citizens. The emphasis, therefore, on Abdeen Square and other squares that host the event as places that accommodate both families and young people implies both a gender and a generational interaction amongst people in a tension-free space that fosters respect for the individual, and tolerance of different political, religious, and gender orientations.

The celebratory nature which characterized the early days of the project developed into an attempt to record and commemorate events arising from the unfolding political tension in Egypt. Many of the artists, poets, musicians, and singers whose first appearance was in Tahrir Square also continued to use *El Fan Midan* as a political platform to pursue an activist agenda, which in turn instigated a crack down from security forces. In April 2014, security forces in Alexandria dispersed a Saturday night concert that was hosted by *El*

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<sup>22</sup> *Ib.*

*Fan Midan* and arrested some of the attending political activists, organizers, and attendees. The order came from the Alexandria Security Directorate, claiming that the concert was organized without security permission. The arrestees were released after a report was filed against them. Significantly, the police officer at the station said that the name of the festival ‘aroused suspicions because of the word *midan*’.<sup>23</sup>

### Conclusion

The ongoing struggle of power between the state and the citizens over urban space can be read in light of Henri Lefebvre’s hypothesis as stated above of how every city produces its own space which ultimately affects spatial practices and perceptions, and, accordingly, serves as a tool of thought and of action.<sup>24</sup> The struggle indicates that the state is aware of the attempts of the citizens to reclaim public space, an act which Lefebvre considers a means of gaining control and power. At the same time the state is not ready to relinquish its control over what it continues to perceive as private property. Any congregation of citizens, therefore, is perceived by the state as a threat, an act of trespassing which it thinks it has the right and power to dissipate. Whether or not cultural initiatives like *El Fan Midan*, *No Wall*, *Coloring Through Corruption* and other creative projects are able to bring about change remains debatable since change, according to Lefebvre, cannot happen without changing the very space where it occurs. If such projects are unable to maintain their control over the reclaimed space, then change becomes problematic. In one of the last events of *El Fan Midan* in 2014 before it was stopped, one of the audience related the following scene at Abdeen Square: ‘Behind the stage were layers and layers of barbed wire, some sandbags and a large contingent of military force. They stood there, taking turns watching the crowd for signs of trouble. Soldiers farther back, standing near a row of tanks behind the palace gates, poked their heads between the bars to get a better view. One soldier started

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<sup>23</sup> S. O. Shoureap, ‘Al-Fan Midan street art festival shut down by security forces’, *The Cairo Post*, 8/4/2014, in <http://thecairopost.youm7.com/news/105596/news/al-fan-midan-street-art-festival-shut-down-by-security-forces> (access 30/11/2016).

<sup>24</sup> Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, p. 26.

dancing in place but snapped to attention when noticed'.<sup>25</sup> The winds of change are certainly in the air, a fact which the state is aware of, and tries its utmost to suppress.

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<sup>25</sup> S. Blakemore, 'Revolutionary Art Takes Over Abdeen Square', in *Masress*, <http://www.masress.com/en/dailynews/128796> (access 30/11/2016).

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# **The Victory of the Egyptian Vernacular in Egyptian Writings pre and post January 2011**

Loubna A. YOUSSEF

## **Abstract**

Is there change in modern Arabic/Egyptian writings pre and post the January 2011 revolution? Yes, there has been a good deal of it: the Arabic presses have been churning out heaps of material, and to sift through them for such trends may require research of a specialized and sustained nature. The alternative is to highlight one or two major trends, whether fully indicative of such change by themselves or not. This paper will therefore focus first on what I may call the language polemic, that is the clash between writing (and speaking, though only up to a point) in archaic Arabic (symptomatic of the religious discourse resurrected in the 1970s), and the local varieties of vernacular Arabic popularized, simultaneously, by the theatre and the soap operas, and the plethora of 'poetic' pieces published in the press and in individual volumes. The latter is hailed as the real language of the people. The second point this paper will deal with will shed light on the problem of feminist writing.

## **Introduction**

In January 2011 Egypt caught the attention of the world and the Egyptian revolution was televised far and wide. This paper will not take part in the debate about whether it was a revolution or not because the term revolution has come to be quite controversial. It is currently defined according to which major intellectuals are involved. In Egypt today there are two groups, one claiming that 25<sup>th</sup> January 2011 is a revolution in the sense that the wheel of fortune has turned forward (the literal sense of revolve); and the other insists that it is an uprising, almost impromptu. This paper adopts the position of the first group that highlights the change that occurred; and as long as there has been change, then it is a revolution. The two questions that will be raised are first, have Egyptian writers (essayists, dramatists, novelists, poets) inspired and predicted the January 2011 revolution? That is, was this revolution expected? Secondly, is there change in modern

Egyptian/Arabic writings pre and post the January 2011 revolution? The contention of this paper is to argue that yes, indeed, the revolution was in the air, and the writings before the revolution have been inspirational; and there is change that can be traced in both form and content in pre and post revolution writings.

During the two decades that preceded the revolution there was a great deal of discussion about the endless chronic problems in Egypt. After the revolution the Egyptian/Arabic presses have been churning out heaps of material. To sift through them to determine all the different trends may require research that is beyond the scope of a short paper. The alternative is to highlight two major trends that are indicative of predictions and change. This paper will, therefore, focus first on what I may call the language polemic, that is, the clash between writing (and speaking, though only up to a point) in archaic, outdated, old-fashioned Arabic (symptomatic of the religious discourse resurrected in the 1970s), and the local varieties of vernacular (dialect) Arabic popularized, simultaneously, by the theatre and the soap operas, and the plethora of 'poetic' pieces published in the press and in individual volumes. The latter is hailed as the real language of the people. The second point my paper will deal with is the problem of feminist writing. This is still a problem insofar as the majority of the Arabic reading public cannot fully accept that a woman's voice is worth listening to, especially if that voice is campaigning in an idiom drawn with 'specialized' terminology, less than transparently translated.

### **The first trend: verse vs prose**

#### *Verse*

In so far as the Arabic language is concerned, the gulf separating classical Arabic (in both its archaic and modern standard varieties) from the vernacular keeps widening. The 'consumerist' (generally commercial) culture of the fledging capitalism in Egypt, has established the vernacular as the language of advertising (which has witnessed a revolution as the billboards and the media clearly show, but this is not within the scope of this paper), and this variety is gaining ground everyday, so much as that verse written in it now rivals that written in modern classical Arabic. Here I will limit myself to two different Egyptian voices, one before and another after January 2011.

The first trend in writing verse emerged before 2011 and is identified by Mohamed Enani (Muḥammad 'Inānī/'Anānī, b. 1939),

the eminent scholar, dramatist and translator, through ‘Angry Voices’. In the third volume of the *Contemporary Arabic Literature Series* entitled *An Anthology of the New Arabic Poetry in Egypt*, Enani has translated a selection of poems from Arabic into English by the ‘second generation’ of Egyptian poets who followed the first generation, the ‘pioneers’, the ‘innovators’ who introduced the ‘New Poetry’ in the 1960s (Enani. *New Arabic Poetry in Egypt*, p. 11), namely Maḥmūd Sāmī al-Bārūdī (1838-1904), Aḥmad Shawqī (1868-1932), Ḥafīz Ibrāhīm (1872-1932), and others. Of this second generation, Enani starts with Salah Abdul-Saboor (Ṣalāḥ ‘Abd al-Ṣabūr, 1931-1981) who ‘wanted poetry to break free totally of order “imposed” on our vision by the tradition, to allow the poetic impulse to reign supreme and unbridled, so as to dictate “to the mind fresh modes of thought”’. (Enani. *New Arabic Poetry in Egypt*, p. 8) Enani argues convincingly that for Abdul-Saboor and others

The classical Arabic poem has ceased to provide a frame of reference, positive or negative: they neither accept it as a model nor consciously reject it for its classical poetics. From the collections published in 1984-1985 one is compelled to conclude that their frame of reference is the European poem, though not necessarily the “modernist” poem, initially made available through translation, but now primarily through the first generation of Arabic modernists. So, while it was possible in the case of Salah Abdul-Saboor to trace Eliotic influences in his verse drama or Yeatsian personae in his longer lyrics, it is now mainly the Abdul-Saboor poem itself that must be ultimately examined for influences on the younger generation.<sup>1</sup>

Examining the poems by the late Salah Abdul-Saboor to trace his influence on the third ‘younger generation’, as Enani suggests, provides evidence that Egyptian poetry written at the end of the twentieth century and at the beginning of the twenty first changed in form and content. This is not only evident in poems of the second generation by Salah Jaheen (Ṣalāḥ Jāhīn, 1930-1986), Amal Donqol (Amal Dunqul, 1940-1983), Mohammad Abu-Sinnah (Muḥammad Abū Sinna, b. 1937), Wafaa Wagdy (Wafā’ Wajdī d. 2011) and others in this volume, but in the ‘Angry Voices’ that followed and in the ‘voices’ that ‘celebrate the Arab Spring’. More often than not, they

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<sup>1</sup> M. Enani, *An Anthology of the New Arabic Poetry in Egypt*, General Egyptian Book Organization, Cairo, 2001, p. 12.

use the vernacular/Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) and address modern lyrical themes that deal with alienation, imagination, emotions, ‘the heartless city’, spiritual aridity, freedom, nationalism, political issues and more.

Many poets writing in Egypt nowadays, who use the vernacular/MSA, believe that this language is more in tune with their feelings and ideas; and poetry written in this form of language is better received by the Egyptian/Arab audience. This group of poets started writing before January 2011 and they were quite revolutionary. In 2001, Enani selects poems by eighteen young Egyptian poets, translates them into English and publishes them in volume sixty-five of the *Contemporary Arabic Literature Series* entitled *Angry Voices: An Anthology of the Off-Beat Arabic Poetry of the 1990s in Egypt*. With the captivating and provoking title *Angry Voices*, Enani is ringing a warning bell and publicizing that a volcano is about to erupt.

This first trend also includes poets who wrote after the January 2011 revolution. Most of the poetry celebrating what is known as the Arab Spring by poets of different generations like Ahmed Fouad Negm (Aḥmad Fu’ād Najm 1929-2013), Abdel-Rahman Elabnoudy (‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-‘Abnūdī, 1938-2015), Sayed Hegab (Sayyid Ḥijāb, b. 1940) and Amin Haddad (Amīn Ḥaddād, b. 1956) (Eskenderella) is written in the vernacular, and a new critical trend is emerging to regard that poetry, and the rhyming slogans chanted in popular rallies, demonstrations and in graffiti, as ‘received’ literature or even canonical. The Egyptian ‘*ammiya*’ poet Sayed Hegab is prolific and profuse in writing in the Egyptian dialect – to the point of contributing *Yawmeyat* (Diary) in prose, a major column in one of the most popular daily newspapers, *Al-Akḥbār* (The News). Not only does he write verse in the Egyptian dialect, but early in August 2014 he declared that he is using the Egyptian language which he regards as fit for poetry. He went on defending the colloquial Egyptian Arabic as the ‘genuine’ language of the Egyptians.

Amin Haddad, who wrote an anthology of poems with paintings of scenes from the revolution by Samir Fouad (Samīr Fu’ād) entitled *From the Homeland to Heaven*, created a very popular group, Eskenderella, that sang/performed his poetry wherever they were invited: in the Medan (Tahrir Square), in the Cairo Opera House, at Cairo University, etc. This volume of poetry by Amin Haddad is dedicated to ‘The People of Egypt: They always prove that myths are real’. Of Amin Haddad’s generation, Bahā’ Jāhīn has made history by

publishing a poem in Egyptian Arabic on the front page of *Al-Ahrām* no less. The significance of this move can be better appreciated when we remember that only Aḥmad Shawqī, the master craftsman of Arabic poetry, had the right to such pride of place in *Al-Ahrām*. It is paradoxical that at a time when there is so much talk about the Arab nation, the historical weight of the Arabic language in its classical form/tradition that a relatively young poet should occupy the position of the major symbol of Arabic tradition. This tendency culminated in Abdel-Rahman El-Abnoudy's magnificent *murabba'āt* (quartets/quatrains) in order to distinguish it from Salah Jahin's *rub'ayyāt* although both terms refer to a four-line stanza with varied rhyme schemes. Elabnoudy's *murabba'āt* show that there has been a change in the traditional form of popular verse. In the traditional poem, there are two hemistichs, each having two units, namely distichs which in turn have two monostichs. Instead of a having a long slow rhythm, مستفعلٌ فاعلٌ (a hemistich with two units, each having two feet that are different, one long and the other short) repeated four times in the line, two times in each distich, creating a long rhythm like Salah Jahin's, Elabnoudy has a single major foot followed by two minor feet: مستفعلٌ فاعلٌ فاعلٌ.

This is a point that I am highlighting because it provides evidence that the nature of Arabic is about to change; instead of the loud, slow, balanced movement of the typical Arabic line of verse, we now have vivacity, quickness in tempo and the hitherto unknown quality of reaching the audience instantly. Here are two samples, one by Salah Jahin and the other by Alabnoudy. The first one by Jahin is translated by Nehad Salem (Nihād Sālim) (43) and the second by Al-Abnoudy is translated by Mohamed Enani.

اقلع غمالك ياتور وارفض تلف  
اكسر تروس الساقية واشتم وتف  
قال بس خطوة كمان.. وخطوة كمان..  
يا اوصل نهاية السكة يا البير يجف!

Throw off your blindfold, Bull! Refuse to go!  
Break the cogs of the waterwheel, spit in our eye!  
The bull said with a sigh: 'One more step, or so,  
Either I reach the end, or the well will dry.

As far back as the 1980s, the late Salah Jahin, Egypt's best known cartoonist and poet of the vernacular, was addressing the Egyptians

who are blindfolded, urging them to 'Refuse to go!' The scene of a blindfolded bull is familiar in both rural and urban Egypt, but what is not familiar is the 'refusing to go, breaking the cogs of the waterwheel, the spitting in the eyes of those who deserve this'. The bull has a voice and warns that 'the well will dry', a nightmare for any Egyptian farmer. In his comment on the translation of this quatrain in his 'Introduction' to his translation of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, Mohamed Enani applauds the translator for adding 'with a sigh' in the English translation because this addition makes up for the difference between what the bull alludes to in Arabic and how this English does not convey the same allusion (19).

As for Alabnoudy's, he said:

السُّلْطَةُ تَعْرِي ... وَتَعْرِي  
لذِيذَةَ بِنْتِ اللّٰذِيْنَ  
أول يومين تمشي دوغري  
تالت يوم تنبيع المدينة!!

اللي يقولوا: 'السلف تلف'  
ناس حاقدة وأحدة ع الإستكانة  
إحنا اقتصادنا-ولينا الشرف--  
نُصُّهُ استدانة-وُنُصُّهُ إعانة!!

Look how tempting is that power,  
How delicious at every hour,  
For a day or two go straight, go gritty,  
But on the third, sell the city.

Those who advise you 'gainst credit',  
Are just submissive and sour;  
For our economy, is such an honour,  
Lives partly on aid, partly on credit.

In these two short quatrains, Alabnoudy is not only alluding to those who desire, gain and abuse political power, but is critical and cynical about the people who accept those in power and the dysfunction and lack of productivity of the nation. In both Jahin and Alabnoudy, the humour, the reference to problems that ought to be addressed, and the insinuations that power is corrupt convey an indirect message that a revolution is inevitable. The two dominant images in Jahin are first, the blindfolded bull that should make use of its eyesight or vision in

order to break loose and free itself; and second, the well that will dry if the bull remains blindfolded. In the translation, the word 'Bull' is capitalized to hint that this is a proper noun, and therefore a reference to every one of us. In Alabnoudy, the central image is of power, but power that will 'sell the city'.

The voices that celebrate the Egyptian 2011 revolution started off by having an altogether different tone. When Mubarak stepped down, there was hope that a new era will prevail. Individual poets and groups of young writers and singers conveyed the hope that the Egyptians have regained their country and that Egypt will be leading the Arabs to democracy, development and enlightenment. The poems 'Al-Medan' by Alabnoudy and 'A Bird's-Eye View of Medan El-Tahrir' by Hesham Elgokh (Hishām al-Jakh) were recited in Medan El-Tahrir (Maydān al-Tahrīr) and heard on the Egyptian TV and Radio as well as in different Arab cities to create a positive image of the Egypt that they are witnessing and the glorious future they expect. Aziz El-Shaf'ie ('Azīz al-Shāfi'ī) who wrote the lyrics of the song 'Oh, My Country' gave the martyr a voice. This song that became regarded by Egyptians as the 'song of the revolution' brings tears to the eyes of listeners whenever it is sung or heard years after it was first sung. Amin Haddad and his popular group, Eskenderella, and The Choir Project (مشروع كورال) lead by Salam Yousry sing/perform poetry that attracts enthusiastic audiences.

### *Prose*

I have so far focused on poetry, but the vernacular has been struggling to prove itself as a literary language outside poetry as well. The so-called popular tradition in Arabic is mainly in poetry, with the exception of course of *A Thousand and One Nights* which fuses classical Arabic with especially Egyptian vernacular, as the *Nights* was written or compiled in Egypt sometime in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The poetry in the *Nights* is interesting as it represents the first ever attempt to weld classical and local varieties of Arabic together.

As mentioned earlier, the Egyptian/Arabic presses have produced heaps of material after the revolution. For the purpose of this short paper, I will shed light on three observations that will unfortunately sound like sweeping generalizations. The first has to do with a group who writes reflections: some of these are admirable because they write short articles that are focused and use punctuation, an unfamiliar practice for writers in Arabic (like Rola Gharsa, the Egyptian Newton

and others). The members of the second group write with the purpose of sending direct messages to those in power, and a third group of journalists who are posing as discriminating critics (like Magda El-Gendi, Sanaa Al-Baisy, Safeya Amin, Dina Eryan, and others) worse still, are writing prose in a language best described as ‘motley’ – with patches of classical, archaic, modern standard and colloquial – and calling it poetry. A. El-Deeb writes Arabic in the same style that al-Manfalūṭī (1876-1924) adopted. As if to redress the balance some Arab countries have totally banned all writing (poetry in particular) in the vernacular. The United Arab Emirates now hold an annual competition for the best poet who writes in classical Arabic, in Dubai, and the winner is crowned as ‘Prince of the Poets’ (presumably with a financial reward to go with the title). In Syria and Iraq, that is, until before the recent upheavals (2003-2017) have had no regard at all for anything not written in classical Arabic. The Arabian Peninsula is a little more liberal in this regard, following the strange case of Egypt.

So far as one can tell, the varieties one reads (or are imposed on one’s consciousness by the media and the sign boards) amount to nothing more than chaotic ‘overflowing’ of feelings and ideas, lacking the ‘order’ one normally associates with art, unless one accepts Morse Peckham’s view that all art represents ‘a rage for chaos’, not otherwise. He said, ‘Art is the exposure to the tensions and problems of the false world such that man may endure exposing himself to the tensions and problems of the real world’.<sup>2</sup> As for the slogans of the protestors that show humour and ingenuity:

إرحل يعني – Go!

فاهم والا؟ – No?

