ENVISIONING AND DEFINING A NEW EGYPT: WOMEN AND GENDER IN THE JANUARY 25th UPRISING AND TRANSITIONAL PROCESS

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ABSTRACT

On January 25, Egyptian protesters infamously toppled the Mubarak regime in a period of eighteen days. Similar to experiences of other Egyptian historical nationalist and revolutionary experiences, Egyptian women played a full role in the eighteen day Jan 25th Revolution. However, after the toppling of Mubarak, women’s burden of representation and upholding society’s civil and moral boundaries has made their bodies and movements policed, physically and symbolically. Women (imagined and real) become the sites of constructions of categories such as "nation" "state" and "citizenship" during the uprising and in the reconstruction of a new Egypt. The process of transformation and simultaneous reproduction of gender through symbols, discourse, and meaning have mirrored the changes seen in the revolutionary process of restructuring the state and attempts to transform old modes of powers and social inequalities. By examining debates and charged discourses on women's roles and rights in society rights, this paper will reflect the various visions of the ideal Egyptian nation as well as the changing realities in a post-revolutionary Egypt.
PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Even though I was in Washington DC in January 2011, as an Egyptian, I was on the same eighteen day roller-coaster of emotions that all Egyptians were riding during the initial days of the revolution. Watching the revolution unfold from January 25 until Mubarak’s resignation on February 11, I was moved by the remarkable images of Egyptian unity, unsettled when I saw footage of paid thugs attacking protesters, and enraged by Mubarak’s out-of-touch speeches and the distorted propaganda repeated by state media. Even though I was not surprised by the large role and courage that women displayed during these eighteen days, I was nevertheless intrigued by their participation. Even my spirited grandmother, who usually refuses to leave the confines of her dimly-lit apartment, was moved by the patriotism and went out daily to the streets of Alexandria. She would come back and proudly share how “I feel young when I protest. I walk and scream from my heart.”

As I experienced the Egyptian revolution from far away, I was reminded of the nationalist movement in 1919 in which women went out in public protest and joined their people to end British colonial occupation and demand national independence for Egypt. I wondered if the fate of women after the 2011 would result in similar disappointment for those women in 1919 who were expected by men to return to previous understandings of appropriate behavior and expected roles in society. I increasingly noted the complex ways the revolution and the process of rebuilding the state was gendered and was keen on following how these moments would change the course of Egypt’s future.

Regardless of where the transitional process takes Egypt, I and many other Egyptians have a renewed sense of patriotism and a sense of responsibility towards the country. These
changes could simply be seen through my relationship with my grandma. Before the January 25th Revolution, our discussions revolved around when I would finish my studies so I could get married. After it, we engaged in political debates such as for whom we would vote for president and who were the thugs that were engaging in violence in the ongoing protests. As tens of political parties would emerge in the post-Mubarak era all with similar nationalistic names, she humorously suggested that she and I should also start our own political party and name it “Al Akhawat al-Ahrar” (“The Free Sisterhood”).

In this spirit, I would like to begin my thesis to thank those courageous Egyptian martyrs who sacrificed their lives to allow these beautiful discussions possible to take place. This project was made possible by the support of Georgetown’s Arab Studies Program for providing funding to support my field research in Egypt. I am indebted to my advisor Judith Tucker, who provided steadfast encouragement, patience, and generous readings of my manuscript. Many thanks to my reader Fida Adely for her invaluable comments and suggestions. Ayoung Shin, Alissa Walter, and Anny Gaul, peers from the Georgetown Arab Studies Program, deserve special thanks for reviewing drafts of my manuscript and for enriching my thinking. Thanks are due to many who gave their time in agreeing to be interviewed and for allowing me the privilege of observing their activism. Finally, I am enormously grateful to family and friends for their emotional support and encouragement throughout this process.
# Table of Contents

Introduction ...................................................................................................................... 1

Chapter One: The Historical Tensions of Re-imagining/Re-defining the Egyptian Nation and Woman ................................................................. 15

Chapter Two: The Making of the Tahrir Family ................................................................................. 42

Chapter Three: The Boundaries of Restoring Honor and Vandalizing the Nation: Women are the Red Line ........................................................................ 69

Conclusion .................................................................................................................... 103

Bibliography ................................................................................................................. 108
INTRODUCTION

From January 25 to February 11, 2011, the Egyptian people (al-sha’ab al-masri) shocked the world. Millions of Egyptians went down to the streets to call for isqat al-nizam (“the fall of the regime”) in unison, despite their differences in class, gender, religion, and age. Throughout the course of eighteen days, they were able to remove Hosni Mubarak, an 83 year old despot who had been clinging to power for the last 30 years. Egyptians defied long-standing stereotypes which had painted them as belonging to a passive, co-opted, and apolitical society. Startling images and videos of fearless citizens risking their lives for their nation and for the calls of ‘aish, hurriya, ‘adala igtimaiyya, (“bread, freedom, and social justice”) inspired the world. With the ousting of Mubarak, the Egyptian people began a political, social, economic and psychological restructuring and reestablishing of a “new Egypt,” a process still clouded with contention, mass-mobilization, and uncertainty.

Since the eighteen-day uprising, experts on Egyptian politics have largely focused on high politics - the Supreme Council of Armed Forces (SCAF), the Muslim Brotherhood, elections, regional balance of power - in their analysis of Egypt’s transitional period. Although there is growing fascination and alarm in Western and Egyptian media around what will be the future of women’s rights in Egypt, particularly with the rise of Islamist movements since the fall of Mubarak, gender as an analytical tool to study the January 25 Revolution and the transitional period has largely been unexplored. Consequently, women’s voices have been largely left out of the analysis.