الشعب يريد اسقاط النظام – The people want the fall of the regime

and the graffiti that uses the walls of cities and towns to give a voice to the voiceless, these are now recorded in many volumes that deserve in depth studies. Although by its very nature, graffiti is an artistic expression that does not last because it can be easily erased, the graffiti of the waves of the Egyptian revolution have been saved through the use of the camera. The graffiti played the role of an alternate media, launching campaigns concerning martyrdom, random imprisonment, Maspero and Muslim/Christian conflict, civil

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<sup>2</sup> Enani, *An Anthology of the New Arabic Poetry in Egypt*, p. 12.

disobedience, the role of the Ministry of Interior and SCAF, etc. It turned the city into an open museum that exhibits art that cannot be sold or bought.

Decades before the January 2011 revolution, the Egyptian identity and consciousness were shaped by the works of Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm (1898-1987), Naguib (Najīb) Maḥfūz (1911-2006), Abdel-Rahman El-Sharkawy (‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sharqāwī, 1920-1987), Youssef Idris (Yūsuf Idrīs, 1927-1991) and others. Those who do not read (and this is the majority of the Egyptian population) were exposed to the ideas of these writers through the adaptation of their works into films. Those who read were affected by these writers and produced works of their own, like Bahaa Taher (Bahā’ Ṭāhir, b. 1935), Sonallah Ibrahim (Ṣun‘ Allāh Ibrāhīm, b. 1937), Khairy Shalaby (Khayrī Shalabī, 1938-2011), Ibrahim Aslan (Ibrāhīm Aṣlān b. 1935), Alaa Alaswany (‘Alā’ al-Aswānī, b. 1957) and others. Intellectuals rather than young common readers, however, read these writers. It is during the two decades that preceded the revolution that the Egyptian market was flooded with both fiction and nonfiction books in the vernacular that have had a very wide reading public. These works that cover different genres are groundbreaking in both form and content and provide evidence that a revolution is in the air. Writers in their forties have become quite famous, attracting a young audience that was never interested in reading. Essam Youssef and Ashraf Al‘ashmawy, among others, have captured the hearts and mind of readers because they wrote in a language these young people can identify with and they both focused on taboos that were not touched upon before. They also gave voice to the voiceless.

In Essam Youssef’s Arabic novel *Rob’ Gram* (2008) (translated into English as *A ¼ Gram* in 2009) the drug addict has a voice for the first time in Arabic literature. ‘The novel sheds light on education, love-life, ‘*wrfī* marriage, drafting, family life, friendship, leisure, growing up, faith, infidelity and relations between Muslims and Christians (Salah and Ameer, his roommate in the rehabilitation center)’.<sup>3</sup> In Essam Youssef’s *The Good Cup and the Bad Cup* (2013) the corruption in the Egyptian society is exposed. *The Good Cup and the Bad Cup* is a narrative that portrays a real-to-life good cup, but

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<sup>3</sup> O. Khalifa - L. A. Youssef, ‘Junkies on the Nile: Can the Translator of *A ¼ Gram* be Invisible?’, in L. Youssef (ed.), *Eminent Scholars IV: Essays in Language and Literature in Honour of Mohamed Enani*, Cairo University Center for Languages and Professional Translation, Cairo, 2012, p. 302.

provides evidence that when the life of a police officer who has integrity gets entangled with another who is evil and corrupt, the good cup finds himself determined to use all his resources (official and unofficial) to take revenge. And the question is does this make the good cup evil? Such an interesting question and many others can also be asked about *The Barman* by Ashraf Al'ashmawy and *Taxi* (2006) by Khaled Al-Khamissy (Khālid al-Khamissī, b. 1962). Although these works have been read by millions, they are not eligible for national prizes because the writers use the vernacular. Despite the fact that these works discuss extremely serious problems in society (namely drug addiction, political, social or economic problems) the element of humour is prevalent and dominant, rendering them informative and entertaining. The sales of these books show that the Egyptian readership is growing and the reading public welcome works that are true to life and portray the marginalized.

Why am I shedding light on these works and this new group of young readers? My claim is these are the young readers who led the January revolution. For a long time the young people of Egypt had no hope that change will come about. They had no voice and were not aware of the power they had over their parents and the adult population of our country. It is books like *A ¼ Gram* and *Taxi* that created an awareness that the young have courage and energy and can make a difference. In a paper on 'Balāgha or Rhetoric: The Language of the Tahrir Square Revolution', I argue that although all the main characters of *A ¼ Gram* are addicts, the writer portrays them as 'well bred and worthy of respect' (23). In this paper, with reference to Hatem, one of the recovering addicts who goes through the Narcotics Anonymous Program in Egypt, I quote an extract by Hatem and argue that

With no illusions about himself, Hatem reflects on his condition as an addict, and makes a general statement about Egyptians that is funny and wise. In addition to being witty, this extract is critical of the streets of Cairo, the tension people are suffering from, and the need for a solution, namely to subject the Egyptians to a rehabilitation Program. The imagery of madness, of a circus and a war are apt in alluding to the many layers of problems that prevail. The protestors in Tahrir exhibit a similar kind of humor and wisdom. (24)

During the January revolution, the young people of Egypt discover that they can in fact do what their parents have been unable to do. There are endless stories about parents trying to forbid their children

from going to Tahrir (and similar squares everywhere in Egypt), but when the parents could not stop their children, they joined them. Although the characters in *A ¼ Gram* are drug addicts and those in *Taxi* are taxi drivers and users, the language and humor in both echoes the language and humor of the revolution.

Another relevant and interesting work, a play directed by Khaled Galal and entitled 'Black Coffee' in 2009 (available on Youtube), also attracted a large audience. The students of The Center for Creativity at the Higher Council for Culture located in the Cairo Opera House produced this humorous, satirical, witty play to criticize the ills of the Egyptian society. The title, which is a reference to the tradition of drinking black coffee in funerals when Egyptians go to pay their condolences, and the characters who are dressed in black indicate that Egypt is in mourning and there is a sense of loss that pervades the country. The characters hold cups to drink black coffee after every one of the problems is alluded to imply the death of morality. The first problem they address echoes George Orwell's claim that 'Our civilization is decadent and our language – so the argument runs – must inevitably share in the general collapse'.<sup>4</sup> The characters proceed to refer to problems related to businessmen, spinsterhood, a war without end, ugliness, inflation, ignorance, illegal immigration and more.

Be that as it may, the real source of polemic is to be found in the competing religious discourse, which hardly ever departs from archaic Arabic. It is to be heard at its loudest on Fridays during the *khutba* for the noon prayers, when the Imams use it with its strident tones, absolutist doctrines, in their homilies; more often than not loud speakers are used, so that passers-by feel they are listening to a shouting contest. The result is, obviously, that ordinary mosque-goers cannot concentrate on the sense of the words, only recognizing Qur'anic verses and, occasionally, prophetic traditions. The rest consists in most cases of independent interpretations of some of the tenets of Islam to which the mosque-goers listen without concentration, realizing that they have to go through this experience as part of the Friday prayer ritual. When at the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty first charismatic preachers – like Amr Khaled ('Amr Khālid) and Khaled Elgindy (Khālid al-Jindī)

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<sup>4</sup> G. Orwell, 'Politics and the English Language', in W. Lutz - H. Brent (eds.), *The Critical Reader*, Harper and Row, New York, 1990, p. 374.

and a group belonging to a younger generation like Mustafa Hosny (Muṣṭafā al-Ḥusnī), Mo'ez Mas'oud (Mu'izz Mas'ūd) – who have different credentials appeared as public speakers in mosques and on TV, these posed a threat to the Mubarak regime and were not allowed (as far as I know) to deliver the homilies on Friday. They raised debate in Egypt about the role and impact of the 'new' religious discourse especially on the youth.

Although these religious preachers speak in Modern Standard Arabic (MSA), and appear on TV and in talk shows, they are perpetually tied up to the idiom of archaic language. Their religious discourse is tied up to classical Arabic. They quote the Qur'an and consult the explanations of Ibn Kathīr, Al-Qurṭubī and al-Zamakhsharī. The late Sheikh Metwally Al-Sha'rawy (al-Sha'rāwī) is different from the three mentioned above, Amr Khaled, Khaled Elgindy and Mo'ez Mas'oud, because he built his charisma gradually through the common trick/device of having a captive audience, mainly the congregation in the mosque where he preached. Anyone preaching to the converts is guaranteed a positive response. His method and specific attraction involved tapping his linguistic and literary resources in adding glamor to verses hitherto taken for granted. Here is an example:

فسق: اصلها خروج القشرة من البلح الرطب.  
هذا يبرر استخدام الفسوق علي انه الخروج من درع الايمان مثل البلح

The date is pressed by the eater to take it out of its skin. Sheikh Al-Sha'rawy applies this concrete image to all uses of the verb فسق that is getting out of the protective armor of faith.

What has this to do with writing, one may very well ask. Well, when one listens to a language one hardly knows, or with thoughts 'voyaging' elsewhere, can that language be used as a medium for a truly aesthetic experience of poetry and/or fiction? I believe this is rather unlikely, and most of the verse written in the manner of the 'ancients', that is, basically using that language, has come to represent an almost 'specialized' (subjective) experience. The ideas of the 'ancients' are enjoyable because they were once fresh and vigorous, but today they are simply 'reliques' of ancient poetry, such as those compiled by Bishop Percy in the 18<sup>th</sup> century in England. In Egypt nowadays we have two groups of contemporary writers of the 'ancient' verse; one is composed of graduates of Dār al-'ulūm (House

of Knowledge) like Abdel-Latif Abdel-Halim (‘Abd al-Laṭīf ‘Abd-al-Ḥalīm), Ahmed Ghorab (Aḥmad Ghurāb), Mohamed Tohamy and others, and the other is composed of journalists publishing their verse in the Egyptian daily newspaper *Al-Ahrām*, like Farouq Shoosha, Farouq Guwaida, Mohamed Bahgat, Bahā’ Jāhīn, Atef Alnimr, Mostafa Abdel-Ghani and others. Though few, they are powerful and influential because they publish their verse in daily nationals and in collections, expatiate on their merits in the media but there are no appreciative ‘receivers’ outside the circles of the poets themselves.

### **Feminist Writing**

The second trend that ought to be mentioned is feminist writing especially that 2014 (<http://arablit.wordpress.com/2014/01/23/the-year-of-reading-arab-women/>) has been declared as The Year of Reading Arab Women. This genre will be found to suffer from a similar rift to the one addressing the language used in writing and in religious discourse. Writers on feminism are mostly academicians who are deeply influenced by the major figures of feminist thought worldwide. Women writers like Fathia Al-‘Assal (Fatīḥa al-‘Asāl, 1933-2014), Radwa ‘Ashour (Raḍwā ‘Āshūr, 1946-2014), Lamis Gaber (Lamīs Jābir), Nawal Al-Sa‘dawy (Nawāl al-Sa‘dāwī b. 1931), Salwa Bakr (b. 1949), Azza Badr (and journalists like Hala Al-‘Essawy and Maha Abdel-Fattah to give but two examples) and others, appear to provide the required material to substantiate the feminist claim that women are no less talented writers than men, and that they can make their own voice heard. At present, a writer like Nawal Al-Sa‘dawy publishes in *Al-Ahrām*. She would attempt an ideological narrative replete with idioms drawn from ultra modern theories such as the subalternity of the female voice within the patriarchal cacophony of society. Such a style is designed to impress dealers in theory, from critical theory, through feminism, through modernism. As published in *Al-Ahrām*, such an impressive style, however abstruse (obscure, perplexing, highbrow, profound), could not be expected to be welcome by the common male reader. The typical Arab male reader is brought up to expect a mellower style and a sweeter feeling from his female counterpart: he would be puzzled, to say the least, to read such a narrative from a woman, however learned.

But the thrust of the feminist onslaught on the patriarchal society and the discourse of male power seems to be to transplant in a Muslim

country ideas developed in a largely 'free-thinking' society, a permissive society, or a society that has long separated the state from religion. In certain cases, women influenced by feminist ideas have found it difficult to espouse their acquired feminist principles to the deep-rooted religious feelings, which (in Islam as well as in Christianity) seem to make the husband lord and master. Feminist writings are often seen as an amusing novelty, condescendingly accepted by some men, but passed over by most.

While in poetry the rift is primarily linguistic, the rift here is primarily cultural. But I believe the two phenomena can be approached together as indicating a 'crisis' in Arabic culture. I use the word 'crisis' guardedly as I have noticed that whenever you try to combine the two sides (poetry and feminist writing) of each dilemma, you end up with more questions than answers. For instance, if you try to envisage a 'third language', as Tawfiq al-Ḥakīm has done, that is a language in-between Modern Standard Arabic and the Egyptian vernacular, you will end up facing the ancient variety, the archaic language of the religious sermons with which the people are bombarded continually. It is true there are many voices calling for the need for a different/new Islamic discourse, and there are a few who have already adopted a sensible attitude reflected in both tone and content namely the late Sheikh Al-Sha'rawy and Ghazali (al-Ghazālī) and Amr Khaled, Khaled Elindi, Mo'ez Masoud, but they are still a minority. As for the contemporary novelist, s/he is still judged by his level of language and may be discarded if he departs too much from Modern Standard Arabic.

The same applies to feminism as an advocated principle and as discourse, to be found in the writings of women themselves: whenever you try to strike a balance between the so-called liberation of women and their subalternity to men, you will meet with resistance both from men (naturally) and from women who believe that they can have in being only 'second in command' pleasure enough. As the famous play says 'what every woman knows' is the art of actually controlling men by pretending to be controlled by them.

In conclusion, attempts to produce worthwhile studies of the current linguistic rift in the new writings in Arabic have been made on the basis of the linguistic studies made in the west; but the difference is vast between our rift and any comparable rift in western languages. What is needed is not a linguistic effort but a critical approach capable of gauging the effect of each language variety on the reading public,

especially now the internet is proving to be a major player, exhibiting many facets of the current rift.

Every Egyptian revolution over the last century or so was characterized by its quintessential Arabic tone, that is, Arabic as the language of our history, tradition, and even identity. The resurrection of the Arabic nation was inevitably associated with the reader of the classical Arabic tradition: the major poets tried to revise the ancient Arabic poetry: Shawqī, Ḥāfiẓ, al-Bārūdī, ‘Alī al-Jārim, etc. They saw themselves as the heirs of the great Arabic tradition reinforced by the establishment in the 1930s of the Arabic Language Academy. The progress towards modernity never felt to clash with the classical Arabic tradition: The Apollo School of the 1930s, the Revival of the 1940s and 50s still relied on Pan Arabism with its bulwark (fortification, defense) of the classical language. During the revolutions (from ‘Urabi 1882, 1919, to 1952 until 25<sup>th</sup> January 2011), Egyptian Arabic was reborn, thanks to the new media where people can use any language they want, with official organs (official government documents or documents speaking for the government) of the state being relegated to a secondary position.

In preparing for the talk that developed into this paper, I felt I have been trying to recreate the spirit in Medan El-Tahrir in words. This is beyond me because what happened then was unprecedented. There was what Radwa Ashour calls ‘Collective Energy’ that was magical. Even Bakhtin’s image of a carnival does not help. There was laughter and tears; there was a bond between rich and poor, educated and illiterate, Muslim and Christian, young and old. The flag of Egypt brought everyone together, but we are now aware that the path ahead is long and unclear, but there is a spirit of hope. ‘Hope cannot be destroyed’ as Bill Ashcroft said in the Comparative Literature conference at Cairo University in 2012. As has become clear, much has been written about the revolution in verse and prose. But being a believer that the best writing is a ‘spontaneous overflow of powerful emotions recollected in tranquility’, a great deal will be written when Egyptians enjoy a state of ‘tranquility’.

## Appendix I

### *A Bird's-Eye View of Medan El-Tahrir* Hesham Elgokh

مشهد رأسي من ميدان التحرير

خبئ قصائدك القديمة كلها  
مزق دفاترك القديمة كلها  
واكتب لمصر اليوم شعرا مثلها  
خبئ دفاترك القديمة كلها  
واكتب لمصر اليوم شعرا مثلها  
لا صمت بعد اليوم يفرض خوفه فاكتب سلاما نيل مصر وأهلها  
عينك أجمل طفلتين تقرران بأن هذا الخوف ماض وانتهي  
كانت تداعبنا الشوارع بالبرودة والسقيع ولم نفسر وقتها  
كنا ندفي بعضنا في بعضنا ونراك تبتسمين ننسي بردها  
وإذا غضبت كشفت عن وجهها وحيأؤنا بأبي يدنس وجهها  
لا تتركهم يخبروك بأنني متمرد خان الأمانة أوسها  
لا تتركهم يخبروك بأنني أصبحت شيئا تافها وموجها  
فأنا ابن بطنك وابن بطنك من أراد ومن أقال ومن أقر ومن نهي  
صمتت فلول الخائفين بجبنهم وجموع من عشقوك قالت قولها

Hide all your old poems,  
Tear up all your old copybooks,  
Today, write for Egypt the poetry that Egypt deserves.  
Hide all your old copybooks,  
Today, write for Egypt the poetry that Egypt deserves.  
As of today, no silence will oppress us because of fear;  
Write a peaceful prayer for Egypt's Nile and people.  
The beauty of your two eyes, like two beautiful girls, affirms the end of fear,  
forever.  
In the bitter cold the streets playfully flirted with us, but, then, we could not  
understand,  
We warmed up one another and forgot the cold when we saw your smile,  
And when you were angry, we saw it in your face, and would not dare tarnish your  
image.  
Let them not tell you that I'm a rebel who betrayed you or forgot my oath,  
Let them not tell you that I've become petty and misguided,  
I'm the son you bore, the son you bore who wants, dismisses, decides, and prohibits.  
Silent, the cowards are terrified, and the masses that cherish you have made their  
statement. (My translation)<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> The poem 'Al Medan' by Alabnoudy is recited by the poet himself and can be heard on youtube: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fk\\_HJmPRelQ&feature=share](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fk_HJmPRelQ&feature=share) (access 2/12/2016).

## Appendix II

*Oh, My Country*

Aziz El-Shaf'ie

Sung by Ramy Gamal and Aziz El-Shaf'ie

يا بلادي يا بلادي  
يا بلادي يا بلادي، أنا باحبك يا بلادي  
يا بلادي يا بلادي، أنا باحبك يا بلادي  
قولوا لأمي ماتز عليش، وحياتي عندك ماتعيطيش  
قولولها معلش يأمي، أموت أموت وبلدنا تعيش  
أمانه تيسولي ايديها وتسلمولي علي بلادي

يا بلادي يا بلادي، أنا باحبك يا بلادي  
يا بلادي يا بلادي، أنا باحبك يا بلادي

في جسمي نار ورصاص وحديد  
علمك في ايدي واسمي شهيد  
بودع الدنيا وشابفك  
يا مصر حلوه ولايسه جديد  
لأحر نفس في بانادي  
باموت وأنا باحب بلادي

يا بلادي يا بلادي، أنا باحبك يا بلادي  
يا بلادي يا بلادي، أنا باحبك يا بلادي

طايرين ملايكة حوليا طير  
لحظة فراقك يا حبيبتي غير  
هامش معاهم وهسيبك  
واشوف يامصر وشك بخير  
قالولي يال ع الجنه  
قتلهم الجنه بلادي

يا بلادي يا بلادي، أنا باحبك يا بلادي  
يا بلادي يا بلادي، أنا باحبك يا بلادي<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> The poem can be heard on youtube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=btXZMh5tHDA> (access 2/12/2016).

Oh, my country, oh, my country, I love you my country  
 Oh, my country, oh, my country, I love you my country.

Tell my mom not to be sad; by my life, do not cry;  
 Tell her 'I am sorry, mom, I will die again and again,  
 And may our country live on.'  
 Promise to kiss her hands for me, and give my country my greetings.  
 Chorus

There is fire, shots, and bullets in my body;  
 Your flag is in my hand and I am now a martyr,  
 I have bid the world farewell and can see you  
 Beautiful, in your new dress;  
 With my last breath I proclaim as I die, I love my country.  
 Chorus

Angels are flying all around me,  
 The moment to say good bye my love has come, like no other,  
 I'm going with them and will have to leave you,  
 And let me wish you well, Egypt.  
 They said, 'Let's go to heaven'. I said 'My country is heaven.'  
 Chorus

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# Égalité de genre au Maroc après 2011 ? Les droits sexuels et reproductifs au centre des récentes luttes de reconnaissance

Sara BORRILLO

## Abstract

This paper explores some discourses and actions oriented to a new conception of the women's body and the individual liberties that some social Moroccan actors put in place after 2011. On the one hand, it analyzes the impact of social and political activism in urban contexts on the recognition of the formal equality between women and men. On the other hand, it points out the importance of sexual rights in the debates about the gender equality and the 'right to have rights'. In particular, through the analysis of some political and artistic experiences in Moroccan civil society, it demonstrates the emergence and the importance of gender issues and sexual rights in the struggles for the 'rights to recognition'. On what basis, against what resistances and within what perspective is it possible to imagine a renewed conception of the female body as an essential axis of the construction of gender equality after 2011 in Morocco?

## Introduction

Au Maroc, une danseuse est une prostituée.<sup>1</sup> Une femme en minijupe est une prostituée. Une femme qui habite seule et qui n'est pas mariée est une prostituée. Au Maroc, on ressent cela. On vit cela. Et moi, je ne peux pas vivre de façon indépendante comme j'aimerais, car ma famille – qui fait partie de cette société – ne me le permet pas. Car cette société considère la femme et son corps comme une honte, comme quelque chose à cacher, comme une *'awra*. Par exemple, ma mère me dit : « Meriem, ma fille, ne sors pas en minijupe : tu es encore trop jeune ». Et je lui réponds : « Ok, maman ». Et quand je serai mariée, mon mari me dira très probablement : « Meriem, ma femme, ne sors pas en minijupe, sinon tous les autres hommes vont te regarder et ça c'est un manque de respect envers moi ». Et moi je lui

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<sup>1</sup> Je remercie vivement Catherine Errafi et Gaëlle Gillot pour leurs précieux commentaires à cette étude.

dirai : « Ok, mon mari ». Si mon mari meurt et que je me retrouve veuve, j'aurai envie de sortir en minijupe et ma voisine me dira : « Meriem, ne sors pas en minijupe, ton mari vient de mourir ». Et moi je lui dirai : « Ok, ma voisine ». Mais alors : Quand est-ce que je pourrai mettre cette minijupe ?! Quand on est jeune et belle on a l'énergie et l'envie de s'exposer et montrer son corps, mais cette énergie reste en toi, en toi, et un jour tout d'un coup, elle fait boom ! C'est cela être femme au Maroc...<sup>2</sup>

Meriem Bouslama a 26 ans et elle est originaire de Salé, où elle habite avec ses parents, deux professeurs du secondaire de la classe moyenne. Sa sœur Zaïnab, ingénieure d'État, a été activiste dans l'Association marocaine des droits de l'homme (AMDH). Avec elle et grâce à elle, Meriem a milité dans le cadre du Mouvement du 20-Février, le mouvement social qui a bouleversé la politique marocaine en 2011, en participant surtout à l'organisation de débats, ateliers de réflexion et lecture, flash mob et autres activités culturelles et de sensibilisation. Malgré la désagrégation du mouvement, après l'adoption de la Constitution en juillet 2011 et la victoire du Parti de la justice et du développement (PJD) aux élections du 25 novembre 2011, elle continue à militer dans son quotidien et dans le cadre d'une association informelle qui s'occupe d'éducation à l'enfant. Elle rêve de devenir danseuse, mais continue ses études pour devenir éducatrice d'enfants, car elle est convaincue qu'il faut éduquer les nouvelles générations à un changement radical des mentalités. Sa voix est représentative, d'une part, de la désillusion de beaucoup de jeunes militantes qui ont participé aux manifestations populaires de 2011 en luttant aussi pour subvertir la hiérarchie des relations de genre. D'autre part, elle représente la détermination de certaines d'entre elles qui continuent à agir pour l'égalité de genre, en mettant le corps au centre de leurs propres revendications, car elles considèrent la répression des libertés liées au corps des femmes comme un signal grave de la plus large répression des libertés individuelles en cours dans le pays.

Sur la base d'une enquête de terrain, basée sur des interviews narratives et semi-structurées, dirigées en septembre 2014 auprès des militantes indépendantes du Mouvement du 20-Février et des représentantes des associations du féminisme historique marocain de

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<sup>2</sup> Interview avec Meriem Bouslama, militante du Mouvement du 20 Février, Rabat, 4/9/2014.

Rabat et Casablanca, cet article se focalise sur la centralité des questions liées à l'autodétermination du corps féminin dans le cadre des débats et des revendications pour l'égalité de genre et pour les libertés individuelles qui se sont déroulés au Maroc depuis 2011.

### **Égalité de genre, *agency*, citoyenneté**

Les normes liées à la sexualité et à la construction des rôles sociaux de genre contribuent à structurer – et en sont même l'expression – des formes de domination sociale, politique, économique d'une société à un moment historique donné.<sup>3</sup> Les significations de la sexualité et du genre sont strictement corrélées à travers : les systèmes de parenté et familiaux qui produisent des instruments de socialisation et articulent des systèmes de propriété et héritage ; les communautés élargies qui construisent la normativité dans le domaine de la sexualité, notamment dans la définition de l'honneur et de la pudeur, de la vertu, des limites entre pratiques licites et illicites ; un système national de dispositifs de pouvoir, de lois, discours religieux et mécanismes de production dans lesquels la famille et la société sont intégrées.<sup>4</sup> Analyser les significations de la sexualité et du genre peut donc se révéler utile pour comprendre les structures de pouvoir d'une société.

Au Maroc, la hiérarchisation des relations de genre est légitimée par l'usage patriarcal de l'Islam qui s'explique à travers les normes sociales et celles du Code de la Famille (*Mudawwana*). Celui-ci consacre la discrimination des femmes dans un continuum public-privé et rend la citoyenneté des femmes *imparfaite*,<sup>5</sup> voire *dérivée* de celle d'un homme, dans le sens où elle est considérée en fonction de son rôle social de mère, épouse, fille et sœur.<sup>6</sup>

Depuis 2011, la question des libertés individuelles liées à la sexualité et à l'autodétermination du corps a été centrale dans le cadre de la lutte de plusieurs associations et groupes de militant(e)s dans la

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<sup>3</sup> J. Scott, 'Gender a Useful Category of Analysis', in *The American Historical Review*, 1986, pp. 1053-1075.

<sup>4</sup> M. Foucault, *La volonté de savoir. Histoire de la sexualité I*, Gallimard, Paris, 1976; B. Dunne, *Sexuality and the Civilization Process in the Modern Egypt*, PhD Dissertation, Georgetown University, 1996, p. 7.

<sup>5</sup> Pour la notion de « citoyenneté imparfaite », voir D. Kandiyoti, 'Beyond Beijing. Obstacles and Prospects for the Middle East', in Mahnaz Afkhami - Erika Friedl (eds.), *Muslim Women and the Politics of Participation. Implementing Beijing Platform*, Syracuse University Press, New York, 1997, pp. 3-10, p. 5.

<sup>6</sup> M. Charrad, *States and Women's Rights: The Making of Postcolonial Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 2001, p. 233.

phase de transformation sociale et politique qui a suivi les protestations animées par le Mouvement du 20 Février (M-20F). Le persistant harcèlement sexuel, le phénomène des violences basées sur le genre, le droit d'expression à travers le corps et les droits liés à la sexualité (comme le droit à avoir des relations sexuelles avant le mariage ou à choisir l'avortement) ont fait l'objet de plusieurs campagnes, débats et manifestations qui sont allées bien au-delà de la mobilisation du M-20F pour la dignité, la liberté et la justice sociale. En fait, jusqu'à aujourd'hui, surtout dans les contextes urbains de Rabat et Casablanca, plusieurs activistes et groupes des militant(e)s invoquent l'urgence de la reconnaissance des droits et libertés en lien avec les choix autodéterminés liés au corps. Même si l'égalité de genre est aujourd'hui reconnue dans la nouvelle Constitution marocaine (1<sup>er</sup> juillet 2011), plusieurs obstacles caractérisent la reconnaissance de la citoyenneté des femmes.

Ici, la citoyenneté est conçue non seulement comme un statut social ou politique formel qui définit l'appartenance à une communauté donnée, à un statut attribué à des individus par un État, ou à un ensemble d'obligations et droits individuels qui définissent la relation entre citoyens et État ou entre individus d'une même communauté.<sup>7</sup> Ici la citoyenneté est conçue aussi comme idéal d'*agency* politique, c'est-à-dire comme pratique performative d'expression du soi et exercice actif de responsabilité individuelle en relation avec la collectivité.<sup>8</sup>

C'est pour cette raison que cet article explore en premier lieu l'impact de la reconnaissance du principe d'égalité de genre sur la citoyenneté, à travers les voix des activistes qui ont été parmi les protagonistes de la mobilisation du M-20F. Puis il se focalise sur l'analyse des luttes pour les libertés individuelles et en particulier des droits sexuels et reproductifs, qui sont conçus ici comme fondamentaux dans une société égalitaire reconnaissant les femmes comme des sujets de droits.<sup>9</sup> Il examine donc les discours, les résistances et les perspectives d'autodétermination du corps, à travers

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<sup>7</sup> B. S. Turner, 'Contemporary Problems in Theory of Citizenship', in Bryan S. Turner (ed.), *Citizenship and Social Theory*, Sage, London-Newbury Park, 1993, p. 1-19; E. Vezzosi, 'La cittadinanza femminile: una nozione "porosa"', in *Genesis-Rivista della Società Italiana delle Storie* V/2 (2006), pp. 219-234.

<sup>8</sup> J. Butler, *Undoing Gender*, Routledge, New York, 2004.

<sup>9</sup> M. Mouaquit, *L'idéal égalitaire féminin à l'œuvre au Maroc. Féminisme, islam(isme), sécularisme*, L'Harmattan, Paris, 2008.

lesquels les droits sexuels et reproductifs représentent un axe incontournable du changement des lois et des mentalités en direction de la construction d'une société plus égalitaire au Maroc.

### **Le débat égalité/complémentarité et la Constitution de 2011 : deux fractures internes dans le Mouvement du 20 Février**

La participation des femmes aux mouvements protestataires de 2011 au Maroc, comme dans la région MENA, a souvent été analysée selon deux dimensions qui se sont révélées mystificatrices : elle a été considérée comme un phénomène exceptionnel et comme une expression des revendications exclusivement des nouvelles générations.

En premier lieu, les visions orientalistes et néocoloniales, qui considèrent les femmes des pays majoritairement musulmans comme victimes éternelles du patriarcat et incapables de se libérer, se révèlent erronées lorsque l'on observe comment est articulé le mouvement des femmes au Maroc. Afin de mieux comprendre la remarquable présence féminine dans le cadre du M-20F, celle-ci doit être contextualisée historiquement. Le mouvement des femmes du Maroc voit ses premières voix s'exprimer dans la période des luttes pour l'autodétermination nationale et pour l'indépendance ; puis, dans les années 40, il commence à se structurer dans les premières associations féministes, et après l'indépendance, en 1956, dans les partis politiques surtout de gauche et dans le cadre des luttes syndicales, estudiantines et pour les droits humains des années 60 et 70. En particulier à partir des années 80, avec la formalisation des principales associations des femmes, le mouvement féministe se structure en ce que Zakya Daoud a appelé le *féminisme combatif* des principales associations qui militent encore aujourd'hui pour les droits politiques, économiques et sociaux des femmes et pour l'égalité de genre : l'Association démocratique des femmes du Maroc (ADFM), l'Union de l'action féminine (UAF), et plus tard la Ligue démocratique des droits des femmes (LDDF).<sup>10</sup> Parallèlement, dans le domaine académique, une quantité significative d'études et d'analyses sensibles à l'approche genre, baptisées comme *féminisme intellectuel*, a agi en support aux réalités opérationnelles sur le terrain.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Z. Daoud, *Féminisme et politique au Maghreb. Soixante ans de lutte (1930-1992)*, Eddif, Casablanca, 1993.

<sup>11</sup> R. Bourquia, *Femmes et fécondité*, Afrique Orient, Casablanca, 1996, pp. 9-14.

Deuxièmement, contrairement aux analyses qui considèrent la participation féminine et plus généralement la participation aux protestations de 2011 dans la région MENA comme typiquement émanant des jeunes, il faut remarquer que dans les marches, dans les débats et assemblées, comme dans les comités de décision du M-20F au Maroc, des femmes jeunes et moins jeunes ont agi ensemble et de façon intergénérationnelle.

De plus, la mobilisation des femmes a été hétérogène et transversale à différentes formes d'appartenance politique, religieuse, sociale. Elle a été caractérisée par la coprésence de femmes de :

- formations de gauche, comme celles proches des partis tels que l'Union socialiste des forces populaires (USFP), le Parti de l'avant-garde démocratique et socialiste (PADS), le Parti socialiste unifié (PSU), le Parti du progrès et du socialisme (PPS) ;

- des associations du féminisme historique comme l'Association démocratique des femmes du Maroc (ADFM), la Ligue démocratique des droits des femmes (LDDF), l'Union de l'action féminine (UAF), l'Association des femmes marocaines démocrates (AFMD) ;

- des associations pour les droits humains comme l'Association marocaine pour les droits de l'homme (AMDH) ;

- des associations comme Attac ;

- des groupes de diplômés chômeurs, qui militent pour le droit au travail dans le secteur publique ;

- des femmes des forces islamistes, du Parti de la justice et du développement (PJD, *Ḥizb al-'adāla wa-l-tanmiyya*) ou de l'association Justice et Bienfaisance (*Al-'adl wa-l-iḥsān*) ;

- des femmes proches de groupes salafistes qui demandaient la libération des membres de leur famille emprisonnés (en raison de la loi antiterrorisme adoptée après les attentats de Casablanca de 2003) ;

- des femmes indépendantes.

Cette variété témoigne de la participation des courants multiples, qui vont de la sphère laïque à celle islamiste, unis dans la lutte contre l'humiliation (lett. *ḥogra*, mot dérivé du verbe *ḥaqara*, qui signifie humilier, mépriser). La *ḥogra* peut être, en effet, comprise de manière intersectionnelle, puisque ce concept s'articule autour des dimensions de classe, d'origine, et aussi de genre.<sup>12</sup> Pour la jeune militante de Salé, Zeinab Bouslama,

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<sup>12</sup> N. Lykke, *Feminist Studies. A Guide to Intersectionality Theory, Methodology and Writing*, Routledge, London-New York, 2010; K. W. Crenshaw, 'Mapping the

la *hogra* est vécue par tous les marocains, sauf ceux qui ont un nom de famille bien connu ou qui sont très riches. La *hogra* est quotidienne : pour moi, par exemple, cela signifie ne pas pouvoir obtenir un document simple, sans donner de l'argent aux employés publics ; ne pas avoir accès à une école en sachant qu'il y a des places déjà prévues pour les recommandés ; et en plus, en tant que femme, je sens doublement la *hogra*, sur le plan social et patriarcal.<sup>13</sup>

L'égalité de genre est devenue une question de plus en plus centrale dans les revendications du M-20F, aussi bien pour ce qui concerne la relation entre les différents courants du Mouvement que pour ce qui concerne la relation entre le Mouvement et le pouvoir central.<sup>14</sup> Les différents courants du M-20F, dans lesquels la participation féminine a été remarquable, ont présenté des conceptions différentes des droits des femmes et des rôles sociaux : en général, les formations progressiste-démocrates ont été favorables à l'égalité, tandis que les groupes d'affiliation islamiste ont soutenu la complémentarité entre hommes et femmes. Même si les femmes des forces sociales laïques et des islamistes ont interagi pendant les dernières décennies, échangeant des pratiques de lutte et des discours selon leurs objectifs politiques respectifs,<sup>15</sup> le débat qui les opposait en 2011 a été bien visible : les différents groupes ont montré publiquement leur position, en scandant des slogans opposés et, pendant que les groupes progressistes marchaient de façon mixte, les islamistes respectaient une séparation sexuelle de l'espace selon laquelle les hommes marchaient devant les femmes.

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Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color', in *Stanford Law Review* 43/6 (1991), pp. 1241-1299; C. Andrew, 'Ethnicities, Citizenship and Feminisms. Theorizing the Political Practices of Intersectionality', in *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics* 1/3 (1995), pp. 64-81; J. W. Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1988.

<sup>13</sup> Interview avec Zainab Bouslama, militante du M-20F, Rabat, 4/9/2014.

<sup>14</sup> S. Borrillo, 'Il Movimento del 20 Febbraio e l'uguaglianza di genere in Marocco: tra dibattito interno e riforma costituzionale', in Anna Maria Di Tolla - Ersilia Francesca (eds.), *La rivoluzione ai tempi di internet. Il futuro della democrazia nel Maghreb e nel mondo arabo*, Università "L'Orientale", Napoli, 2012, pp. 27-46.

<sup>15</sup> Z. Salime, *Between Feminism and Islam. Human Rights and Sharia Law in Morocco*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis-London, 2011; F. Sadiqi, 'Facing Challenges and Pioneering Feminist and Gender Studies: Women in post-Colonial and Today's Maghrib', in *African and Asian Studies* 7 (2008), pp. 447-470.

De façon générale, plusieurs jeunes militantes interviewées ont déclaré avoir subi des pressions contre la présence active de femmes dans l'espace public. La jeune Salma Maarouf, présente dans les marches du M-20F de Rabat depuis le début de la mobilisation nationale et parmi les animateurs de l'appel vidéo à la mobilisation diffusé sur Youtube au début du 2011,<sup>16</sup> a dénoncé le fait que

la femme libre n'était pas la bienvenue et beaucoup d'islamistes ont été contre le fait que les femmes soient sur les charriots, animent les foules avec le mégaphone, ou participent aux comités décisionnels.<sup>17</sup>

De plus, si le débat autour de l'égalité a marqué une différence entre les deux blocs, le débat sur l'intégration de l'égalité dans la nouvelle Constitution a représenté au même moment un *tournant* significatif pour la cohésion du bloc séculier des progressistes/gauchistes, en traçant une distance entre les représentantes des associations du féminisme historique et les militant(e)s indépendants.