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1 Even though the popular did not lead to a complete overthrow of the past political system, commentators (local and international) refer to the events as the January 25 Revolution.
Most feminist narratives on nationalist movements paint a picture of the difficult and contradictory experience of women who globally "served nationalism,” even as nationalism “in some respects have failed women.”\(^2\) Or, women’s issues and concerns are incorporated during periods of national mobilization and political struggle, only to be discarded and pushed to the margins during later periods of state consolidation. There are clear indications that Egyptian women since the January 25 Revolution have not reaped long-term benefits in their involvement in nation-building efforts that ultimately are not feminist. However, this analysis stops too soon and in many ways is incomplete. Rather, we must fully engage linkages of revolutionary moments to other manifestations of political action and change, and the ways women’s as well as men’s desires shape the nation and in what ways they are included and excluded. I will discuss how women (imagined and physically) have been at the center of reconstituting gendered notions of citizenship, sovereignty, and state power during this ongoing process of revolution. In this, I argue that national politics are inevitably gendered, that ideas of national identity and origins are “permeated with notions of masculinity and femininity.”\(^3\) Although the new Egyptian state still has not been consolidated at this moment, I will provide a glimpse to the amorphous process of producing and reproducing culturally based meanings of the nation, and how women’s engagement has affected this process.

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Theoretical Framework, Sources, and Methodology

Primarily, my analysis is built on Joan Scott’s conception of gender as a tool of analysis. With this, I aim to provide insight into an often overlooked but essential component in understanding Egypt’s uprising and the continuing transitional period: the story of women and shifts in gendered relations in the revolution. Joan Scott’s definition of gender rests on the proposition that gender is a constitutive element of social relationships based on perceived difference between the sexes, and gender is a primary way of signifying relations of power. My addition of the voices of women into the study of Egypt’s revolution is not merely additive, nor does it intend simply to replace men with women as the main actor. Instead, I aim to complicate assumptions about revolution, political agency, and space that are built into approaches that only examine high politics in the public sphere. Such an analysis complicates the assumptions about revolution, political agency, and space that are built into approaches that only examine high politics. By merging the transformative politics happening within both public and private spheres, gender as an analytical tool helps redefine political action that crosses across the “public-private” divide, providing a unique lens to understanding the January 25 revolution and its continuation. Furthermore, gender as an analytical tool helps clarify understandings of how power is being reorganized between political forces and state actors, and how the range of sex roles and symbols functions to maintain the social and political order, or promote its change.

Second, my thesis will build upon feminist literature that examines the relationship between modernity and gender in the Middle East. Deniz Kandiyoti notes that earlier work seems to style a framework of East versus West and omit the extent to which indigenous

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modernity discourses exist not only in relation to the West, but also in response to local political histories, and ethnic, class and other inequalities and differences. Earlier scholars, such as Valentine Moghadam argue that secular political systems are better for women than religion-based systems. In addition, many view women’s non-secular beliefs or politics as a “false consciousness”, rather than as part of complex religious-class-gender subjectivities and locations that at times challenge, extract benefit from, or comply with various hierarchies and power regimes. However, Frances Hasso believes that this earlier scholarship needs to acknowledge the existence of plural modernities: “opening up possibilities for recognizing plural feminist projects and subjectivities that may include non-secular articulations… or even antifeminist subjectivities and agencies that value certain forms of self-subordination”. Since Mubarak’s ousting, the Muslim Brotherhood and the Salafist movement have gained a dominant role in mainstream politics and will have a greater influence on enforcing their understandings of an Egyptian democratic system shaped by religious and cultural influences. I will thus analyze these groups’ notions and discourse about women and their proper roles in the ideal Egyptian nation post-January 25 and what it may mean for women’s rights in new Egypt. Building off the recent scholarship that recognizes that women themselves are drawn to Islamist movements and play an important role in them, I will shed light to how female Islamist activists envision their agencies, rights, and roles within Islamist groups and larger society since the January 25 Revolution.

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5 Frances Hasso, “Problems and Promise in Middle East and North Africa Gender Research.” Feminist Studies 31, no. 3 (Fall 2005): 653.
6 Hasso, 657.
7 Here, Hasso uses the term "identity" to signify a person's understanding of who s/he is and how s/he belongs, whereas "subjectivity" signifies self-hood as constituted through language, power relations, and embodied experiences.
**Sources and Methodology**

I have used a variety of sources to examine the cultural, social, and political discourses around gender during and after the January 25 Revolution. Employing Benedict Anderson’s notion of ‘imagined communities’ or how a nation is a socially-constructed community of people, the majority of whom have never been in face-to-face contact, I examine the forum of social media in which Egyptians can think of themselves in a constitutive manner, and in which conceptions of an ideal society are envisioned and debated. Particularly, in our globalized and connected world, technological tools such as Youtube, Facebook, and Twitter which “tend to interrogate, subvert, and transform other contextual literacies”, and absorb themselves immediately into public discourse. Social media thus transforms and reconstitutes a much wider field of mass mediation. These tools were used to mobilize Egyptians before, during, and after the revolution, and provide vehicles and forums for Egyptians to debate and envision a new Egypt.

Many scholars have argued that Anderson’s theory does not account for the emotional aspect of nationalism nor gives room for ordinary people to impact their form of local nationalism, but only articulates nationalism as that shaped by state institutions and the intelligentsia. Noting this gap in Anderson’s theory, Michael Herzfeld introduced the notion of ‘cultural intimacy’ which “accounts the details of everyday life- symbolism, commensality, family and friendship” and highlights the interplay between official and social discourses. Thus,

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modifying Benedict Anderson’s top-down formulation, this thesis studies not only how Egyptian
government officials, religious authorities, and charismatic opposition leaders inject their visions
onto the public, but how ordinary Egyptians increasingly subvert official discourses of nation,
thereby impacting and defining the cultural form of the evolving nation-state.¹⁰

Examining the videos, cartoons, and online debates that circulated on social forums
allowed me to examine how various actors used social media to articulate their own gendered
visions and interact with each other, whether they are ordinary citizens, social groups, political
parties, or even governmental actors. Although any essentialist arguments about “culture”
discourse should be rejected, examining culture as “semiotic practices” certainly adds value to
political analyses of Egypt’s transitional period as I examine the politics around how gendered
language and symbols are used to construct “truths”, and to what purposes and in what
circumstances they are being articulated and shaped by such different actors.¹¹ As Asaf Bayat
argues, “In matters of history, humans define their truth. The individuals and groups who hold
social power can assert and hegemonize their truths. Historical narratives… demonstrate how
societal forces, notably social movements, play a decisive role in changing and shaping the
‘truth’ of holy scriptures.”¹²

Rather than simply examining literal readings of the Qur’an and the hadith and
determining Islamic notions of democracy, pluralism, and women’s rights, one should rather pay

¹⁰ Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*. (Minnesota: University of
¹¹ Lisa Wedeen refers to it as the processes of meaning-making in which agents’ practices interact with language and
symbols to produce observable political effects. See, Lisa Wedeen, “Conceptualizing Culture: Possibilities for
attention to the politics around how language and symbols are used, which is what my research will attempt to understand.