Un des résultats les plus évidents de la lutte pour l'égalité de genre vis-à-vis du pouvoir a été la formalisation de ce principe dans l'article 19 de la nouvelle Constitution, rédigé par une commission nommée par le Roi, après son discours du 9 mars 2011 qui avait pour but de calmer les esprits révolutionnaires. Mais cet acquis, qui a été salué avec ferveur par certaines associations du féminisme historique, a été considéré insuffisant par les composantes indépendantes du M-20F qui ont estimé le nouveau texte cosmétique. Pour les associations du féminisme historique, l'égalité devait finalement être reconnue comme concept nécessaire au plaidoyer sur le terrain, utile pour les activités de formation, de sensibilisation et ensuite comme un outil de pression sur les institutions pour négocier sur une base plus concrète l'application réelle de l'égalité. Les composantes indépendantes du M-20F ont opté pour le boycott de la Constitution,<sup>18</sup> convaincues que la nouvelle Constitution ne contribuait pas au changement des relations hiérarchiques entre couronne et Parlement (le Roi garde des pouvoirs

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<sup>16</sup> *Morocco campaign#feb20#morocco*, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S0f6F SB7gxQ> (accès 27/10/2015).

<sup>17</sup> Interview avec Salma Maarouf, militante du M-20F, Rabat, 11/9/2014.

<sup>18</sup> La Constitution a été adoptée grâce au résultat positif au referendum du 1<sup>er</sup> juillet, anticipé par une grande campagne médiatique pour le *Oui* : ont voté à 72% et plus de 95% des voix ont été pour le oui. AFP, « Maroc : 98% pour le *oui* à la nouvelle Constitution », 2/7/2011, <http://www.jeuneafrique.com/Article/DEPAFP 20110702104433/> (accès 27/10/2015).

sur le Parlement), ni des relations entre pouvoir et peuple (la Commission pour la rédaction du texte a été nommée par le Roi et n'a pas été élue par les Marocains), ni des relations de genre (l'article 19 reste seulement une déclaration théorique). En effet, même si dans l'article 19 l'égalité entre hommes et femmes est déclinée du point de vue des droits politiques, sociaux, économiques, juridiques, culturels et aussi environnementaux, elle reste textuellement conditionnée aux constantes et aux lois du Royaume. Quand on parle des constantes du pays, on fait référence à la devise nationale *Dieu, la Patrie, le Roi (Allah, al-waṭan, al-malik)*, où les caractères islamique et monarchique de l'État posent problème par rapport à l'égalité des sexes. D'une part, la succession au trône est un droit exclusif du fils aîné du Roi, de l'autre, l'Islam, incontournable pour la stabilité du pouvoir central, légitime la discrimination envers les femmes dans le droit de la famille (en matière d'héritage, de polygamie, d'obligation de respecter la *'idda*, d'interdiction du mariage d'une musulmane avec un non musulman, etc.). De plus, les militantes indépendantes ont jugé insuffisant l'article 19 du fait que l'Autorité pour la parité et lutte contre les discriminations (APALD), qui est prévue dans le deuxième alinéa de l'article et qui est chargée de veiller au respect de la parité dans toutes les institutions du Pays, n'a pas encore vu le jour. De plus, le gouvernement élu le 25 novembre 2011 n'a inclus dans son équipe qu'une seule femme ministre – chargée du Ministère de la solidarité, de la femme, de la famille et du développement social ; et aux élections régionales du 4 septembre 2015 aucune femme n'est devenue Présidente de Région.<sup>19</sup> On voit comment à une égalité formelle ne correspond pas une égalité substantielle.

### **Libertés individuelles : frontières de la lutte pour l'égalité entre domaine politique et culturel**

Sur le plan national, la stabilité politique déclenchée par l'adoption de la Constitution de 2011 et l'élection du PJD en 2011 ont représenté un effet non désiré du M-20F, qui a perdu de son impact social à cause de sa fragmentation interne et de son incapacité à représenter une alternative crédible dans le jeu politique officiel. Si sur le plan politique les résultats du Mouvement n'ont pas été immédiatement

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<sup>19</sup> M. Yassine - E. Mohamed, « Élections : les 12 nouveaux présidents de régions passés à la loupe », 14/9/2015, [http://telquel.ma/2015/09/14/elections-les-12-nouveaux-presidents-regions-connus\\_1462831](http://telquel.ma/2015/09/14/elections-les-12-nouveaux-presidents-regions-connus_1462831) (accès 14/9/2015).

significatifs, sur le plan de l'activisme pour les droits humains et de la citoyenneté, les forces qui avaient animé les protestations de 2011 ne se sont pas perdues.

Depuis 2011, en effet, on peut observer une redynamisation de l'activisme en faveur des droits humains et de la citoyenneté, qui concerne principalement les droits et libertés individuels, surtout sexuels et reproductifs, liés au corps des femmes. Et cela notamment après l'affaire que l'on peut appeler le *suicide d'honneur* de la mineur Amina Filali, une jeune fille de Larache qui, en mars 2012, a décidé de se donner la mort après avoir été mariée à son violeur, mariage qui permettait à ce dernier d'éviter la prison puisque « réparateur » envers la mineure violée, en accord avec l'(ex) art. 475 du Code pénal.<sup>20</sup> Après ce suicide, l'Association marocaine des droits de l'homme (AMDH) a déclenché un débat national sur le lien entre droits des femmes, libertés individuelles et démocratisation. Le débat a été rapidement diffusé dans la presse : une bonne partie de la société civile, du monde académique et culturel s'est déclarée favorable à l'abolition de l'alinéa 2 de l'article 475 qui garantit cette possibilité et de nombreuses voix ont appelé à la réforme des lois discriminatoires contre la liberté des femmes à disposer de leur corps.<sup>21</sup>

Le secteur audio-visuel a été particulièrement réactif dans ce débat : le jeune réalisateur Nadir Bouhmouch, déjà connu pour avoir réalisé le film sur les protestations de 2011 au Maroc *My Makzen and Me*,<sup>22</sup> avec le groupe *Guerrilla cinema* a produit en 2013 le documentaire *Art. 475. When marriage becomes punishment*, dans lequel plusieurs intellectuels et activistes ont dénoncé l'immobilisme des institutions contre le phénomène des mariages des mineurs garanti par cet article du Code pénal et la contradiction des dispositions du Code de la Famille du 2004 qui relève l'âge légal pour le mariage à 18 ans pour les deux conjoints (art. 19), tout en permettant à un juge

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<sup>20</sup> Selon le réseau des centres d'écoute contre les violences faites aux femmes Anaruz, il y a eu 40 000 mariages de mineurs en 2012 : Anaruz - Réseau National des Centres d'écoute des femmes victimes de violences, *Les violences fondées sur le genre au Maroc. Mariage des mineurs et partage des biens acquis pendant le mariage : lacunes du texte et difficultés de l'application*, IV<sup>e</sup> rapport, Rabat, 2012.

<sup>21</sup> C'est le cas de la conférence organisée en mai 2012 par l'équipe de Fatima Sadiqi à l'Université de Fès, *Le mariage des filles mineures : une perspective socioculturelle et juridique*, <http://www.psy-cognitive.net/up/uploads/files/psy-cognitive.net-a831c73156.pdf> (accès 15/9/2015).

<sup>22</sup> N. Bouhmouch, *My Makhzen and Me* (Maroc, 2011), <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zVNmMUYGnGw> (accès 15/9/2015).

d'autoriser les mariages de mineurs (art. 20).<sup>23</sup> Plusieurs manifestations, débats et conférences académiques ont provoqué une pression médiatique qui a poussé le Parlement à l'abolition de l'alinéa 2 de l'article 475 du Code pénal (22 janvier 2014) et, dans la première moitié de 2015, à considérer la réforme du Code entier.<sup>24</sup>

L'épisode de la jeune Filali a été saisi par l'AMDH pour également lancer un débat sur la dépénalisation des relations sexuelles hors mariage et sur la remise en cause de l'institution de la famille comme lieu unique des unions sexuelles légitimes.<sup>25</sup> Au printemps 2012, la présidente de l'AMDH, Khadija Riadi, a aussi demandé l'abolition de l'art. 490 du Code pénal qui punit toute relation sexuelle hors mariage. Même si la publication de ces opinions a coûté à certains journalistes des menaces de mort,<sup>26</sup> le débat a été relancé par le sociologue de l'Université de Rabat Abdessamad Dialmy, qui a dénoncé l'hypocrisie de la société marocaine envers les célibataires et en particulier envers les femmes non vierges, en invoquant l'urgence d'une *transition sexuelle* pour le Pays, c'est-à-dire d'une libéralisation profonde de la conception du corps et des relations sexuelles avant de prétendre l'affirmation d'une *transition démocratique générale*.<sup>27</sup>

Pour Dialmy la double morale de la société marocaine se manifeste dans la prédominante condamnation de la femme non vierge – souvent surnommée vulgairement *matqūba* (littéralement *percée, déflorée*) – pendant que les hommes sont considérés plus virils grâce à leurs expériences sexuelles. À ce propos, le sociologue se demande comment les hommes peuvent avoir des relations sexuelles si les

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<sup>23</sup> N. Bouhmouch, *Art 475. Le film* (Maroc, 2012), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ym07RKs-PJU> (accès 15/9/2015).

<sup>24</sup> AFP, « Au Maroc, un violeur ne pourra plus échapper à la prison en épousant sa victime », 22/1/2014, [http://www.francetvinfo.fr/monde/afrique/au-maroc-un-violeur-ne-pourra-plus-echapper-a-la-prison-en-epousant-sa-victime\\_511827.html](http://www.francetvinfo.fr/monde/afrique/au-maroc-un-violeur-ne-pourra-plus-echapper-a-la-prison-en-epousant-sa-victime_511827.html) (accès 25/9/2015).

<sup>25</sup> Y. Aït Akdim, « Maroc : fini les peines d'amour ? », 28/6/2012, <http://www.jeuneafrique.com/140955/societe/maroc-fini-les-peines-d-amour/> (accès 15/9/2015); H. Jazouani, « Maroc : L'AMDH demande l'abrogation de la loi condamnant les relations sexuelles hors mariage », 20/6/2012, <http://www.yabiladi.com/articles/details/11427/maroc-l-amdh-demande-l-abrogation-condamnant.html> (accès 15/9/2015).

<sup>26</sup> A. El-Yacoubi, 'Morocco Salafi clerics back death for journalist', 6/7/2012, <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/huff-wires/20120706/ml-morocco-salafis/> (accès 15/9/2015).

<sup>27</sup> A. Dialmy, « Le Maroc est en train de vivre sa période de transition sexuelle », 16/7/2012, <http://www.lavieeco.com/news/societe/abdessamad-dialmy-le-maroc-est-en-train-de-vivre-sa-periode-de-transition-sexuelle--22768.html> (accès 15/9/2015); A. Dialmy, *Logement, sexualité et Islam*, Eddif, Casablanca, 1995.

femmes ne le peuvent pas, en dénonçant l'hypocrisie de la société marocaine qui est contraire à l'homosexualité ou aux relations sexuelles non traditionnelles.<sup>28</sup>

Cette hypocrisie contribue à la reproduction de la violence à l'égard des femmes, comme le dénonce le documentaire *Le contrôle social sur les corps des femmes : le concept de virginité et la reproduction de la violence de genre* (*Al-raqāba al-ijtimā'iyya 'alā al-ajsād al-nisā'*: *mafhūm al-'udriyya wa i'āda al-intāj 'unf al-naw'*). Ce documentaire a été réalisé par l'écrivaine maroco-japonaise Maha Sano dans le cadre d'un programme de sensibilisation pour les élèves des écoles secondaires initié en 2013-2014 par la Fédération de la Ligue démocratique des droits des femmes (FLDDF). Le documentaire problématise la question de la virginité féminine comme valeur fondamentale pour la stabilité de la famille et pour la réputation de la femme et de son conjoint, en se concentrant sur la condamnation des femmes non vierges et sur les abus psychologiques qui en résultent. Une jeune protagoniste anonyme, qui a été violée, témoigne ainsi de la pression faite aux femmes à propos de la virginité : « Depuis ta naissance ta famille te dit de préserver ta virginité car c'est ton honneur et l'honneur de ta famille. Si tu la perds, il ne restera plus rien à ton père », dit-elle.<sup>29</sup> Cette déclaration est confirmée par un homme interrogé dans la rue qui, à ce propos, définit la virginité comme « couronne sur la tête de la femme. Si elle ne l'a pas, elle n'a rien ».<sup>30</sup>

Sur la question des violences faites aux femmes, le militantisme des associations et des groupes spontanés est devenu plus fréquent : le 8 décembre 2013 pour la première fois des femmes victimes de violence ont marché devant le Parlement de Rabat, avec des masques pour protéger leur propre identité, comme le raconte le documentaire *Hunna* (Elles) de la journaliste italienne Sara Creta et de l'activiste du Forum des alternatives Maroc (FMAS) de Rabat, Jamila Lamnate.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> A. Dialmy, *Which Sex Education for Young Muslims?*, Filad, L'Aja, 2009. Pour le cas égyptien, voir G. Gillot, « Faire sans le dire. Les rencontres amoureuses au Caire », in *Géographie et cultures*, L'Harmattan, Paris, 2005, pp. 31-52.

<sup>29</sup> M. Sano, Documentaire *Le contrôle social sur les corps des femmes : le concept de virginité et la reproduction de la violence de genre*, FLDDF, Rabat, 2014.

<sup>30</sup> *Ib.*

<sup>31</sup> S. Creta – J. Lamnate, Documentaire *Hunna*, Rabat, 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IK8RNnI9Gds> (accès 27/20/2015).

On remarque aussi que la scène culturelle de Rabat s'est dynamisée sur le lien entre hypocrisie sociale concernant la sexualité et les violences faites aux femmes. En 2013, la compagnie théâtrale *DabaTeatr Citoyen*, très engagée sur le plan des droits humains et de citoyenneté, a mis en scène au théâtre national Mohammed V de Rabat un spectacle contre la violence à l'égard des femmes avec le titre *Goullou!* (Dis-lui!), une invitation à résister et à dénoncer les violences subies. La compagnie Aquarium de Rabat a proposé en *darija* le spectacle *Dialy* (Il est à moi, c'est le mien), référé au vagin, sur les tabous liés à la sexualité, qui dénonce l'obsession sociale de la virginité féminine. Ce spectacle, depuis sa première mise en scène en octobre 2012, a provoqué une polémique significative dans la presse et les actrices et auteures ont même reçu des menaces de mort. Réalisé grâce à des ateliers de prise de parole avec cent cinquante femmes de Rabat, le texte du spectacle est le résultat de témoignages autobiographiques transversaux à toutes les couches sociales, car selon la réalisatrice Naïma Zitan :

Les souffrances des femmes n'appartiennent pas à une classe sociale défavorisée, mais elles sont transversales à toutes les classes sociales de la société marocaine.<sup>32</sup>

À cet regard, l'auteure du texte, l'écrivaine Maha Sano, a déclaré :

le titre *Dialy* est un symbole de l'urgence de réappropriation du corps des femmes. Dans le communiqué de presse, on a noté que le vagin, comme la sexualité des femmes, "ça c'est à moi, ni à toi, ni à vous!" [*Hada dialy, meshi dialek aw dialkum*].<sup>33</sup>

Après 2011, également dans le cadre de la sphère publique en ligne le sujet du corps et de la sexualité des femmes a été très débattu, grâce à la création de plusieurs pages web ou groupes Facebook : *Kullunā Amina Filali* (On est tou(te)s Amina Filali), *La femme n'est pas une cote khwiyya* (mon frère), *CEDAW et droits des femmes au Maroc*, ou *Femmes, réflexion et action* sont des exemples des groupes qui ont

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<sup>32</sup> N. Zitan, « Ne jugez pas *Dialy* avant d'avoir vu la pièce », 10/2/2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rscqq1XwCLE> (accès 15/9/2015); interview avec con Naïma Zitan, réalisatrice, Rabat, 21/5/2014.

<sup>33</sup> Interview avec Maha Sano, artiste, Rabat, 19/9/2014; A. Khalid, 'Re-enacting Revolution and the New Public Sphere in Tunisia, Egypt and Morocco', in *Theatre Research International* 38/Special Issue 02 (July 2013), pp. 87-103.

contribué au débat avec des milliers de membres. Certaines pages Facebook sont devenues des outils pour consolider le partage d'informations et pour mieux organiser les pratiques protestataires dans la sphère publique réelle. Dans ce sens, il faut signaler que, à partir d'un groupe Facebook, *Women Choufouch* est devenu un vrai mouvement contre le harcèlement sexuel,<sup>34</sup> pendant que le magazine *Qandisha*, qui prend le nom de l'esprit féminin de la tradition marocaine, est né à partir d'un blog de sa fondatrice Fedwa Misk et est aujourd'hui une revue en ligne militante.<sup>35</sup>

Ce ferment culturel reflète une capacité renouvelée de mobilisation qui est transversale à la sphère publique virtuelle et réelle.<sup>36</sup> À ce propos, un cas intéressant de réaction aux déclarations publiques des politiciens de plusieurs groupes et associations de femmes s'est vérifié en juin 2014 contre les déclarations du chef du gouvernement opposées au travail extra-domestique des femmes. Le 19 juin 2014, le Premier Ministre Abdelilah Benkirane a déclaré à la Chambre des Conseillers que « la meilleure place pour une femme est le foyer et quand elle sort de la maison, la lumière sort avec elle ». <sup>37</sup> Subitement, le 22 juin, des militantes ont lancé la campagne avec le hashtag *#anamachitria*, qui signifie « Je ne suis pas un chandelier » (*tria*, en darija) pour revendiquer leur droit au travail, à la mobilité et à l'auto-détermination.<sup>38</sup>

Selon plusieurs militantes interviewées, cette rapidité de réaction, due entre autres à la dynamisation des réseaux sociaux qui rend la mobilisation plus efficace, a été renforcée en 2013 aussi par la mobilisation nationale contre la grâce royale concédée à Daniel

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<sup>34</sup> Z. Achraf, « Les sanctions pour les harceleurs s'alourdissent : interview avec Layla Belmahi, co-fondatrice de l'association Woman Shoufouch », 24/4/2015, [http://www.huffpostmaghreb.com/2015/04/24/les-sanctions-pour-les-ha\\_n\\_7133614.html?ir=Maghreb&ncid=fcbklnkfrhpmg00000005](http://www.huffpostmaghreb.com/2015/04/24/les-sanctions-pour-les-ha_n_7133614.html?ir=Maghreb&ncid=fcbklnkfrhpmg00000005) (accès 15/9/2015).

<sup>35</sup> S. Borrillo, 'Telepredicatrici e attiviste on line in Marocco: la costruzione mediatica del genere femminile tra ideale islamico e libertà individuali', in Renata Pepicelli (ed.), *Le donne nei media arabi. Tra aspettative tradite e nuove opportunità*, Carocci, Roma, 2014, pp. 99-110.

<sup>36</sup> A. Salvatore, *Between Everyday Life and Political Revolution: The Social Web in the Middle East*, in *Oriente Moderno*, XCI/1 (2011).

<sup>37</sup> Hespress Channel, *Binkīrān wa 'amal al-mar'a* (Benkirane et le travail des femmes), 17/6/2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1cfZm3rf124> (accès 18/9/2015).

<sup>38</sup> W. Charrad, « Benkirane tancé par la twittoma qui lance #anamachitria », 19/6/2014, [http://telquel.ma/2014/06/19/benkirane-twittoma-anamachitria\\_139571](http://telquel.ma/2014/06/19/benkirane-twittoma-anamachitria_139571) (accès 27/10/2015).

Gavan, un pédophile de nationalité espagnole condamné à une peine de trente ans. Le Mouvement du 20-Février, l'Association marocaine des droits de l'homme (AMDH), l'Association *Touche pas à mon enfant* et d'autres formations politiques et syndicales ont organisé des manifestations devant le Parlement de Rabat, à Casablanca et dans d'autres villes, soutenues par des campagnes Twitter, une page Facebook et une pétition Avaaz. Même si la plupart des manifestations a été dispersée par la police, le Roi a retiré la grâce le 4 août 2013, deux jours après les premières marches, et cette remise en cause d'une décision royale a donné à la société civile une confiance majeure dans l'efficacité de sa mobilisation.<sup>39</sup> Selon la journaliste Fedwa Misk, il s'agit d'aspects significatifs qui témoignent de l'impact du M-20F sur la capacité de mobilisation de la société marocaine :

Grâce au Mouvement, au Maroc il a eu un réveil démocratique. Aujourd'hui, on n'a plus peur du pouvoir et des autorités comme avant et on s'engage plus politiquement, car la politique n'est plus conçue comme une activité dans le cadre d'un parti, mais comme un exercice de citoyenneté.<sup>40</sup>

Et dans ce scénario, les droits et les libertés sexuels et reproductifs sont intégrés dans la lutte pour une citoyenneté pleine et entière, respectant « le droit à avoir des droits » de façon égalitaire à tous les citoyens et citoyennes.<sup>41</sup>

### **Le Mouvement alternatif pour les libertés individuelles (MALI) et les droits sexuels et reproductifs**

Les droits sexuels et reproductifs et pour l'autodétermination du corps font partie des libertés individuelles, revendiquées par les militantes interviewées, qui sont des éléments fondamentaux pour une

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<sup>39</sup> Article de rédaction, « Maroc : Le roi annule la grâce accordée au pédophile espagnol, Daniel Galvan », 4/8/2013, <http://www.yabiladi.com/articles/details/18837/maroc-annule-grace-accordee-pedophile.html> (accès 16/9/2015); article de rédaction, « L'affaire du pédophile espagnol gracié au Maroc en 4 questions », 5/8/2013, [http://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2013/08/05/maroc-la-grace-accordee-a-un-pedophile-espagnol-en-question\\_3457450\\_3212.html](http://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2013/08/05/maroc-la-grace-accordee-a-un-pedophile-espagnol-en-question_3457450_3212.html) (accès 27/10/2015).

<sup>40</sup> Interview avec Fedwa Misk, rédactrice en chef de *Qandisha*, Casablanca, 5/9/2014.

<sup>41</sup> E. Balibar, *Cittadinanza*, Bollati Boringhieri, Torino, 2012, p. 18.

citoyenneté renouvelée. Particulièrement actif dans ce domaine, le Mouvement alternatif pour les libertés individuelles (MALI) a été créé, grâce à un groupe Facebook, en 2009 par Ibtissame Betty Lachgar et Zinab El-Rhazoui, deux activistes très médiatisées.<sup>42</sup> La première est très active sur les médias sociaux et dans les manifestations au Maroc et en France ; la deuxième, ex-journaliste à Charlie Hebdo, a exprimé ses opinions contestataires dans le journal marocain *L'Hebdomadaire*. Déjà connues des autorités pour avoir manifesté plusieurs fois pour le droit à ne pas jeûner pendant le Ramadan (obligation implicite dans l'art. 222 du Code pénal),<sup>43</sup> les militantes du MALI ont récemment été protagonistes de plusieurs manifestations pour les droits sexuels et reproductifs. Des représentants du Mouvement ont animé le *Kiss-in*, une manifestation qui a eu lieu le 12 octobre 2013 dans le cadre d'un sit-in en face du Parlement de Rabat en solidarité avec deux adolescents de Nador, précédemment condamnés à la prison pour avoir posté sur Facebook la photo d'un baiser.<sup>44</sup> En présence de plusieurs journalistes étrangers, la manifestation a été rapidement dispersée par des opposants, mais l'évènement a représenté une première sans précédent au Maroc.<sup>45</sup>

De plus, dans le cadre de la lutte pour l'autodétermination du corps, une attention particulière est donnée par le MALI à la revendication du droit à l'avortement pour toutes les femmes. Avec la campagne *My body is mine* et plusieurs marches publiques, les activistes réclament l'abolition des normes du Code pénal marocain qui condamnent toute femme ayant recours à l'avortement ou qui tente de le faire, et quiconque l'aide et l'encourage, médecins compris.<sup>46</sup> Sur ce sujet l'attention publique a été majeure quand, en janvier 2015, le professeur Chraïbi, Président de l'Association de lutte contre les

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<sup>42</sup> Interview avec Ibtissame Betty Lachgar, leader du MALI, Rabat, 9/9/2014.

<sup>43</sup> S. Sbiti, « Un collectif demande la protection des déjeuneurs du Ramadan », 24/6/2014, [http://telquel.ma/2014/06/24/collectif-demande-protection-jeuneurs-du-ramadan\\_140095](http://telquel.ma/2014/06/24/collectif-demande-protection-jeuneurs-du-ramadan_140095) (accès 12/9/2015).

<sup>44</sup> Canal 24 plus, Vidéo de la manifestation du Kiss-in: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TiuwkjaT0d0> (accès 27/10/2015).

<sup>45</sup> L. Vincent, « Maroc : le kiss-in de solidarité a tourné court à Rabat », 14/10/2013, <http://www.rfi.fr/afrique/20131013-maroc-le-kiss-in-solidarite-tourne-court-rabat-adolescent-nador-baiser-facebook> (accès 19/9/2015).

<sup>46</sup> Au Maroc l'avortement légal est permis pour sauvegarder la santé des mères (art.453). Article de rédaction, « MALI se mobilise pour le droit à l'avortement », [http://telquel.ma/2014/01/27/mali-se-mobilise-pour-le-droit-a-lavortement\\_10714](http://telquel.ma/2014/01/27/mali-se-mobilise-pour-le-droit-a-lavortement_10714) (accès 27/10/2015).

avortements clandestins (ALCAC) a été démis de ses fonctions de chef de service à la maternité de l'Hôpital des Orangers de Rabat après avoir été protagoniste d'un documentaire télévisuel français sur l'avortement au Maroc.<sup>47</sup> Le renvoi du médecin a été motivé par le Ministre de la Santé par des raisons liées aux autorisations de tournage du documentaire.<sup>48</sup> Mais à partir de cet épisode la solidarité envers Chraïbi a été croissante et le débat sur l'avortement et sur la liberté des choix liés à l'autodétermination du corps au Maroc s'est répandu dans une bonne partie de la presse.<sup>49</sup>

À l'occasion de la journée internationale de l'avortement (28 septembre 2015), le MALI a lancé une campagne Avaaz pour demander « l'abrogation des articles 449 à 458 du Code pénal marocain qui condamnent toute femme ayant recours à l'avortement ou qui tentent de le faire, comme quiconque l'aide et l'encourage, médecins compris ». <sup>50</sup> L'objectif de la campagne est de mettre fin « aux pratiques clandestines qui comportent de nombreux dangers en offrant des moyens d'avortement légaux, contrôlés et sanitaires afin de sauver des vies ». <sup>51</sup> Dans une interview, Ibtissame Betty Lachgar a déclaré que :

Affirmer le droit au choix de la femme implique aussi affirmer le droit à choisir un destin différent du rôle reproductif. La domination masculine et le patriarcat persistant dans notre société qui fait du corps des femmes un objet à des fins reproductives, en refusant aux femmes

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<sup>47</sup> Selon les données de l'AMLAC, entre 800 et 1 000 femmes se feraient avorter chaque jour au Maroc (200 par le recours à l'avortement non médicalisé et 600 à 800 par une interruption de grossesse en clinique ou en cabinet privé). Pour le MALI il s'agit d'un numéro bien majeur. France 2, « Choc! Envoyé spécial. L'avortement au Maroc - avec Prof. Chraïbi », <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o0VwYwShsqw> (accès 25 septembre 2015); H. Bennani, 'Prof. Chraïbi licencié : « Je vais aller en justice », 10/2/2015, [http://www.h24info.ma/maroc/pr-chraibi-licencie-je-vais-allen-justiceexclusif/30672?utm\\_source=Newsletter\\_Datarget&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=H24-AL3-10-02-2015](http://www.h24info.ma/maroc/pr-chraibi-licencie-je-vais-allen-justiceexclusif/30672?utm_source=Newsletter_Datarget&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=H24-AL3-10-02-2015) (accès 27/10/2015).

<sup>48</sup> S. El-Ouardighi, « Avortement. Le Ministre Louardi répond au professeur Chraïbi », 11/02/2015, <http://www.medias24.com/SOCIETE/152699-Avortement.-Le-ministre-Louardi-repond-au-professeur-Chraibi.html> (accès 25/9/2015).

<sup>49</sup> N. Guessus, « La politique de laissez-les mourir », in *L'Economiste* 4464, 17/2/2015, <http://www.leconomiste.com/article/966894-l-avortement-au-maroc-la-politique-de-laissez-les-mourir-par-le-pr-nouzha-guessous> (accès 27/10/2015).

<sup>50</sup> Pétition Avaaz *Dépénalisation de l'avortement au Maroc*, [https://secure.avaaz.org/fr/petition/LEGALISATION\\_DE\\_LAVORTEMENT\\_AU\\_MAROC\\_1/?pv=28](https://secure.avaaz.org/fr/petition/LEGALISATION_DE_LAVORTEMENT_AU_MAROC_1/?pv=28) (accès 26/9/2015).

<sup>51</sup> Id.

le droit de décider en toute autonomie. Nous réaffirmons notre volonté de garantir le droit inaliénable des femmes à disposer de leur corps. Le corps des femmes n'appartient qu'à elles-mêmes. Ce n'est ni à l'État, ni à la société, ni aux hommes (de lois) de décider. Les femmes n'avortent ni par plaisir, ni par hasard.<sup>52</sup>

Avec ce type de déclaration, on pourrait définir les militant(e)s du MALI comme des *commandos intellectuels* ou des *pionniers sexuels* qui, selon Ghada Al-Samman, sont des révolutionnaires qui agissent pour des idées nouvelles et progressistes sans peur de la censure publique.<sup>53</sup> Effectivement le MALI dépasse les frontières des tabous sexuels au Maroc, en étant très engagé aussi à sensibiliser la société sur la dépénalisation des relations sexuelles hors mariage et en particulier sur les relations homosexuelles sanctionnées par l'art. 489 du Code pénal. À ce propos, à travers plusieurs campagnes promues sur Youtube et sur les réseaux sociaux, le MALI avec le Collectif *Aṣwāt* (Voix) pour la lutte contre la discrimination fondée sur la sexualité et le genre ont récemment lancé la campagne *L'amour n'est pas un crime* (*Al-ḥubb laysa jarīma*).<sup>54</sup>

### Un débat impossible à interrompre

2015 a commencé avec plusieurs débats sur la sexualité et l'autodétermination du corps. En janvier, la sortie de la vidéo de la chanson de Zina Daoudia *A 'īnī ṣākī* (Donne-moi mon sac), visualisée par des millions d'internautes, a scandalisé les conservateurs qui ont considéré la chanteuse trop vulgaire dans sa manière de s'habiller, de parler, de se maquiller.<sup>55</sup> En mai, la participation de Jennifer Lopez au

<sup>52</sup> Interview avec Ibtissame Betty Lachgar.

<sup>53</sup> G. Al-Samman, 'The Sexual Revolution and the Total Revolution', in Elizabeth Warnok Fernea - Basima Qattan Bezirgan, *Middle Eastern Muslim Women Speak*, University of Texas Press, Austin, 1976, pp. 391-399, transl. of 'Al-thawra al-jinsiyya wa al-thawra al-shāmila', in *Mawaqif* 2/12 (1970), Beirut, pp. 68-73.

<sup>54</sup> Collectif *Aṣwāt* pour la lutte contre la discrimination fondée sur la sexualité et le genre, Campagne *L'amour n'est pas un crime* (*Al-ḥubb laysa jarīma*), *#الحب\_ليس\_جريمة*, *#Love\_is\_not\_crime*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pogAQUUMdZY> (accès 27/10/2015).

<sup>55</sup> M. Cheibi, « Polémique : La chanteuse Zina Daoudia répond à ses détracteurs dans une interview accordée à Goud.ma, morceaux choisis », 29/1/2015, [http://www.huffpostmaghreb.com/2015/01/29/polemique-zina-daoudia\\_n\\_6572040.html](http://www.huffpostmaghreb.com/2015/01/29/polemique-zina-daoudia_n_6572040.html) (accès 27/10/2015) ; Article de rédaction, « Daoudia dévoile le clip de sa chanson

festival *Mawazin* de Rabat et sur la scène de la télé publique 2M a provoquée des initiatives de demande de démission du Ministre de la Communication, et cela bien que la Reine et ses enfants aient assisté au concert en première ligne. Puis, la sortie au festival cinématographique de Cannes du film *Much Loved* du réalisateur Nabil Ayouch, qui raconte l'histoire de quatre prostituées de Marrakech, a suscité une grande polémique et un débat d'une grande violence dans la presse et les média sociaux. Contre ceux qui ont condamné les scènes peu pudiques car considérées comme irrespectueuses de la morale nationale, beaucoup d'internautes, des journalistes et d'intellectuels ont dénoncé l'hypocrisie patriarcale de la société marocaine qui s'oppose à un film dénonçant la prostitution sans essayer de lutter contre le phénomène très enraciné dans le pays. Le film a été interdit par le Ministère de la Communication sans que la production du film n'ait même demandé l'autorisation officielle de distribution.<sup>56</sup>

Ces derniers épisodes ont enrichi le débat sur l'avant-projet du Code pénal qui avait été présenté en avril 2015 par le Ministre de la Justice. L'avant-projet a été jugé comme rétrograde par la société civile continuant la mobilisation surtout pour ce qui concerne la pénalisation des relations sexuelles hors mariage ou homosexuelles.<sup>57</sup> Dans le cadre la campagne *Le Code pénal ne passera pas (Al-Qānūn al-jinā'ī lan yamurru)*, un groupe de journalistes, activistes, citoyen(ne)s, se sont battu(e)s contre le projet de lois qui conserve les articles contre les relations sexuelles hors mariage et contre l'homosexualité.<sup>58</sup>

Au mois de juin, d'autres épisodes ont attiré l'attention médiatique sur la lutte pour la dépénalisation des relations homosexuelles et sur l'autodétermination du corps. Le 3 juin 2015, pendant le festival

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Aatini Saki », 30/3/2015, [http://www.huffpostmaghreb.com/2015/03/30/daoudia-aatini-saki-clip\\_n\\_6967484.html](http://www.huffpostmaghreb.com/2015/03/30/daoudia-aatini-saki-clip_n_6967484.html) (accès 27/10/2015).

<sup>56</sup> L. Berrada-Berca, « Ce que raconte réellement *Much Loved* », 14/9/2015, [http://www.huffpostmaghreb.com/lamia-berradaberca/ce-que-raconte-reellement-much-loved\\_b\\_8132474.html?ncid=fbklnkfrhpmg00000005](http://www.huffpostmaghreb.com/lamia-berradaberca/ce-que-raconte-reellement-much-loved_b_8132474.html?ncid=fbklnkfrhpmg00000005), (accès 15/9/2015).

<sup>57</sup> N. Lamili, « Maroc : l'avant-projet de réforme du Code pénal est-il rétrograde ? », 16/4/2015, <http://www.jeuneafrique.com/229969/politique/maroc-l-avant-projet-de-r-forme-du-code-p-nal-est-il-r-trograde/> (accès 27/10/2015).

<sup>58</sup> « Code pénal : Militants et activistes se mobilisent sur les réseaux sociaux contre le projet de loi », 6/4/2015, [http://www.huffpostmaghreb.com/2015/04/06/code-penal-militants-activistes-mobilisation-reseaux-sociaux\\_n\\_7010618.html](http://www.huffpostmaghreb.com/2015/04/06/code-penal-militants-activistes-mobilisation-reseaux-sociaux_n_7010618.html) (accès 27/10/2015).

*Mawazin* de Rabat, un guitariste du groupe britannique Placebo a montré son dos sur lequel était inscrit le numéro 489 barré d'une croix ; ceci pour dénoncer l'article 489 du Code pénal qui pénalise les relations homosexuelles. Cet épisode s'est déroulé juste un jour après que deux activistes du groupe *Femen* se soient embrassées, seins nus, sur l'esplanade de la mosquée Hassan II de Rabat, symbole de la monarchie. Les *Femen* ont été tout de suite interrogées et expulsées en France, pendant que leur acte a été jugé contreproductif par les militantes féministes marocaines qui considèrent ce groupe exogène et caractérisé par un discours et des pratiques coloniaux.<sup>59</sup>

Toujours en juin, deux jeunes filles à Inezgane, près d'Agadir, ont été harcelées par des hommes dans un marché car accusées d'avoir porté une robe trop courte. À l'heure de déposer plainte, les deux femmes étaient poursuivies pour outrage à la pudeur et encouraient une peine de prison d'un mois à deux ans à cause de leur tenue jugée contraire aux bonnes mœurs, en vertu des articles visant l'attentat à la pudeur publique (art. 483-485) du Code pénal. Cet épisode a généré une vague de protestations significatives à Rabat, Casablanca, Marrakech supportées par une campagne Twitter, une page Facebook et une pétition Avaaz dirigée vers le Ministre de la Justice titrées *Porter une robe n'est pas un crime*. Finalement le 13 juillet les deux filles ont été innocentées et la société civile, en particulier les associations féministes, surtout la Ligue Démocratique des Droits des Femmes (LDDF), ont fêté leur victoire.<sup>60</sup>

Si ces débats montrent une attention renouvelée aux thématiques des droits sexuels et reproductifs, toutes les militantes rencontrées ont dénoncé le fait qu'il n'y a pas de changement dans la vie quotidienne des femmes, où le harcèlement sexuel continue régulièrement.

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<sup>59</sup> T. Savage - Y. Roudabi, « A Mawazine, Placebo dit non à la criminalisation de l'homosexualité », 3/6/2015, [http://telquel.ma/2015/06/03/mawazine-placebo-dit-larti-cle-489-du-code-penal\\_1450114](http://telquel.ma/2015/06/03/mawazine-placebo-dit-larti-cle-489-du-code-penal_1450114) (accès 30/9/2015); M. Yassin, « Seins nus, deux Femen s'embrassent devant la tour Hassan à Rabat », 2/6/2015, [http://telquel.ma/2015/06/02/membres-du-femen-manifestent-rabat\\_1449896](http://telquel.ma/2015/06/02/membres-du-femen-manifestent-rabat_1449896) (accès 30/9/2015).

<sup>60</sup> TelQuel, « Des centaines de Marocains clament mettre une robe n'est pas un crime », 29/6/2015, [http://telquel.ma/2015/06/29/centaines-marocains-clament-mettre-une-robe-nest-pas-crime\\_1453760](http://telquel.ma/2015/06/29/centaines-marocains-clament-mettre-une-robe-nest-pas-crime_1453760) (accès 27/10/2015); Pétition Avaaz *Mettre une robe n'est pas un crime*, [https://secure.avaaz.org/fr/petition/Au\\_ministre\\_de\\_la\\_Justice\\_et\\_des\\_Libertes\\_Mettre\\_une\\_robe\\_nest\\_pas\\_un\\_crime/?pv=68](https://secure.avaaz.org/fr/petition/Au_ministre_de_la_Justice_et_des_Libertes_Mettre_une_robe_nest_pas_un_crime/?pv=68) (accès 7/8/2016).