I travelled to Egypt for three months from June to August of 2011 to conduct fieldwork consisting mainly of in-depth interviews and participation observation. Although my relatives are from Alexandria and I am most familiar with this city, I chose to spend most of my time in Cairo where most NGOs, political parties’ headquarters, and institutions are located. I spent the first two months living in Talaat Harb Street in Central Cairo, only a few minutes’ walk to Tahrir Square. This gave me the opportunity to be part of *dawlat al-Tahrir* (“the Tahrir state”) as many have referred to it, where I witnessed and joined several protests.

I noticed the changes in women who spoke at the protests and the language they used, where women stood in relation to men during these protests, and how these dynamics changed depending on the event and the actors participating. On calmer days where there were organized protests with platforms provided for activists, politicians, and families of martyrs to rally the crowds, I stood with women near the front of the stage, with men respectfully standing behind us making sure to keep a gap in between women and men to prevent harassment. However, during the unorganized skirmishes clouded with tear gas that spontaneously broke out between police and protesters, this segregation disappeared as women and men of different identities engaged in the same forms of contestation they became adept at during the January 25 revolution.

Passing around water bottles on a hot day with tens of strangers, singing the same chants, and having people coming to my rescue with vinegar and cloth after my first experiences with teargas further built my attachment to the family in Tahrir and the importance of the ongoing revolution. Not only was I part of the family of protesters, I also was part of the family and
belonged to the loose networks in the lower-class neighborhood in Central Cairo. Shopkeepers, street vendors, the family and friends of the “building guard” (bawwab) not only provided me with discussions around their views on the revolution, developing political happenings, and their thoughts on gender-relations and roles, but also became my family and supported me knowing I was living alone.

During the same summer, I briefly interned for UN Women which provided me with the access needed to conduct participant observation at meetings and conferences held by local feminist group since the revolution where participants discussed and debated how to overcome the backlash against women’s rights and groups since the revolution. I interviewed activists in various women’s organizations to discuss their participation in the revolution, women’s rights in Egypt and it future in Egypt, and their views on how to resolve their current difficulties. Through snowball sampling from my own connections through friends, family, and neighbors, I also interviewed educated young and older women belonging to various political parties (liberal and conservative) and social organizations. I asked them about their views of the political developments and how were they involved, their conceptions of the ideal Egyptian state, and their understandings of women’s roles and rights. As I became more intrigued by the activism of Islamist women within their changing organizations, protests, and larger society, I was graciously given access to Islamist women’s circles through friendships I made, as well as through the active acquaintances of my grandmother at the local Muslim Brotherhood dominated mosque in Alexandria she attended.

Collecting oral histories allowed me to capture the emotional experience that comes with actions and events, and allowed my subjects to discuss their sense of agency and their
understanding of their identities in their own terms, illuminating the subjectivities of their lives. The majority of my interviews were conducted with women given they are the primary focus of my research, and that I was interested in sharing the views of women, who relative to their male counterparts, whether in the media and other forms of coverage, were not given as much of a voice. I did interview a few male activists and politicians around their conceptions of gendered relations and women’s rights. Casual discussions with male relatives and old friends and acquaintances I developed also helped inform my thesis.

My identity definitely shaped the results of my fieldwork. Being an Egyptian female who wears hijab, I easily blended into my surroundings. For women and men not affiliated with feminist organizations and not accustomed to researchers conducting studies on these topics, discussing women’s issues and rights can be culturally sensitive. Being a woman wearing hijab who does not look like a Westerner or an outsider attempting to impose the “oppressed Muslim woman” narrative on their experiences mitigated suspicions and allowed for more open discussions, many of which I could relate to and understand being an Egyptian woman. People’s perceptions of me as an Egyptian who lives in the United States with an elite education also led to interesting discussions around their views around Islam and the West, differences in gender relations in these societies, and what it means to be a “modern” Muslim woman. Some of my subjects, particularly feminists and politicians who were accustomed to researchers conducting studies, were aware that my narrative about them would be exposed in Western circles, and this awareness undoubtedly affected their self-presentation and the content of our discussions.

As very few of my researchers spoke fluent English, most of my interviews were conducted in colloquial Egyptian Arabic. Although some responded in formal Arabic, most of
these interviewees were encouraged to speak in a conversational manner in the Egyptian dialect. These interviews were conducted in a range of settings and based on the subjects’ choosing including offices of women’s organizations, the headquarters of new political parties, cafes, the homes of these subjects, and even in the tents of Tahrir during the sit-in against SCAF during the summer of 2011.

With a topic that is dynamic and continuously unfolding that I have not been able to physically witness in Egypt when I travelled back to the United States, such as the debated parliamentary elections and the increasingly violent clashes between protesters and SCAF in the winter of 2011, and the consequent success of Islamist groups after the elections, I naturally continued to track and include the developments of the transitional process, adding to the initial research I gathered in the summer. I followed the Egyptian news, studied the heated debates and opinions of friends and strangers (whether well-known political figures who use social media to articulate their opinions or the visions of “ordinary” Egyptians who contribute to these debates through social media). As an Egyptian in a family that is also attached to and keenly following the debates, even though I was far away, I experienced somewhat the same political debates happening simultaneously within many Egyptian households that were for the first time engaging in these divisive yet healthy discussions, all the more depicting how gender and family are central in understanding politics, as they bridge the misperceived divide between the politics of “private” and “public” spheres. As this topic and the transitional period is changing daily, this thesis will only analyze until December 2011, the first year of the transitional period.

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13 For more on how the Egyptian revolution was experienced in domestic spaces, inflected by gender and class read, Jessica Winegar, “The Privilege of Revolution: Gender, class, space, and affect in Egypt” Journal of the American Ethnological Society 39, no. 1 (Jan 2012): 67-70.
This thesis seeks to use gender to bring to light the complexities of the revolutionary movement and demonstrate the power dynamics and negotiations that took place within it. Because the revolution represented a reconfiguration of power, and because gender is a primary expression of power relations, one can read the revolution as a reconfiguration of gender dynamics in the hierarchical paternal system. By tracing how gender “becomes implicated in the conception and construction of power itself”, we can see how the change in the balance of powers since the revolution articulates and manifests itself.\textsuperscript{14} Actors in the revolution are not only redefining gender, but are using existing gender reconfigurations (innovative and recycled) to define themselves as worthy of gaining control and as a means to define their visions for Egypt’s development.

Based on my research, I argue that the process of transformation and simultaneous reproduction of gender through symbols, discourse, and meaning mirror the changes arising from a national revolutionary moment and the difficult process of restructuring the state and struggling to transformed old modes of powers and social inequalities. Examining discourses and practices that define women as the barometer of how “authentic” or “modern” a society is, this thesis illustrates the diverse ways in which women are used by various actors to envision and (re)create an authentic yet democratic Egypt. This thesis will also show how Egyptian women are not just used by various actors, but also have agency in constituting their own definitions for what it means to create/recreate a new Egypt.

The structure of this thesis provides a nuanced gendered examination of the January 25 uprising and the transitional period. Before analyzing gender discourses during the January 25

\textsuperscript{14} Joan Scott, \textit{Gender and the Politics of History} (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988) 42.
uprising and the subsequent transitional process, it is important to understand earlier relationships between revolutionary moments, women’s activism, and engendered envisionings of the new nation.

Chapter One situates the current uprising and transitional period in its historical context. First, I examine the intersection of colonialism, modernity, and gender in the early twentieth century during the Egyptian nationalist movement. I explore the intertwinement of the Egyptian feminist movement and the nationalist movement, which provided a medium for increased women’s activism and for women to assert their agency, when nationalist colonialist debates linked women’s emancipation to the nation’s independence. Then, I examine the local politics around gender and the construction of a paternalistic gender regime in which elite figures (both men and women) used modernity discourses not only to assert their freedom from colonialism, but to claim political authority over other local elites. The fact that the women’s movement was led by elitist women with ties to those in power would later negatively affect the feminist movement when it was perceived as benefitting from the paternalism of those in power, all the more diverging secular discourses of those in power and alternative Islamist discourses around modernity. I then explore the consequences for the women’s movement and women’s rights in the contemporary project of building the nation-state under Nasser, Sadat, and Mubarak. I reveal the politics of gender under their regimes in which women’s rights would be only used when it was instrumental for the policies and agendas, and to politically distinguish themselves from oppositional forces.

After providing a historical examination of the woman question during the nationalist movement as well as under the modern nation-state, in Chapter Two, I provide a close
examination of the gendered and familial discourses that emerged during the eighteen day uprising. I explore how the Mubarak regime and the protesters both used gendered and familial language during this moment. By juxtaposing the discourse from above (the state) and the discourse from below (the protesters), I demonstrate that even though the old regime used familial rhetoric to lay common grounds with citizens and to stifle the uprising, it was not able to adapt to the changing discourse of the ideal Egyptian family when the discourse was interrelated to Mubarak’s authoritarian power. The protesters during the January 25 uprising used familial imagery and performed the ideals of the true Egyptian family, a more powerful alternative that ultimately constructed and defined boundaries of a new ideal nation that excluded the old regime and its social/political/economic ills. I study the space of Tahrir Square provided not only the space to renegotiate/reclaim authority/power over public spaces, but provided the space that allowed for the transcendence of gender norms as well as bodily dispositions. Similar to the larger space for female protesters to assert their agency during the nationalist movement, I record provide an account of how women were given an opportunity to challenge gendered notions and given greater agency to cross social boundaries through their participation.

In Chapter Three, I examine the transitional period after the Egyptian uprising. I study the reconfiguration of power vis-à-vis changing discourses surrounding the revolution itself and changing discourses around women and gender. Namely, I examine the gendered politics that emerge as various political players struggled for control over the transitional process. Although these actors appear to have completely different visions for the nation, women (imagined and physically) have been at the center of the process of restructuring the state. As in past
revolutionary processes, Egypt as a woman increasingly became the central trope for how “she” would be envisioned, the regressed discourses around the revolution also mirrored the regressed and sexualized discourses around women and gender. This is revealed particularly in the intensified public campaign targeting state-sponsored feminism as not representing the authentic Egyptian women as well as the tightening of the space that allowed for the transcendence of gender norms and bodily disposition during the uprising. The Supreme Council of Armed Forces, the power supposed to lead the transitional period to a new state system for Egypt, increasingly mirrored the old regime’s methods of control as it attempted to steer the revolution in a direction that would preserve its interests. Examining SCAF’s gendered policies and the violence used against women, as well as the gendered discourses emerging from these instances reveal the implications for the restructuring of the state.