Meriem Benlioua, entre 2013 et 2014 Secrétaire générale de l'association *Cap Démocratie*, qui a été créée en 2011 après les manifestations du M-20F, a déclaré :

Le corps des femmes pose toujours problème, c'est là que tout le monde bloque : sur comment la femme s'habille, comment elle marche, comment elle fume, se maquille. La femme est toujours prête à la séduction selon les hommes et le problème est que beaucoup de femmes ont intégré une peur de séduire qui souvent les mène à s'autocensurer.<sup>61</sup>

Yusra El-Barrad, jeune militante de Casablanca de la Ligue démocratique des droits des femmes, a affirmé que : « il y aura égalité au Maroc quand avant de sortir de ma maison je ne devrai plus réfléchir sur comment m'habiller en fonction du trajet que je fais ». <sup>62</sup> Pour l'écrivaine Maha Sano, la centralité de la sexualité féminine dans le déséquilibre de pouvoir au sein de la société est due au fait que

Le corps des femmes est toujours lié à la signification du *sacré* au sens positif et négatif : il est *sacralisé* en raison de son rôle reproductif, mais il est socialement *sacrifié* car il déstabilise.<sup>63</sup>

### **Conclusions : « La révolution sera sexuelle ou ne sera pas »**

Les obstacles à la reconnaissance des droits et libertés sexuels et reproductifs au Maroc dévoilent le double paradoxe juridique et social de la citoyenneté. Si d'un côté la Constitution prévoit l'égalité de genre, la normativité sociale supportée par les articles du Code pénal prévoit la soumission à une vision patriarcale du corps et de la sexualité féminine, et de toute forme de sexualité non hétéronormée et donc considérée comme non légitime.

En utilisant la distinction entre luttes de redistribution et de reconnaissance proposé par Fraser et Honneth, on peut remarquer que le Mouvement du 20 Février a agrégé à la fois deux types de revendications : celles re-distributives classiques et les exigences de

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<sup>61</sup> Interview avec Meriem Benlioua, Rabat, 12/9/2014; L. Skalli, 'Young women and social media against sexual harassment in North Africa', in *The Journal of North African Studies* 19/2 (April 2014), pp. 244-258.

<sup>62</sup> Interview avec Yusra El-Barrad, Casablanca, 17/9/2014.

<sup>63</sup> Interview avec Maha Sano.

reconnaissance de droits culturels et politiques.<sup>64</sup> Le premier type de revendication inclut des luttes matérialistes – obtention d’emplois dans le secteur public, amélioration des conditions de travail, augmentation du salaire minimum légal et redistribution des revenus – portées par les syndicalistes, les associations de diplômés-chômeurs et les collectifs citoyens. Le deuxième, des slogans culturalistes et/ou en support du discours des droits humains, est notamment représenté par les associations qui ont demandé la constitutionnalisation de la langue amazighe, ainsi que les mouvements de lutte pour la reconnaissance des libertés individuelles et l’égalité de genre.<sup>65</sup>

Si d’un côté le M-20F a échoué dans son intention d’influencer les dynamiques politiques et socio-économiques sur le plan national, les expériences analysées dans cet article montrent que l’action de plusieurs forces de la société civile marocaine, qui sont des échos et témoignages de la résistance de l’esprit contestataire et progressiste du M-20F, sont engagées aujourd’hui pour le changement de la mentalité patriarcale et des relations de pouvoir entre individus à travers des revendications *de reconnaissance* liées à l’autodétermination du corps et aux droits sexuels et reproductifs.

À mon avis, ces nouvelles formations sociales et culturelles à travers des instruments artistiques, audio visuels, théâtrales, et à travers des nouvelles technologies, montrent l’exigence de promouvoir et performer des instances favorables aux droits des femmes et à l’égalité de genre selon trois trajectoires principales.

1) En premier lieu, on assiste à ce que Loubna Skalli a défini un *repositionnement féministe*, c’est-à-dire que le champs d’action des militant(e)s pour l’égalité s’est étendu du territoire du politique à celui de la culture, où de nouveaux langages, des pratiques sociales et imaginaires reflètent le désir et l’urgence d’un projet global de société égalitaire.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> N. Fraser - A. Honnet, *Redistribution or Recognition? A Political - Philosophical Exchange*, Verso, London-New York, 2003.

<sup>65</sup> M. Sakhi - A. Esmili, « Comprendre et agir : appel à un autre Maroc », 7/5/2015, <http://autre-maroc.org/appele-a-un-autre-maroc/> et <http://www.contretemps.eu/interventions/comprendre-agir-appele-a-un-autre-maroc-cr%C3%A9er-conditions-nouveaux-mouvement-social> (accès 27/10/2015).

<sup>66</sup> Skalli, ‘Young Women’; Salime, ‘A New Feminism? Gender Dynamics in Morocco’s February Movement’, in *Journal of International Women’s Studies* 11/13/Issue5 Arab Women Arab Spring, pp. 101-114.

2) En deuxième lieu, ce type de revendications de droits de reconnaissance montrent l'indissolubilité du lien entre l'institutionnalisation des libertés et droits individuels liés à la sexualité et à l'égalité de genre et tout changement démocratique.<sup>67</sup>

3) En troisième lieu, si le corps et la sexualité restent objets des dispositifs du pouvoir patriarcal et représentent le centre de blocages relatifs à la reconnaissance des droits et libertés individuels, il est aussi vrai que la lutte pour les droits sexuels et reproductifs animée par les militant(e)s, groupes et associations féministes a ouvert le débat au-delà des frontières hétéro-normatives du genre, en ouvrant des horizons de lutte nouveaux dans les discours et politiques liés à la sexualité. Aujourd'hui, la lutte féministe ou pour l'égalité de genre s'avère être non pas la lutte exclusive d'une partie de la société, mais une lutte qui peut influencer la démocratisation des relations de pouvoir entre individus et la manière de concevoir et redéfinir le processus de construction des genres, au pluriel, au-delà des conceptions binaires traditionnellement conçues comme étant les seules légitimes.

S'il est pertinent de reconnaître, comme l'a affirmé Ghada Al-Samman, qu'une révolution sexuelle ne peut se faire sans une révolution sur le plan économique, idéologique, politique et social,<sup>68</sup> pour les militantes marocaines rencontrées, c'est la révolution sexuelle qui tend à devenir de plus en plus centrale pour contribuer à une révolution *totale*. D'autre part, dans une interview réalisée chez elle, Fatima Mernissi, la sociologue féministe décédée en novembre 2015, disait que : « Après l'indépendance nationale, le débat sur les libertés sexuelles au Maroc et dans le monde arabe représente la vraie révolution en cours ».<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> V. Moghadam, 'Modernising Women and Democratisation after Arab Spring', in *Journal of North African studies* 19/2 (April 2014), pp. 137-142.

<sup>68</sup> Al-Samman, 'The Sexual Revolution and the Total Revolution', pp. 392-393.

<sup>69</sup> Interview avec Fatima Mernissi, Rabat 24/6/2012.

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# **Being Young and Post-Feminist in Morocco: The Emergence of a New Women's Activism**

Renata PEPICELLI

## **Abstract**

For several months in 2011 a new generation of young women militants invaded the streets and the squares of more than sixty both small and large towns in Morocco, reconfiguring gender roles and turning squares and streets into new gendered spaces. Young women and young men joined and demonstrated together, producing a new kind of activism and a new form of relationship between the genders. Through the internet their message went viral, circulating within the country and abroad, spreading the feminist concept of equality between men and women. However, this young generation of activists did not feel that it fully belonged to feminist practices and ideas and broke away from the historical women's associations which had dominated the public and political scene in Morocco since the 80s. The youth of the 20 February Movement occupied a political space, which can be defined as 'post-ideological', 'post-secular' and 'post-feminist'. On the basis of interviews with activists from different generations, this paper investigates the forms and tools of this new young 'post-feminist' activism, placing it within the long history of the women's movements in Morocco.

## **Introduction**

The 20<sup>th</sup> February Movement demonstrated the emergence of a new women's movement in Morocco, which surprised many on account of the shape it took and the forms of its engagement. For several months in 2011 a new generation of young women militants invaded the streets and the squares of more than sixty both small and large towns in Morocco, reconfiguring gender roles and turning squares and streets into new gendered spaces. Young women and young men joined together and demonstrated, resisted against the police, performed various forms of art, organized gatherings and meetings, and produced a new kind of activism and a new form of relationship between the genders. Through the internet their message went viral, circulating within the country and abroad, spreading the feminist concept of equality between men and women. However, this young generation of

activists did not feel that it fully belonged to feminist practices and ideas and broke away from the historical women's associations which had dominated the public and political scene in Morocco since the 80s. These new activists of the 20<sup>th</sup> February Movement occupy a political space, which can be defined as 'post-ideological', 'post-secular' and 'post-feminist', in which the methods adopted in social and political conflict produced new and unexpected alliances with the Islamist movements rather than with historical feminist movements.

Quoting activists from different generations, this paper investigates the forms and tools of this new young post-feminist activism, describing its genealogy, points of continuity and breaks from previous experiences, placing it within the long history of the feminist movement in Morocco. It is based on field research in Morocco and, in particular, on in-depth interviews with young female and male activists of the 20<sup>th</sup> February Movement in Rabat and on interviews with human rights and women's rights activists.<sup>1</sup>

### **'New Antigones': 'Political Disobedience' and Equality in Practices in the 20<sup>th</sup> February Movement**

Following on from the protests in Egypt and Tunisia between the end of 2010 and beginning of 2011, Morocco experienced important demonstrations across the country during several months of 2011. The demonstrators were asking for political, social and economic reform, such as the reform of Parliament, of the Government and of the Constitution, as well as for free education, jobs, housing and the recognition of Tamazight as a national language.<sup>2</sup> There was a significant participation of young women right from the very first meetings set up to identify the steps to be taken to bring the Arab wind of protest also to Morocco. 'Prior to 20<sup>th</sup> February, I attended 2-3 meetings at the head-quarters of the Moroccan Association of Human

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<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank Lucile Daumas for her support and assistance during the fieldwork in Morocco.

<sup>2</sup> For an analysis of the 20<sup>th</sup> February Movement see the following articles: C. Bayloq - J. Granci, « 20 février. Discours et portraits d'un mouvement de révolte au Maroc », in *L'Année du Maghreb. Dossier : Un Printemps Arabe ?* VIII (2012), pp. 239-258; T. Desrues, 'Mobilizations in a Hybrid Regime: The 20th February Movement and the Moroccan Regime', in *Current Sociology* 61/ 4 (2013), pp. 409-423; T. Desrues, 'Moroccan Youth and the Forming of a New Generation: Social Change, Collective Action and Political Activism', in *Mediterranean Politics* 17/1 (2012), pp. 23-40.

Rights (AMDH, Association Marocaine des Droits de l'Homme), in Rabat' – recounts Ouidade Melhaf, who was 21 in 2011:

These meetings were held in secret. We were afraid. We organized ourselves above all on Facebook. At that time, using the internet was not too risky as the Moroccan government had not yet developed an efficient system for controlling social networks.<sup>3</sup>

When the movement decided to go public, young women immediately played a central role: they exposed themselves to the judgment of the community and to the repressive forces of law and order. With their votes, they soon became iconic figures in the movement, new 'Antigones', who, in the squares, in the streets, in meetings, and on the social media, revisited the figure of the Greek heroine, updating 'the archetype of the disobedient woman', who rebels against power.<sup>4</sup> This had already happened in Iran, when Neda Agha Soltan, killed during the protests in 2009 at the age of 29 years old, became the symbol of the Green Wave; or in Egypt, when Asma Mahfouz, in a video posted on Youtube, invited Egyptians to demonstrate in the squares against Mubarak on 25<sup>th</sup> January;<sup>5</sup> and again in Turkey with the 'girl in the red dress', photographed in Taksim square during the 2013 clashes, who became the emblem of the rebellious youth, both fragile and strong. In Morocco, the symbol of the movement was to be the face framed by the long dark hair of the then nineteen-year-old Amina Boughalbi,<sup>6</sup> a third-year journalism student, who quickly became the local and international icon of the 20<sup>th</sup> February Movement (as from now referred to as 20FM). Together with many other Moroccan girls, until then unknown to the public at large, Amina chose to take a risk, shedding her anonymity and protesting. Appearing in the first frames of the video, which was chosen to launch the announcement of the first demonstration – the one which gave the movement the name of 20<sup>th</sup> February – Amina

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<sup>3</sup> Interview with Ouidade Melhaf, Rabat, 11/1/2014. In 2014 she was a Master student and freelance journalist in Tangier.

<sup>4</sup> B. Casalini, 'Nel segno di Antigone: disobbedienza femminista e queer', in *Genesis XIV* (2015), pp. 117-140.

<sup>5</sup> See the video <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RIuiWLTMonY> (Last access 10/7/2015).

<sup>6</sup> The role played by Amina Boughalbi in the 20FM was analyzed in several academic essays (Salime 2012; Langohr 2014) and in magazines and newspapers' articles.

invited people to protest, stating: 'I am Moroccan and I will march on 20<sup>th</sup> February because I want freedom and equality for all Moroccans'.<sup>7</sup> Amina describes the first phase of 2011 in this way:

When the 20FM appeared, my parents, like all other Moroccans, found out about what I was doing through television. My father saw me on YouTube asking people to demonstrate like the young people in Egypt and Tunisia. My mother supports the King. She was afraid. She said that the police would beat me, that I would lose my future. My father was afraid. He told me to be careful and to concentrate on my studies. However, the main problem was my mother. Above all when the threats by phone started to arrive. They said that my parents should silence me, that I would lose my life and my studies. But each time I reassured them, telling them that I was doing nothing illegal.<sup>8</sup>

Coming from a lower-middle class family in the city of Oujda on the border with Algeria, Amina, an excellent student at high school, at the age of 17 moved on her own to Rabat in order to study at university; a radical change in her life which was soon to lead her down the path of politicization.

I changed a lot at university. What made me change was the fact that I started to read and, before that, I had met with some young militants, members of associations like the AMDH. I used to go to cafés. We began to discuss God, religion, the social and political situation in Morocco, the situation of women. It was then that I began to ask myself questions. In class I had a friend who was a fan of Che Guevara and so I began to read about Che Guevara. As a result of these discussions, I began to read the great writers. And so in a year I underwent a complete transformation. I took off the veil and another Amina emerged.<sup>9</sup>

Gradually, from week to week, as the 20FM grew, during the first months of 2011, in both large and small cities across Morocco, the

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<sup>7</sup> The video in Arabic is in: <https://www.mamfakinch.com/video-campagne-20-fevrier-%D9%86%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%A1-20-%D9%81%D8%A8%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%8A%D8%B1/>; with English subtitles is on: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S0f6FSB7gxQ> (Last access 10/7/2015).

<sup>8</sup> Interview with Amina Boughalbi, Rabat, 17/1/2014. At the moment of the interview she had got a degree in Journalism and worked for the association Médiateur pour la Démocratie et les Droits de l'Homme.

<sup>9</sup> *Ib.*

presence of women increased, mostly young women coming from a middle-class student environment, but also from sectors of the lower classes. Highly visible in the demonstrations and the general meetings (even though in numerical minority compared to the men), the young women within the movement filled all kinds of roles within the movement, from leadership to logistics, facing the police in the same way as did the men. Sabra Talbi, a female student during the 20FM and now a music teacher in a public high school recounts:

During the movement I felt I was a real 20FM militant and did not primarily think of myself as a woman; there was no difference between myself and the militant men. I did everything. I had my own ideas, my own point of view. The police beat everyone, men and women. There was no difference. When the movement came to an end, I felt I was a woman. I cried a lot.<sup>10</sup>

For those who had been militants in Morocco for years, this new female presence in both the public and political field represented a significant change, both materially and symbolically. Young women appeared in a significant manner in public in a new relational dynamic. According to Khadija Ryadi, who has been involved in the Moroccan political scene since the '80s as a member of the radical left and the human rights' movement:

The experience of the 20FM saw the participation of many women, many young women, unlike previous demonstrations in Morocco's history. The 20FM militants are more numerous, assert themselves more forcefully, have more faith in themselves compared to when we were young.<sup>11</sup>

For Ryadi's generation and above all for the women who were active in the '60 and the '70s, like Latifa Jbabdi, Fatna El-Bouih, Widad Bouab – who even paid for their activism by imprisonment and torture –, <sup>12</sup> feminist activism was mostly in left-wing parties and in

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<sup>10</sup> Interview with Sabra Talbi, Rabat, 14/1/2014.

<sup>11</sup> Interview with Khadija Ryadi, Rabat, 15/1/2014. At the moment of the interview she was president of the Moroccan Association of Human Rights (AMDH).

<sup>12</sup> For an analysis of the repression of women's activism in the '70s and '80s see the experience of Fatna El Bouih: F. El Bouih, 'Narrare il buio', in Elisabetta Bartuli (a cura di), *Sole nero. Anni di piombo in Marocco*, Mesogea, Messina, 2004, pp. 27-

the extra-parliamentary extreme left. However, within these organizations, inequalities linked to class were perceived to be more unacceptable than those related to gender, and the voices of women were often silenced in the name of other objectives, which were considered a priority.<sup>13</sup>

### A 'Post-Ideological' Generation

The greater presence of women and their significant role in the 20FM compared to the mobilization of the left of previous decades was accompanied by a series of changes in the form, the instruments and the content of the struggle, which underline the important differences between generations.<sup>14</sup> Khadija Ryadi adds:

These young women place more importance on daily struggle than on reflection. In our time there was more debate, more reflection, people read more. Now technology has greatly influenced the young. There are certainly some better things today: young women are more numerous and quickly learn the practices of the militants. However, there is a difference in the awareness of what they do. There is a cultural and ideological decline. Insufficient importance is given to political ideology, to the content of the struggle. These young women are more interested in immediate results. Compared to before, it is a more practical than political logic. This does not only regard young women but also young men.<sup>15</sup>

The young people involved in the 20FM, unlike the generations that preceded them, did not have a strong political background supporting them, nor – and this was one of the main weaknesses of the movement – were they able to create a new and alternative political agenda, capable of obtaining consensus in the long-term throughout the population. The post-ideological approach adopted by the movement on the basis of a series of watchwords such as 'liberty,

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140; S. Slyomovics, 'This Time I Choose when to Leave: An Interview with Fatna El Bouih', in *Middle East Report* 218 (Spring 2001), pp. 42-43.

<sup>13</sup> R. Naciri, *The Women's Movement and Political Discourse in Morocco*, Occasional Paper, 8<sup>th</sup> March, United Nations Research Institute for Social Development, United Nations Development Program (UNDP), Geneva, 1998, p. 8.

<sup>14</sup> For a comparative analysis on the changes in youth activism see F. Vairel, « Qu'avez-vous fait de vos vingt ans ? Militantismes marocains du 23 mars (1965) au 20 février (2011) », in *L'Année du Maghreb. Dossier : Un printemps arabe ? VIII* (2012), pp. 219-238.