Through this study, I hope to contribute to knowledge about the early gendered imaginings of various political powers and restructuring of the state, and how women (imagined and physically) have been the center of this process.
CHAPTER 1: THE HISTORICAL TENSIONS OF RE-IMAGINING/RE-DEFINING THE MODERN EGYPTIAN NATION AND WOMAN

One of the popular cartoons that spread throughout the social media spheres after the eighteen day uprising is Egypt symbolized as a woman passively sitting while different forces emerging since the revolution surround her and draw how they perceive her. The Islamist man paints her wearing a niqab while the liberal force draws her as a blonde Westernized woman wearing a sleeveless shirt. One man who is presumably falool, a capitalist remnant from the old Mubarak regime, draws her as a safety vault as he exploits her and other men in the neoliberal system he would attempt to protect, while the army man from the Supreme Council of Armed Forces draws an empty throne when he does not even consider women’s existence as he is accustomed to his solely-male environment.

Although grossly exaggerated, this cartoon represents the struggle of various actors in envisioning the identity of Egypt and the struggle for the nation’s control; these debates often are discussed through discussions around women’s roles and rights in society. These imaginings and the disputes around how Egypt would be shaped, became heated as parties were free to be formed in the post-Mubarak era, and would run in the first free parliamentary elections that would take place in December 2011.  

Figure 1: “Drawing Egypt”, Amjad Rasmi (May 2012)

15 On June 14th, 2012, the Supreme Constitutional Court ruled that election to one third of the seats of the parliament was invalid because it breached the principle of equality when it allowed party members to contest a third of the seats set aside for independents, and hence the make of the entire house was ruled unconstitutional. Following the court ruling, the Supreme Council of Armed Forces dissolved the entire parliament. The ruling was made days before the presidential runoff election between Muslim Brotherhood presidential candidate Mohamed Morsi and
the Constituent Assembly, the committee that would be in charge of the creation of a new
constitution of Egypt, a chance to define the ideals of equality that Egyptians called for during
the revolution but at the same time an attempt to assert Egypt’s identity and authenticity.\(^{16}\)
Regardless of the changes made to the parliament and the constitutional assembly since
December 2011, it is important to understand and analyze the initial discourses and visions that
emerged immediately after the uprising that inform and shape how the state will be consolidated.

As seen by the cartoon, the trope of Egypt as a woman and the question of women’s roles and
rights since January 25 have been crucial in providing the space for envisioning different notions
of a modern, authentic, and democratic future for Egypt after the January 25 uprising. Before
analyzing how gendered and familial discourses and tropes were crucial in the subsequent
process of defining an authentically modern nation through gendered discourse post-January 25,
this chapter will examine the deeper history of the centrality of the figure of the Egyptian woman
in Egypt’s past revolutionary movements and projects of modernization of state and society.
Indeed, the questions asked today about what will be the future for the roles and rights of women
after the transition to Egypt’s redefined nation-state, are products of the present moment as much
as they are of history. Constructing new notions of citizenship and ideologies to reform and
develop society have historically involved re-answering the woman question, constructing
gendered symbols, and regulating the bodies of women.

Ahmed Shafiq, the last prime minister to serve under Mubarak and seen by critics as a symbol of the old regime. This decision was a large blow to the Islamist parties who had the largest share in the legislature. This move has been analyzed as a soft coup by the military aimed at curbing the authority of the presidency out of fear of Morsi’s predicted victory. It is expected that elections will be organized to choose a new parliament in the upcoming months after Morsi’s election.
\(^{16}\) The Administrative Court suspended the 100-member assembly appointed a month before on March 2012 as it did not reflect the diversity of Egyptian society. Islamists that dominated the parliament had a near majority in the constitutional assembly, causing fear that laws would be amended in the constitution so that it follows principles of Islamic law more strictly.
The gendered dynamics and historical tensions around the woman question taking place post-January 25 have parallels with the historical watershed period of the 1919 Revolution and the subsequent construction of the liberal-nationalist state. There is a large span of time between these two periods; since the 1919 revolution, economic and social realities, as well as the agency and rights for women have drastically changed. But when one compares these two periods, what is found strikingly similar is the relationship between a national revolutionary movement and the competing discourses and agendas that emerge between various political powers, all defined through gendered discourse. As the physical and symbolic terrain for defining modernizing agendas and for formulating state power, women and the question of their role and rights, have always been central in the search for identity and legitimacy for state power. Consequently, Egyptian women, then and now, face the ambiguous position within the state when they are “both citizens of the state and the privileged custodians of national values”.

Although the boundaries and understandings of what is modern and authentic are socially fluid and constantly reconstructed, discourses around women are at the heart of these definitions.

**Imagining and Defining the Free Egyptian Nation in Early Twentieth Century Egypt**

Recent works on Egyptian nationalism examine the intersection of colonialism, modernity, and gender, and how the Egyptian modern nation was envisioned. Egypt as a woman has historically been constructed and imagined while conscious of outside observers. This situation can be studied through Michael Herzfeld’s “cultural intimacy”, which he defines as “the recognition of those aspects of cultural identity that are considered a source of external

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embarrassment but which nevertheless provide insiders with their assurance of common sociality.”  

This concept of intimacy internalizes the presence of an outside observer whose disapproval matters, whose judgment can be predicted and (most important of all) whose opinion is vital in determining what value “common sociality” can have. Cultural intimacy around the woman question dates back to the turn of the nineteenth century when colonial administrations classified Egyptian domestic practices as backwards to justify the “civilizing” colonial rule as a part of an effort to free oppressed women. The subordinate role of women in the family was treated as both the cause and the symptom of societal backwardness. Consequently, women’s status and familial habits- marital practices, living arrangements, relations between parents and children- became political in the contest for moral authority for self-rule and related to the construction of the nation-state.