<sup>15</sup> Interview with Khadija Ryadi.

dignity, justice, end of corruption...’ and on the basis of a general program of content, allowed for the relatively easy and immediate creation of a mass movement capable of overcoming political differences and positions. Different ideologies and currents of thought, such as those in favor of a form of republican state and those advocating for a parliamentary monarchy, those supporting secularism and those supporting Islamist movements, succeeded in coexisting for several months outside party boundaries and traditional forms of political alliance. However, this post-ideological dimension did not produce an alternative structured political ideology – partly due to the short life of the 20FM. From an element of strength, the post-ideological nature of the movement turned into a form of weakness. When the King showed his intention of fulfilling his promises on the subject of reform in his speech of 9<sup>th</sup> March 2011<sup>16</sup> various segments of civil society, of the political parties, of the trade unions, of the women’s movement, who had given initial, if lukewarm, support to the 20FM, abandoned it in favor of the new course promoted by the monarchy.

Indeed, many of the young people who participated in the 20FM obtained their political training in the field during the first months of 2011, following, for a number of them, some previous experience within various associations. However, as stated previously, they had no real theoretical political training. With the exception of some significant political experience, such as that of unemployed graduates who emerged in the early ’90s and demanded a job in the public sector,<sup>17</sup> most young people felt they had been distant from politics since the ’80s. The ‘elitist’ nature of politics was a problem for young people who considered themselves far from parties and politics, and excluded from power and from the possibility of criticizing it.<sup>18</sup> Political parties were thereby discredited insofar as popular discourse presented the ‘political game’ as being rather unethical and motivated

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<sup>16</sup> See the royal speech of 9<sup>th</sup> March 2011: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9pTJoUI3W8s>. The French translation is at the following link: <http://www.maroc.ma/fr/discours-royaux/texte-int%C3%A9gral-du-discours-adress%C3%A9-par-sm-le-roi-la-nation> (Last access 10/7/2015).

<sup>17</sup> M. Emperador Badimon, « Diplômés chômeurs au Maroc : dynamiques de pérennisation d’une action collective plurielle », *L’Année du Maghreb. Dossier : Justice, politique et société* III (2007), pp. 297-311.

<sup>18</sup> M. Bennani-Chraïbi, *Soumis et rebelles, les jeunes au Maroc*, Le Fennec, Casablanca, 1994.

by individual interest.<sup>19</sup> Consequently, for many of the young people taking part in the 20FM, areas of conflict against the establishment could be found in associations, mostly in those favoring human rights, such as the AMDH, or in those fighting against neoliberal globalization such as Attac, rather than in political parties which were considered to be colluding with or co-opted by the system.

It is not surprising, therefore, that the 20FM is characterized by a reality far distanced from pre-existing political experiences. Parties, trade unions and associations were only able to support the movement from the outside.<sup>20</sup> To this end, in fact, the National Council of Support (NCS) was set up, constituted by leftist parties, labor unions, civil society organizations and the Islamists of Justice and Spirituality, *Al-'adl wa-l-iḥsān*. However, the role of the NCS was one solely of external support. Due to a code of conduct within the movement, it was not possible to exhibit any party symbols during demonstrations, nor was it allowed to recite slogans which could be traced back to specific political ideologies.

Ouidade Melhaf, aged 21 in 2011, describes this need for change which drives the young as follows:

The 20FM was made up, above all, of youth, high school students, university students, occasional workers of up to 35 years of age. We were above all young people. We wanted to do something new, with a new leadership. We recognized that the old political generations had done a lot for this country, for the freedom that we have today, but we wanted to do something new.<sup>21</sup>

And Lucile Daumas, a long-term militant in the history of Morocco, from the struggle within the family committees of the political prisoners during the ‘years of lead’ (in Arabic, *sanawāt al-raṣāṣ*)<sup>22</sup> to the recent anti-liberalist movements against economic

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<sup>19</sup> Naciri, *The Women's Movement and Political Discourse in Morocco*.

<sup>20</sup> If at Rabat many gatherings and assemblies of the 20FM took place in the siege of AMDH, in Casablanca they took place in the siege of the Unified Socialist Party (Parti socialiste unifié, PSU).

<sup>21</sup> Interview with Ouidade Melhaf.

<sup>22</sup> ‘Years of Lead’ is the term used to describe a period from mainly the 1960s through the 1980s marked by state violence against political dissidents. See: Bartuli (a cura di), *Sole nero. Anni di piombo in Marocco*; R. Pepicelli, ‘Memorie degli “anni di piombo” e percorsi della giustizia transizionale in Marocco. Storia dell’Instance équité et réconciliation (*Hay'at al-Inṣāf wa 'l-Muṣālaḥa*)’, in Anna

globalization, comments on the new forms given to the movement as follows:

I was not part of the 20FM organization; I felt that I could not belong to it. No one prevented me as the movement was open. I felt it was not my place. The young were very keen to operate differently, to militate differently, to propose different things from those proposed so far by the parties and trade unions. I thought it was right to leave all the creative space to them. I only followed, I didn't participate in the meetings, I only went to the demonstrations.<sup>23</sup>

The novel forms and languages of the new political militants appeared day after day in the streets, at meetings and on the internet, in an attempt to expand popular participation. 'The common people and the young felt very distant from politics, from elections' – recounts Ouidade Melhaf:

We wanted to be a creative movement; we wanted new ways of communicating, by video, with banners and through social networks. A lot of people do not read newspapers but are on the internet and on Facebook.<sup>24</sup>

As in other countries overtaken by the protests of the so-called period of the Arab revolt, there has been a widespread use of alternative tools of communication such as social media,<sup>25</sup> but also the theatre and video documentaries. The internet was considered an important tool as an amplifier for the struggle, and as a means to coordinate militants within the same city and across the different cities

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Maria Di Tolla (ed.), *Percorsi di transizione democratica e politiche di riconciliazione in Nord Africa*, Ed. Scientifica, Napoli (forthcoming). On the women's role during the 'Years of Lead' see J. Guillerot - N. Benwakrim - M. Ezzaouini - W. Bouab, *Morocco: Gender and the Transitional Justice Process*, International Center for Transitional Justice (ICTJ,) 2011,

<https://www.ictj.org/sites/default/files/ICTJ-Morocco-Gender-Transitional%20Justice-2011-English.pdf>.

<sup>23</sup> Interview with Lucile Daumas, Rabat, 26/1/2014.

<sup>24</sup> Interview with Ouidade Melhaf.

<sup>25</sup> See A. Salvatore (ed.), *Between Everyday Life and Political Revolution: The Social Web in the Middle East*, in *Oriente Moderno* XCI/1 (2011); S. Sibilio 'La rivoluzione dei (nuovi) media arabi', in Francesca M. Corrao (ed.), *Le rivoluzioni arabe. La transizione mediterranea*, Mondadori Università, Milano, 2011, pp. 81-109.

of Morocco. However, it was only one tool among many, as the activists are keen to point out. Even though social media was important in the creation of the movement, it was also a tool which was used against the activists. In the stories of many of the young women interviewed, the description of the disparaging campaign organized on Facebook against the most visible figure of the movement is continually repeated. Amina Boughalbi, for example, recounts:

They did some photomontages. They put my photo on the internet in an embrace with the leader of the Polisario Front, to mean that we were pro Sahara, to mean that we were pro Polisario, against our country. And people began to say that the 20FM young were a threat to the country, that they were paid by the Algerians to attack Morocco through Polisario. Another young man was portrayed in a church, meaning that he was against Islam. Another one was photographed with some bottles of alcohol.<sup>26</sup>

While Ouidade Melhaf states:

Above all on Facebook I have received insults because of my participation as a woman, rather than because I was a militant. At first it was shocking but then it became the norm.<sup>27</sup>

The desire to open up to a wide segment of the population, to overcome the ideological barriers which divide society in order to give life to a movement ‘which reflected’ Moroccan society as closely as possible, and which had the strength to demand radical change, led the young members of the 20FM, who defined themselves mostly as supporters of secularism, to form new collaborations which until that moment had been considered impossible; in other words, to admit into the movement Islamist activists, the youth of the Pjd – the party that over the course of 2011 became the major government force – but above all the militants of the strong and numerically large extra-parliamentary organization *Al-‘adl wa-l-ihsān*.<sup>28</sup> And, surprisingly, it

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<sup>26</sup> Interview with Amina Boughalbi.

<sup>27</sup> Interview with Ouidade Melhaf.

<sup>28</sup> On the role of the Islamists in the 20FM see J. Granci, ‘Traiettorie dell’islam politico in Marocco. Dissidenza e riformismo al cospetto della monarchia’, in Laura Guazzone (ed.) *Storia e evoluzione dei movimenti islamisti arabi. I Fratelli musulmani e gli altri*, Mondadori, Milano, 2015, pp. 230-242.

was this very collaboration, albeit problematic concerning the issue of gender equality, as will be better explained in the following paragraph, which was considered by many young men and women as one of the main legacies of the movement. Ouidade Melhaf asserts:

On a personal level, what this movement has given me is the fact that before the 20FM it was impossible for me to talk to Islamists. The 20FM has broken down this obstacle against change: to accept someone who has a vision for society which is different from my own. For me the great difference is the fact of participating with young Islamists. For me this has been one of the most important things.<sup>29</sup>

The 20FM, therefore, is characterized as being the mark of a ‘post-ideological’ and ‘post-Islamist’ generation,<sup>30</sup> which presented several shifts in the identity of the young, breaking with the forms and ideals which defined the previous generations.<sup>31</sup> And also as regards gender equality, the positions of the activists underwent significant transformations.

### A ‘Post-Feminist’ Generation

Despite the equality in practices, the 20FM did not carry a strong or clear message of equality. The movement did not produce a statement on gender, nor any specific demands that went beyond the demands for equality chanted in some of the slogans (often boycotted by the Islamists) and present in the platform of the movement.<sup>32</sup> In this connection, Khadija Ryadi states:

There is a paradox in the experience of the 20FM: admittedly many women and young women participated; however, there was little mention of equality between men and women. Equality could be seen

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<sup>29</sup> Interview with Ouidade Melhaf.

<sup>30</sup> A. Bayat, ‘A new Arab Street in Post Islamist Times’, in *Foreign Policy. The Middle East Channel*, 26/1/2011, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2011/01/26/a-new-arab-street-in-post-islamist-times/> (access 2/12/2016).

<sup>31</sup> Z. Salime, ‘A New Feminism? Gender Dynamics in Morocco’s February 20th Movement’, in *Journal of International Women’s Studies* 13/5 (2012), pp. 101-114.

<sup>32</sup> The gender equality was mentioned only in the second platform of the 20FM – 27<sup>th</sup> January, 14<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> February. See S. Borrillo, ‘Il Movimento del 20 Febbraio (M-20F) e l’uguaglianza di genere in Marocco tra dibattito interno e riforma costituzionale’ in A. M. Di Tolla - E. Francesca (a cura di), *La rivoluzione ai tempi di internet. Il futuro della democrazia nel Maghreb e nel mondo arabo*, Università degli Studi di Napoli “L’Orientale”, Napoli, 2012, p. 37.

in the streets; young men and women shared the same role of leadership, but in the slogans this was not very evident. This was caused by the presence of the Islamists. In order not to have problems with them, and to preserve unity, this concession was made: the question of equality was avoided. It was an implicit consensus. Women and equality were sacrificed. The question of women which was, in fact, present at the beginning returned when the Islamists left the movement.<sup>33</sup>

These words are confirmed by Amina Boughalbi, as the reasons behind the sidelining of the gender question:

Initially, men applauded and encouraged the women participation. They always encouraged young women to lead in meetings, to appear in videos. They had no problems with this, or regarding the demonstrations. However, 3-4 months after the creation of the movement, with the 'invasion' of the Islamists, things began to change. They made us discuss subjects, which for us were obvious, such as equality between men and women. At first, everyone agreed with these ideals and total equality between men and women was taken for granted. Later the Islamists imposed their view on the debate. They said that it was necessary to give priority to social and economic needs; in other words, bread, jobs and education. Important demands for us also of course, without, however, abandoning the subject of freedom, individual freedom, equality. As time passed the situation started to become serious, so much so that there were conflicts between young people within the movement at demonstrations and general meetings. For example, when we got to the slogan that said: 'Men and women are equal', the Islamists began to shout us down and say *Allāh Akbar*, so we could not be heard. [...] They began to attack us also because of the way we dressed, because we went to the demonstrations in jeans or mini-skirts.<sup>34</sup>

However, analyzing the speeches and practices of the movement and talking to activists both within and outside the 20FM, it does not seem that the only reason for the lack of centrality of the question of gender was the presence of the Islamists. On close inspection, the young women (just as the young men) of the 20FM did not consider the question of gender a central one. Although egalitarian and libertarian practices permeated their public and private lives, they did

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<sup>33</sup> Interview with Khadija Ryadi.

<sup>34</sup> Interview with Amina Boughalbi.

not formulate an agenda or any specific claims. They did not tackle central themes in their everyday life, such as the question of inequality in the law, or the strengthening of a conservative and backward morality in the face of the development of libertarian behavior practices. For example, in Morocco abortion is illegal even though it is widely practiced,<sup>35</sup> and it is against the law to have sexual relations outside marriage. Article 490 of the penal code criminalizes extramarital sex, calling for punishments ranging from one month to one year in jail.<sup>36</sup> Any form of conduct that does not lie within a strictly hetero-normative perimeter is condemned by popular morals and by the law. For the young men and women of the 20FM, individual freedom and equality are important themes but to be faced at a later date and would have been brought up only following the establishment of a real democracy. Ouidade Melhaf affirms: 'The 20FM was a protest movement and only after democratization would the specifics be considered'.<sup>37</sup> While Sabra Talbi states:

Personally, I am against feminist demands. There is no need to treat the woman in a specific context, separate from society. When we talk of democracy, we are automatically talking of citizens, women, men, who are all equal before the law. We are all human beings. If there is democracy, there will be equality between men and women; everything that is against women will be automatically abolished; women's rights will be respected and there will be no need to talk of the woman as though she were separate from Moroccan society.<sup>38</sup>

Young people, both women and men of the 20FM generation, consider the feminist struggle to be an area of demand which is too

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<sup>35</sup> Chafik Chraïbi, president of the association AMLAC (Association marocaine de lutte contre l'avortement clandestin) estimates that between 600 and 800 abortions take place illegally every day. Recently even the PJD has stated the necessity to discuss the law prohibiting abortion. See S. Hamma, « Maroc : El Othmani, numéro deux du PJD, relance le débat sur l'avortement », in *Jeune Afrique*, 4/3/2015, <http://www.jeuneafrique.com/226003/politique/maroc-el-othmani-num-ro-deux-du-pjd-relance-le-d-bat-sur-l-avortement/> (Last access 10/7/2015).

<sup>36</sup> These cases are rarely taken to court, since a conviction depends on either eyewitness testimony or a confession by one of the perpetrators. However, an unmarried woman's pregnancy is proof of sexual relations and may lead to criminal prosecution, while the fault of her male partner is not established by law.

<sup>37</sup> Interview with Ouidade Melhaf.

<sup>38</sup> Interview with Sabra Talbi.

narrow, too limited and too limiting, and tied to another period of political militancy. Qods Lefnatsa says:

Previously, women were more tied to the battle for women's freedom but now this is no longer true. Women are not just directing their attention to this cause but also to others, though always with the knowledge that there is still work to be done in order to obtain women's rights in Moroccan society.<sup>39</sup>

And Amina Boughalbi claims: 'I fight for women's rights but in their entirety. I always join women's rights to other rights. For me fighting only for women's rights is a waste of time'.<sup>40</sup>

And stone cutter Omar Radi, who, was 23 years old in 2011 and one of the 20FM leaders, asserts: 'I believe there was a priority, an agreed hierarchy of objectives, and the question of women was not a priority objective'.<sup>41</sup>

According to this perspective, it is from the battle for democracy and for human rights that women's rights will pour forth. The young, albeit recognizing the important battles fought by the women's movement in Morocco, looked with detached criticism at the feminist associations created in the '80s and '90s whose experiences will be better described in the following paragraph. They accused historical women's rights militants of having been co-opted by the system in exchange for concessions regarding legislative reform concerning the status of women and personal positions of power in the top echelons of public and private institutions. Qods Lefnatsa states:

In Morocco today women's associations are no longer feminist associations. There is no longer a strong feminist movement that has the courage to demand freedom for women. Feminist organizations in this country no longer demand equality (*musāwā*) but equity, parity (*munāṣafa*), i.e. a number of seats in Parliament.<sup>42</sup>

Their commitment, Amina Boughalbi asserts, is

traditional, in the sense that their work does not involve the great majority of Moroccan women. But this does not mean that they did

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<sup>39</sup> Interview with Qods Lefnatsa, Rabat, 21/1/2014.

<sup>40</sup> Interview with Amina Boughalbi.

<sup>41</sup> Interview with Omar Radi, Rabat, 23/1/2014.

<sup>42</sup> Interview with Qods Lefnatsa.

not do anything in the past. It is true that the feminist movement in Morocco played a fundamental role, for example, in the change of the family code. They followed a course of militancy, which was much appreciated, on a national level and at the North African region level. But there was no involvement of young people. Today, they are organizations, which are dominated by figures of old women; there is no renewal and they have not allowed for any exchange. These women have played an important role and we are grateful to them; it is an inheritance which we must defend but it is not sufficient.<sup>43</sup>

An inheritance, moreover, that does not represent a model of activism to be imitated. For the 20FM generation, women figures, symbols of their commitment, are in fact women committed to the associative sector, in the field of human rights and in the area of social commitment, but not immediately identifiable with the feminist movement (even when dealing with questions of gender) like the previously quoted Khadija Ryadi, Khadija Merouazi, President of the association *Médiateur pour la Démocratie et les Droits de l'Homme*, Aicha Ech-Channa, President of the association *Solidarité Feminine*, which helps single mothers, a category of highly stigmatized women in Moroccan society<sup>44</sup>, and Assia El Oudie, also known as Mama Assia, a magistrate, who, for a long time, looked after the re-education of under-age prisoners.

The split between historical associations of women – such as the *Association Démocratique des Femmes du Maroc (ADFM)*, the *Ligue démocratique des droits des femmes (LDDF)*, the *Union de l'Action Féminine (UAF)*, the *Association Marocaine pour le défense des droits des femmes* – and the youth of the 20FM occurred when the former chose not to participate in the movement and to endorse constitutional reform, while the latter invited people to protest and to boycott the constitutional referendum. It was an important rift which, however, should not be interpreted exclusively in terms of a generational split, of a dialectic clash between generations of 'mothers' and 'daughters'. Harsh criticism also came from women of previous generations. Khadija Ryadi affirms:

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<sup>43</sup> Interview with Amina Boughalbi.

<sup>44</sup> On the topic see the report 'Le Maroc des meres celibataires' (2010) realized by the association *Insaf*: <http://www.egalite.ma/attachments/article/212/INSAF-Rapport%20Etude%20nationale%20%27%27Le%20Maroc%20des%20m%C3%A8res%20c%C3%A9libataires%27%27.pdf> (Last access 10/7/2015).