At the turn of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century, reform of women’s condition in Egypt became a struggle that was called for by the ranks of the educated nationalist male elites as well. Reformers such as Qasim Amin called for the transformation in the status of women in Egyptian society. He and other reformers saw the freeing of women as crucial in Egypt’s call for independence and their preoccupation with modernity. In his 1899 book, The Liberation of Women he advocated a number of changes necessary to advance the position of Egyptian women, including abolishment of practices such as the hijab, ending practices of gender segregation embodied in the institution of the harem, ending early marriage, establishing schools for girls, and reforming divorce laws to curb practices like

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18 Herzfeld, 3.
polygamy. His and others’ recommendations sparked debates within nationalist bourgeoisie circles composed of secularized Westernized reformers, religious traditionalists, and those reformers who stressed working from within Islamic modernist traditions to bring progress. Discourses on women’s roles in early 20th century Egyptian society became symbolic of how reformers and nationalists perceived a modern nation, and the complex and political ways Egypt was envisioned as a woman. Much scholarship has examined the gendered and familial imagery and connotations tied to the Egyptian nationalist movement. Particularly, Beth Baron’s *Egypt as a Woman* analyzes the way that the symbol of “woman” was prominent during the nationalist movement, even though Egyptian women themselves were politically and socially marginalized. Lisa Pollard traces the manner in which caring for the nation as a family had become sine qua non of modern Egyptian politics by 1919. She reveals how political contests between the British and the rising Egyptian middle class led to the rejection of paternal, colonial rule in the 1919 Revolution. Anticolonial political and social unrest under British colonialism would result in a mass uprising of Egyptians against imperialism led by the Wafd party under the leadership of the nationalist Saad Zaghloul. The development of the Egyptian feminist movement was intertwined with the nationalist movement when elite women activists, used nationalist rhetoric to participate in the revolution and push for women’s advancement.

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23 At first, male reformers such as Qasim Amin called for women to play a more active role in their society. By the end of the nineteenth century, upper-class women were also calling for the same demands of reformers, for education and work opportunities, and for the reform of personal status and family laws governing matters such as
mass participation of women within the movement further expanded the landscape for women’s roles in society and provided a medium for women to assert their agency.

What is overlooked by a perspective that focuses on exogenous influences on the woman question is the local politics of gender between various actors and their methods of gaining control over the political/social order. The politics of gender is defined as, “the uses to which gender is put in the process of organizing, legitimizing, and attacking political power, and the multifarious struggles by which gender is a continuously constructed”. 24 After the 1919 Revolution when the British ended Egypt’s status as a protectorate, “marked the moment in which a century’s worth of debate, discussion, and reform of modernity, womanhood, and the family brought private politics of the domestic realm into the spotlight of the political arena”. 25

Not only was the politics of womanhood and the household a means to claim freedom from colonial order as nationalists felt inclined to refute imperialist arguments of their unreadiness for self-rule when women in their society were “oppressed and degraded” by native men, but it was also a means to assert authority of the Wafdist party, which was controlled by the nationalist elite leaders, against other traditional elites and subaltern men. The rise of domestic “modern” virtues, morals, and behaviors through the bourgeois project of the modern reformed family were not discussions about women’s political agency and freedom from colonialism; they became claims to political authority in which the Wafdist nationalists and other native

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25 Bier, 29
bourgeoisie demonstrated their modernist credentials and affirmed their authority.\textsuperscript{26} Although male reformers rhetorically supported new gendered agendas, women’s rights activists realized after participating in the nationalist movement that male politicians no longer supported the women’s cause with the same vigor except when it was instrumental for their policies and agendas.

Egypt created a liberal nationalist political order institutionalized in what Robert Connell calls the paternalistic “gender regime”.\textsuperscript{27} In her study of gender, citizenship and the civic order in mandate Syria and Lebanon, Elizabeth Thompson describes paternalism as a system of power defined by the ability to control the distribution of benefits, not by the recognition of rights to benefits.\textsuperscript{28} In the case of Egypt, this paternalistic gender regime that characterized the liberal nationalist-state was made tangible by the familial symbols and the gendered imagery of effendi nationalism used by the Wafdist nationalists who led the nationalist movement and used their modernity to assert that they were fit to rule over other local elites.\textsuperscript{29} In fact, as Laura Bier points out, what is infrequently acknowledged in the accounts around the leading feminist activists such as Huda El Sha’arawi and Safiyya Zaghlul, is that even though women were excluded as full citizens from the new nation-state, as upper class women often related to the secular elite nationalists who were in control, there was also active complicity with the

\textsuperscript{26} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{27} The gender regimes embodied by the nation-state contained a gendered structure of power, and a gendered division of labor. In the case of the emerging Egyptian nation state what lined symbolic depictions of the nation elite liberal nationalist constructions of authority and the structure of the state itself was paternalism. See, Robert Connell \textit{Gender and Power: Society, the Person, and Sexual Politics} (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press: 1987).
\textsuperscript{29} Effendi was used by the Ottomans as the title of address for important functionaries. In nineteenth-century Egypt, this title took on a specific meaning that was linked to the building of a modern state, related to the secular Egyptian character of Egypt’s elite. See, Arthur Goldschmidt, Amy Johnson, and Barak Salmoni. \textit{Re-envisioning Egypt 1919-1952} (Cairo: American University in Cairo, 2005), 4.
paternalism of liberal nationalist rule. While male nationalist elites turned their attention to the continuous struggle with wrestling for power from the British, the task of “nurturing the nation” was claimed by elite Egyptian women, “who though excluded from political enfranchisement, carved out a space of authority through their involvement with social service provision”. Thus, not only did elite men in power rule over other citizens, but elite women also accepted the paternalism of the liberal-nationalist state as they were given authority over sub-altern women. This form of paternalism under the Mubarak era would be attacked by political groups particularly through attacking women’s rights groups who were perceived as benefitting from Mubarak’s paternalism.

**The Family and the Modernization of the State**

The gendered construction of political authority would have significant ramification for women’s citizenship and the project of building the modern-nation state. The laws formed what Marnia Lazreg termed a “dual legal system” which includes both secular codes of law and laws concerning marriage, divorce, inheritance, and child custody under the control of religious institutions. Thus, women would be included in the post-colonial Egypt in ambiguous terms caught between the contradictions of universalist constitutions defining them as citizens, of shari’a-derived personal status codes limiting their rights in the family, and of a postcolonial malaise burdening them with being the privileged bearers of national authenticity. The tensions of this dichotomy between their roles as citizens of the *watan*, (“nation-state”), and as members

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31 Bier, 41.
of the ummah (“the religious community”), whether Muslim or Christian, still exist today. Most narratives examining the relationship of gender and modernity in Arab states treat the reform of personal status laws as a litmus test for the “progressive” or “conservative” character of the state, or whether modernization has succeeded or failed.