The traditional associations of women in Morocco did not join the 20FM. The pretext was the presence of the Islamists. In my view the reasons for their lack of involvement lie in the fact that the movement made some very strong demands, for democracy, against the existing power. It wanted some fundamental and radical changes. Women's associations in Morocco maintain their elitism and want to change things through negotiation. They are not in favor of mass struggles and street demonstrations as a means to obtaining radical changes. Traditionally, this is not their chosen method. It was also like this for the Constitution. They voted for the Constitution, while we invited people to boycott the referendum. Admittedly, article 19 of the new Constitution states social, economic and civil equality between men and women<sup>45</sup> but on condition that the principles of Islam and the monarchy are not challenged.<sup>46</sup>

On their part, feminists accuse 20FM female activists of having taken gender equality for granted, and of not recognizing the important results of feminist struggles over the last 10 years, such as the 2002 introduction of the quota system for Parliamentary seats (women obtained the right to 10% of seats); the 2004 reform of family law, *Mudawwana* (which establishes gender equality, removes the marital guardian and obedience laws, provides women with the right to initiate divorce and gain custody of children, abolishes repudiation and restricts polygamy);<sup>47</sup> the 2007 reform of the Nationality code enabling Moroccan women to pass on their nationality to their

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<sup>45</sup> For an analysis of the reform of the Constitution in Morocco and of the article 19 see P. Longo, 'Il rinnovamento costituzionale in Nord Africa dopo la Primavera Araba (Egitto, Tunisia, Marocco)', in Laura Guazzone (a cura di), *Storia e evoluzione dei movimenti islamisti arabi*, pp. 312-314. Article 19 states: 'The man and the woman enjoy, in equality, the rights and freedoms of civil, political, economic, social, cultural and environmental character, enounced in this Title and in the other provisions of the Constitution, as well as in the international conventions and pacts duly ratified by Morocco and this, with respect for the provisions of the Constitution, of the constants and of the laws of the Kingdom. The State works for the realization of parity between men and women. An Authority for parity and the struggle against all forms of discrimination is created, to this effect'.

<sup>46</sup> Interview with Khadija Ryadi.

<sup>47</sup> For an analysis of the reform of the *Mudawwana* see L. Buskens, 'Recent Debates on Family Law Reform in Morocco: Islamic Law as Politics in an Emerging Public Sphere', in *Islamic Law and Society X/1* (2003), pp. 70-131; Z. Salime, *Between Feminism and Islam: Human Rights and Sharia Law in Morocco*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 2011; R. Pepicelli, *Femminismo islamico. Corano, diritti, riforme*, Carocci, Roma 2010, pp. 92-98.

children,<sup>48</sup> and finally the 2011 reform of the Constitution and the approval of Article 19 on gender equality. Moreover, the feminists reproach the new generations of activists for having re-adopted and made their own an old vision of the struggle for democracy, which places the battle for equality in second place. Naima Benwakrim, a leading figure in the Moroccan feminist movement, who has gone through various phases of the movement, founding and participating in many associative experiences of women like Espace Associatif and Jossour, replies to the criticism voiced against women's associations with these words:

The 20FM militants suppressed the question of equality in order to allow the participation of Islamists. Nobody came to discuss things with women. Every time I met them, I told them to call us. They always used to say 'Are you pro *Makhzen* or against *Makhzen*<sup>49</sup>?' They criticized our support of the Constitution and yet this is the best Constitution of the region in terms of women's rights. Everything that was in the women's memorandum<sup>50</sup> was taken into consideration. After 20 years of struggle we managed to obtain the feminization of the state; it was a great victory. Communication between the women's movement and the state was, therefore, most constructive. Equality had not been requested by the 20FM.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> On the legal reforms in Morocco concerning women's rights see F. Sadiqi, 'Special Report on Women's Rights in Morocco', in S. Kelly - J. Breslin (eds.), *Women's Rights in the Middle East and North Africa: Progress Amid Resistance*, Freedom House, New York; Rowman & Littlefield, Lanham, 2010, [https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/inline\\_images/Morocco.pdf](https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/inline_images/Morocco.pdf).

<sup>49</sup> In the current language with the term *Makhzen* Moroccans refer negatively to the power system in Morocco.

<sup>50</sup> After the Royal speech of 9<sup>th</sup> March 2011, many components of the Feminist Movement in Morocco created 'The Feminist Spring for Democracy and Equality Coalition' on 16<sup>th</sup> March 2011 in Rabat. The coalition aims was to draw up a memorandum reflecting the feminist movement vision of the new Constitution regarding the equality between women and men in civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights. More information are on the blog of the coalition: <https://pfdemaroc.wordpress.com/>. The text in Arabic of the memorandum is at the following link: <https://pfdemaroc.files.wordpress.com/2011/05/flddf.pdf> (Last access 10/7/2015).

<sup>51</sup> Interview with Naima Benwakrim, Rabat, 24/1/2014.

### **Genealogy. The Activism of the 20FM Generation within the Course of the Moroccan Feminist Movement**

However, despite the absence of a gender agenda and of specific demands regarding equality between men and women, and despite the split with traditional women's associations, the activism of the young 20FM generation can be located within the long history of the women's movement in Morocco. As underlined by Zakia Salime, feminism, as a matter of gender equality, has penetrated the social imagination of a new generation of activists.<sup>52</sup> It has shaped their actions and has made gender equality a course to be followed and pursued in their practices both in public and private life. In fact, Qods Lefnatsa, albeit extremely critical of the actions of the women's associations in Morocco, does not hesitate to affirm:

Even though I do not militate as a 'real feminist', perhaps because I am active in other fields, I consider myself a feminist. I feel I am a feminist although I do not use the term.<sup>53</sup>

The new kind of gender activism of the 20FM youth can be seen as constituting a new wave in the history of women's activism in Morocco when set against the background of various phases in the evolution of the feminist movement in the country.<sup>54</sup> The first phase goes from independence to the '70s. During this initial wave, there initially emerged a women's movement tied to the struggle for independence and to philanthropic associations, and then, during the '60s and '70s, within the parties and trade unions, in particular of the left and extreme left. These were the years that saw the growth of political parties' female sections, as women appeared on the public and political scene, but there was no specificity in the feminist struggle and the battles for gender equality were subordinated to class struggle.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Salime, 'A New Feminism? Gender Dynamics in Morocco's February 20th Movement'.

<sup>53</sup> Interview with Qods Lefnatsa.

<sup>54</sup> For a deeper analysis of the reconstruction of the wave in the course of the feminist movement in Morocco see R. Pepicelli, 'Genere e generazioni in transizione: il movimento delle donne in Marocco dall'indipendenza al post-rivolte arabe', in R. Pepicelli - A. Vanzan (eds.) *The future of Women's Movements in the Mena Region. A New Feminist Wave?*, in *afriche e orienti* 17/1 (2016), pp. 14-33.

<sup>55</sup> R. Naciri, *The Women's Movement and Political Discourse in Morocco*; F. Sadiqi - M. Ennaji, 'The Feminization of Public Space: Women's Activism, the

The second wave goes from the first half of the '80s to the end of the '90s. It signals the birth of a women's movement which was autonomous from the parties and unions, and which supported the centrality of a separatist struggle in order to obtain the reform of legal institutions that support and strengthen gender inequality. These were the years that saw the birth of a number of associations such as the ADFM, Association Démocratique des Femmes du Maroc (Democratic Association of Moroccan Women), the UAF, Union pour l'Action Feminine (Union for Women's Action), the Collectif 95 Maghreb Egalité (Association 95 Maghreb for Equality), and the ADMF, Association Marocaine pour les Droits des Femmes (Moroccan Association for Women's Rights), which were to dominate the feminist public scene up until the present day, placing the gender question at the center of the political debate.<sup>56</sup> These realities were strengthened and consolidated thanks to funds from international donors who were interested in broadening the 'emancipationist' debate in the Arab world.<sup>57</sup>

The third wave goes from the end of the '90s to the present day, with a moment of discontinuity in 2011. The year 2011 represented a turning point which saw the contemporary emergence of a new wave, the fourth. In this phase, which coincides with the first period of the reign of Mohammed VI, women's associations born in the '80s and the '90s, encouraged by the support of international institutions such as the UN, EU, WB, chose a method of struggle which was no longer one of conflict with the system, but of consultation and negotiation, in order to obtain a series of reforms regarding the legal system.<sup>58</sup> Feminist reasoning and feminist practices were taken up by the system and a sort of 'feminism of state' began to emerge,<sup>59</sup> while leading figures from the women's movement were co-opted and absorbed into state institutions. Despite a series of important victories regarding

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Family Law, and Social Change in Morocco', in *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies* II/2 (Spring 2006), pp. 86-114.

<sup>56</sup> H. Alami M'chici, *Genre et politique au Maroc. Les enjeux de l'égalité hommes-femmes entre islamisme et modernisme*, L'Harmattan, Paris, 2002, p. 125.

<sup>57</sup> V. Moghadam, *Feminist Activism in the Arab Region and Beyond: Linking Research to Policy Reform and Social Change*, Freia - Feminist Research Center in Aalborg, 72 (February 2010), <http://freia.ihis.aau.dk/Publikationer+og+skriftserie/Skriftserie0907-2179>.

<sup>58</sup> Naciri, *The Women's Movement and Political Discourse in Morocco*.

<sup>59</sup> S. Eddouada, *Women, Gender and the State in Morocco: Contradictions, Constraints and Prospects*, PhD Thesis, University Mohamed V, Rabat, 2003, p. 24.

women's rights, such as the reform of the *Mudawwana* (2004) and the nationality code, already mentioned above, the women's movement lost the anti-systemic character of its early years. At the same time, the Islamist movement – embodied by the institutionalized PJD (Party for Justice and for Development) and in the extra-Parliamentary group *Al-'adl wa-l-ihsān* – gained approval amongst the population<sup>60</sup> and women's associations asked themselves if it was appropriate to continue along a path which demanded rights within the framework of secularism, which did not include any reference to Islam, or if it was instead necessary to engage in a struggle based on a gender re-reading of the sacred scripts, and which has indeed been defined as 'Islamic feminism'.<sup>61</sup>

The fourth wave – which coexists with the third one – is characterized, as already stated, by the establishment of a new generation of activists, engaged within that reawakening in Moroccan civil society which culminated in the 20FM. This new activism was not confined to the 20FM experience but also included groups close to the movement though not necessarily produced by it, such as the M.A.L.I. group, *Mouvement Alternatif pour les Libertés Individuelles*,<sup>62</sup> which existed before the 2011 protests, or groups which, in one way or another, indirectly emerged out of experiences

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<sup>60</sup> Symbolic of the strength of the Islamist movement was the demonstration of 20<sup>th</sup> March 2000 in Casablanca in which between 100,000 and 200,000 people opposed the proposed reform of the *Mudawwana*, demonstrating a numeric strength which was far superior to that deployed by the left and by the women's movement which had taken to the squares on the same day in Rabat to express their support for the reform and more in general for the 'Panified', *Plan d'Action National d'Intégration des Femmes au Développement* (National Plan of Action for Women's Integration in Development), proposed by the then government (Buskens, 'Recent Debates on Family Law Reform in Morocco', p. 104). It was the first time that the Islamist women had appeared on the public scene. Some of them rose to the fore. Particularly, Nadia Yassine, daughter of *shaykh* Abdessalam Yassine, founder of the *Al-'adl wa-l-ihsān* movement emerged in the public debate (Interview with Nadia Yassine, Salé, 15/1/2006). A significant number of Islamist women were present at the 20FM demonstrations, although in different forms and in different ways compared to those of the young secular activists, whose activism is analyzed in this paper (Interviews with Hakima El Alaoui and Latifa Hamdaoui, members of *Al-'adl wa-l-ihsān*, Rabat, 24/1/2015).

<sup>61</sup> For an analysis of the Islamic feminism in Morocco see R. Pepicelli, *Femminismo islamico*, pp. 69-82 e 92-98; S. Eddouada - R. Pepicelli, « Maroc : vers un féminisme islamique d'État », in *Critique Internationale* XLVI (2010), pp. 87-100.

<sup>62</sup> See S. Borrillo, *supra*.

from the widespread uprising of the younger generations. An example of this is the magazine 'Qandisha' edited by Fedwa Misk, which gathers numerous views on the conditions of women, and the emergence of blogs and online platforms against sexual molestation.<sup>63</sup> This fourth phase is distinguished by a series of characteristic features that have in common some kind of 'post-' prefix. In fact, the activism of the 20FM generation is distinguished by the fact that it is 'post-ideological', 'post-Islamist', 'post-secular' and 'post-feminist'. It refuses to confine gender activism to women's issues; it is against feminist reasoning being regulated by state institutions and criticizes the NGO-ization of women's activism and demands. While liberal feminists desired change to take place through state institutions, 20FM activists wished for the overthrow of these same institutions.<sup>64</sup>

However, while this new activism clearly breaks away from the so-called third wave associations, following the end of the 20FM and the growing repression in the country, it has had difficulty in finding words and forms with which to define itself and continue its battles. Nevertheless, while some of the movement's activists eventually withdrew, disappointed by the protest's outcome, many others founded new associations, with a mixed gender composition, mostly tied to educational, cultural and artistic projects, and, in many cases, avoiding direct political confrontation. Amina Boughalbi explains this new phase as follows:

For me the 20FM is not dead; because 20<sup>th</sup> February is not a demonstration but a generation of young people aware of the need for change in Morocco. It is true that today there are no longer demonstrations in Morocco, but the young are still active and have channeled their activities towards other forms of activism. There are those who have created human rights associations like *Prometheus*, *Jeunes pour Jeunes*. There are those who have made films, who have made documentaries on gender violence, on the story of Amina Filali.<sup>65</sup> There are some young men and women who perform a

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<sup>63</sup> S. Borrillo, 'Telepredicatrici e attiviste on line in Marocco: la costruzione mediatica del genere femminile tra ideale islamico e libertà individuali', in R. Picicelli (a cura di), *Le donne nei media arabi. Tra aspettative tradite e nuove opportunità*, Carocci, Roma, 2014, pp. 107-109.

<sup>64</sup> Salime, 'A New Feminism?'

<sup>65</sup> It is the case of the video-makers group 'Guerrilla cinema' that realized the documentary 475. *When marriage becomes punishment* on the violence against women.

'theatre of the oppressed' in several Moroccan cities, dealing with issues of a political, economic and social nature. There are some young people who play music, who have created rap groups. The idea of the movement continues to live through these young people.<sup>66</sup>

Following the 20FM, a new political gender awareness appeared in the country, which led Moroccan society not to be afraid to demand its rights and to denounce wrongs. It is common knowledge amongst male and female activists that the 20FM brought a considerable amount of freedom to Moroccan society and encouraged people to mobilize for social, political and economic justice, as well as gender justice. Amina Boughalbi continues:

Before 20<sup>th</sup> February, people did not demonstrate, now they do, even in small villages. People discuss subjects that used to be taboo like sexual violence, sexual relations outside marriage, relationships amongst the young. There are certain positive changes, even if there are some negative ones with the arrival of the Islamist government. Following the 20<sup>th</sup> February, Moroccan civil society has taken up a significant amount of control. For example, after the royal decision to pardon the Spanish pedophile, Daniel Galvan Vina, people took to the squares. After the arrest of the two young men who kissed in the street, people took to the squares. There is a general tendency to demonstrate, to take to the squares.<sup>67</sup>

An important case in point for this new gender awareness was the battle for the reform of Article 475 of the Moroccan penal code, which authorized an abuser to marry his victim in order to avoid going to jail. After sixteen-year-old Amina Filali committed suicide on 10<sup>th</sup> March 2012 because she was forced to marry the man who raped her, a large demonstration took place. Amina's suicide could have been a 'news story', quickly dealt with by the press and then forgotten, as with many other pieces of news of a similar nature, but civil society, reborn after 20FM, together with feminists and human rights associations mobilized and were quickly joined by thousands of anonymous supporters, demonstrating in several cities in Morocco a

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<sup>66</sup> Interview with Amina Boughalbi.

<sup>67</sup> *Ib.*

week after Filali's suicide.<sup>68</sup> Their demands received a positive answer in January 2014 when the reform of Article 475 of the penal code took place. The idea, spread by the 20FM protests, that it was possible to express an opinion in public, and manifest one's own ideas, did not remain confined to young people and to the student environment, or to the women who belong to this category. As Lucile Daumas recalls:

In the 20FM demonstrations there were two types of women: on the one hand, young women and female students, and on the other, many women from a lower class environment. These women were strongly aware. They were not in the squares to follow their husbands or sons, but because they knew what they wanted [...] And the thing that was most spectacular was their emergence in the small villages and cities of the South, where the custom was not the *ḥijāb* but the *ḥā'ik*; veiled women, always hidden, took to the streets. [...] In Ait Abdi, for example, they demonstrated to obtain a hospital in which to deliver their babies.<sup>69</sup>

As Zakia Salime wrote, the feminist quest for equality in the youth movement's demands for social justice bore fruit, and raised the visibility of scattered and much more localized protest movements led by women in many poor urban neighborhoods and rural areas.

We have no particular name for these uprisings here and there, other than the names of the women who started them. For instance, when we mention the 'women of Ben Semime', we mean the protest movement that the women of this rural community started against the privatization of a local source of water by a French company. [...] YouTube is crowded with pictures and voices from these widespread and spontaneous protests by women facing situations that drove them to act together.<sup>70</sup>

## Conclusion

It is not easy to predict the forms that this new gender activism will take in the near future. The freedom of expression in Morocco is once again diminishing under the weight of new repressive waves. In

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<sup>68</sup> Z. Touati, 'The Struggle for Women's Rights in Morocco', in Mohamed Olimat (ed.), *Arab Spring and Arab Women: Challenges and Opportunities*, Routledge, London-New York, 2014, p. 131.

<sup>69</sup> Interview with Lucile Daumas.

<sup>70</sup> Salime, 'A New Feminism?', p. 110.

parallel to this, a neo-traditionalist approach to values is becoming established throughout the country, also due to the coming to power of the PJD, in 2011.<sup>71</sup> Any conduct that does not strictly conform to a conservative and traditionalist ethical code is condemned by public morality and by Moroccan laws, applied more and more repressively. This has been the case, for example, with the arrest of a teenage couple who had posted a photo of them kissing on Facebook in 2013,<sup>72</sup> or with the arrest of two young women wearing a mini-skirt in 2015.<sup>73</sup> At the same time, experiences such as that of the online newspaper 'Qandisha' ([www.qandisha.ma](http://www.qandisha.ma)), founded in November 2011, find it difficult to make progress.<sup>74</sup>

Only viewed in the long-term will a historical analysis be able to give us information regarding the women's movement in Morocco and the factions within it.

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<sup>71</sup> For the history of the PJD see Granci, 'Traiettorie dell'islam politico in Marocco', pp.221-223.

<sup>72</sup> Jeune Afrique, *Maroc: un couple d'adolescents arrêté à cause d'une photo sur Facebook*, in *Jeune Afrique*, 5/10/2013, <http://www.jeuneafrique.com/149314/societe/maroc-un-couple-d-adolescents-arr-t-cause-d-une-photo-sur-facebook/>

<sup>73</sup> Majda Abellah, « Deux marocaines poursuivies en raison de leurs jupes jugées trop courtes » (Last access 10/7/2015) in *Jeune Afrique*, 25/6/2015, <http://www.jeuneafrique.com/239715/societe/deux-marocaines-poursuivies-en-raison-de-leurs-jupes-jugees-trop-courtes/> (Last access 10/7/2015).

<sup>74</sup> Skype interview with Fedwa Misk, 16/7/2015.

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