However, many Middle East scholars have studied how the privatization of the family and the intertwinement of family and religion were products of colonialism and its contemporary project of building the nation-state. Breaking away from assumptions that the Western construct of nation-state results in the freeing of the family, Judith Tucker and other Middle East historians revealed how there was more fluidity in gendered hierarchies in the pre-colonial period than was previously imagined. The codification of shariah law to govern the domain of the family, institutionalized forms of gender inequality, and expanded state power over the family when personal status laws were previously more flexible and heterogeneous in terms of application. The new family codes undermined the legal bases of extended patriarchal families, and supported the nuclear modern family, which were more conducive to the consolidation of state power. Talal Asad and other scholars show that the construction of the nation-state would result in enforcing a “neopatriarchy” that privatized religion, enforced more rigid gender hierarchies, and increased the consolidation of gender domination by families, communities, and the modern state. The personal status and family codes would continue to reflect state interests and strategies of power consolidation. And the personal status laws would also become the

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central domain of tensions among internal and external discourses; Islamist and secularist persuasions, progressive and regressive forces.

**The Beginnings of the Divergence of Islamist and Secular Discourses**

In addition to the exacerbated gender differences when the family and sexuality were privatized by religious institutions, two developments from this period stand out: First, the paternalism of the liberal nationalist order would be increasingly challenged by new political movements and reformers. The second was that there was increasing divergence between secular and religious narratives of modernity.

Although the rise of an Islamist movement countering liberal nationalist politics would be the most apparent since the late 1970s under President Anwar Sadat, the early shifts would begin with the emergence of the Muslim Brotherhood in 1928. This organization, founded by Hassan Al Banna, would spur a movement to counter the foreign military and economic domination of Egypt, and called for the renewal of a society corrupted by Western influences through the resurgence of Islam, a reference that would call for spiritual reform first within the individual, then the family, then the community. Ultimately, its goal was to achieve an Islamic state based on *sharia*. How it would be legally implemented when *sharia* was historically uncodified and thus more flexible in its application was unclear. Furthermore, what an Islamic state meant and how to achieve it, whether through a gradual Islamization of society through *da’awa* (“preaching”), engaging in politics, or the violent overthrow of the government, would also be debated within the Brotherhood and other Islamist organizations.

The rising power of Islamist groups and their threat to liberal nationalists in power would be reflected even in the tensions within the feminist movement in Egypt. For example, the
Egyptian Feminist Union, which was founded in 1924 by Huda El Shaarawi in realization that male politicians after the revolution would no longer support the women’s cause, was successful in improving access to education, and bringing minor legal changes related to the minimum age of women, as well as bringing women’s demands to the forefront of public debates. However, it would lose its impetus as it influenced only limited sections of society and not the majority of women who were poor and were not impacted by the legal and educational changes. Women activists also would diverge in approaches around women’s roles and rights and how to achieve Egypt’s *nahda* (“renaissance”).

Zainab Al Ghazali who was part of the Egyptian Feminist Union would leave the organization when she felt that the organization favored westernization and secularization and rejected Islam as a guide to defining the role of women in society. She would start the Islamist inspired Muslim Women’s Association in the late 1930s, later merging her work with the Muslim Brotherhood, beginning the roots of a women’s religious and political movement through Islamist activism. Through an Islamic framework, she called for women’s rights through the enforcement of *shariah*, espousing a discourse privileging the patriarchal family and lauding women’s family duties and obligations. She would become the “mother” of the Muslim Brotherhood, the organization with the largest following of female members, all encouraged to mobilize for the sake of spreading Islamic reform within society.

As demonstrated in the above discussion, the woman question early on was a site for the formation of struggle against occupiers as well as a space for imagining and contesting the form, ideologies, and the institutions of the nation-state. Although Islamist and secular nationalist

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37 Joseph, 24
visions of women’s roles seems to be divergent and contradicting, these visions shared many similarities when both used gender as a site for negotiating the meaning of being “modern” and “authentic”, and at the same time, were advocates for women’s advancement as a necessary component for social and political transformation. However, by the mid-1930s, the common grounds increasingly transformed from a space where cooperation was possible to one where differences led to conflict and no cooperation.\textsuperscript{38} Religious modernity was increasingly coming to be understood as the “other” of the state’s modernizing project. Religious practices and beliefs often would be viewed as a cause of backwardness, while for Islamists religious modernity would be means to which to return to an authentic way of life which was destroyed by the imposition of modern norms and values pushed by a liberal elite.\textsuperscript{39} Such tensions would again reveal themselves after the January 25 uprising as Egyptians varied in their visions for the new modern authentic Egypt.

\textbf{Gendered Politics and Women’s Rights in the Modern Context}

As demonstrated in the discussions around women in the early twentieth century, the politics of gender and its effect on women’s rights in the post-January 25\textsuperscript{th} setting cannot be merely defined in the dichotomies of traditional/modern, religious/secular, or western/indigenous. Nor can we define whether women’s rights are simply better off under either a secular framework or an Islamic one. Rather, as Lila Abu Lughod stresses, one must frame an epistemological critique of modernity when “modernity-as a condition might not be what it

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item[	extsuperscript{38}] Bier, 41.
\item[	extsuperscript{39}] Ibid, 43.
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purports to be or tells itself, in the language of enlightenment and progress, it is." As the postcolonial and poststructuralist literature demonstrates, the politics of modernity was, and in the post-January 25 context, will be used as a regulatory discourse, creating new forms of subjection and exclusion rather than fulfilling promises of universal emancipation. Examining the effects of the modernization projects, as well as the modern state’s use of religion and women’s rights to further its legitimacy against growing opposition movements under Nasser, Sadat, and Mubarak, is important in understanding the implications for the women’s movement and women’s rights post-January 25. Similar to the early twentieth century context, the state and the ruling elites used gender politics to politically distinguish themselves and their progressive credentials from oppositional forces.

For example, Gamal Abdel Nasser (1952-1970), would adopt state feminism as a policy to reveal his modernist credentials. During the 1950s and 1960s under his socialist policies, the state pushed for women’s productive roles by entering all educational fields and the workforce, and encouraged women to be modern through birth control. Responding to the demands of feminist groups in 1950s, his state feminist policies were presented as part of his populist social, economic and political platform. Nasser’s 1956 constitution would give women the right to vote and run for public office, as well as equal rights to education and employment. Even though the constitution declared Egyptians equal under the law and forbade discrimination on the basis of gender, it also accommodated social outlooks to women’s position in the family and in the political system, as the Nasserist regime did not attempt to reform the personal status laws of the

The advancement of women’s position in society did not come without a cost. Under Nasser, the feminist movement would lose its independence and would become government-sponsored as the state co-opted the agenda of the independent feminist groups to achieve political legitimacy. Though encouraged to participate in the public space to achieve the state’s modernizing policies, women’s formal independent activism would be pushed aside and further controlled, losing control of their autonomy as a group.

In contrast, the regime under Anwar Al-Sadat (1970-1981) and Hosni Mubarak (1981-2011) responded to developmental and political crises they would face by initially abandoning their commitment to state feminism. Rather, they would both initially form political alliances with Islamist groups giving such organizations the space to propagate conservative definitions around gender roles and relations.

For example, Anwar Sadat would change the religious identity of the state by amending Article 2, the article dictating the identity of the state, as a method to appease the rising Islamist forces. Sadat, who inherited a defeated Egypt after the 1967 loss and was a successor to the charismatic Nasser, distanced himself from Nasser’s legacy not only by drastically redirecting Nasser’s socialist policies, but by using Islam to forge his legitimacy through amending Article 2 of the constitution. To counter the Nasserists and leftists legitimizing the past ruler, Sadat, named himself the “believer president”, utilized the religious establishment al-Azhar, released Muslim Brotherhood member imprisoned by Nasser, and would allow the reemergence of a stronger multi-faceted Islamic movement, particularly on student campuses. In 1971, Anwar

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42 Ibid.
Sadat reformed Article 2 by adding the clause, "Islam is a source of legislation." This article did not appear at all in pre-modern constitutions before 1923, and only stated that "the religion of the state is Islam and its language is Arabic". Sadat would change this article further by striking a deal with the Muslim Brotherhood to change Article 77, which had originally limited the President to two terms, but now would be changed to the form it would take under Mubarak:

"The term of the presidency shall be six Gregorian years starting from the date of the announcement of result of the plebiscite. The President of the Republic may be re-elected for other successive terms."\(^{43}\) In return, he changed Article 2 to its present form, to read that "Islam is the Religion of the State, Arabic is its official language, and the principal source of legislation is Islamic Jurisprudence (sharia)."\(^{44}\). These actions would have further implications in the dividing discourses between liberal and Islamist groups in the post-Mubarak scene on how the identity of the religious state should be defined, mainly discussed around the appropriate position of women.

Furthermore, the impact of Sadat and Mubarak’s economic liberalization and the consequent retreat of the state sector had serious consequences on state feminism and women’s citizenship. With the process of economic liberalization and the ascendancy of neo-liberal policies, the state undermined the economic situation of lower-middle class and working citizens, while benefitting a small group of bourgeois and upper-middle class citizens, who were linked to the past regime politically and economically. For example, with the economic crisis that resulted under Sadat’s infitah policies, women were encouraged to return home through providing unpaid


\(^{44}\) Ibid.
maternity leave for women in the public sector and early retirement packages, an attempt to encourage women, once encouraged to play productive roles outside the home, to leave the public sphere. As the government lost the role as the agent of economic and social transformation, a diversity of Islamist movements -- the Muslim Brotherhood that engaged in the mainstream of politics, Salafist groups that did not engage in politics and called it heresy, secret militant groups such as Islamic Jihad that aimed to overthrow the government through violent means-- all provided child care and health care while attempting to propagate a morally Islamic sphere. Not only did Islamist movements challenge the power of the state by filling the vacuum with the dismantlement of the welfare state, but they would mobilize a large constituency of both men and women from the young urban lower segment of society. The discourse of Islamic authenticity was evoked by these movements to articulate a wide array of worldly disaffections, from imperialist domination to class domination by Westernized elites.

Veiling as a social and socioeconomic phenomenon would spread starting in the 1970s as younger women joined the Islamist movements and organizations. Women belonging to Islamic organizations described to me their decisions to wear the hijab or the niqab during the seventies and eighties despite their families’ objections. They also described how they were active on campuses and organized themselves to provide social support and services as well as spread da’awa to encourage the spread of Islamic ideals. Thus, with Mubark’s and Sadat’s neo-liberal economic policies, economic, social, and ideological divisions among Egyptian women and men were further deepened.

45 Ibid.
Once the relationships between Islamist groups and the regimes soured, Sadat and Mubarak would use personal status laws and women’s rights as tools to enhance the legitimacy of the state, establishing its secularist credentials to maneuver themselves out of political crisis. Women’s groups increasingly would lose control of their autonomy and legitimacy as they were increasingly viewed as harboring specific agendas tied to the regime. Jihan, the wife of Sadat, in response to the Islamists’ challenge of the authority and power of the state, began a campaign to reform the personal status laws which had remained the same since the 1920s.\textsuperscript{46} Although the reforms she called for were not substantial, not only did the Islamists discredit her and the feminists who supported her for imitating Western women, but the fact that the reforms were passed through a presidential decree antagonized all political groups. These actions further revealed the state’s authoritarianism when the parliament was not allowed to discuss and approve rights. Following Sadat’s assassination, the 1979 personal status laws eventually were struck down by the High Constitutional Court, for being unconstitutionally passed.

As Islamist groups once again threatened the legitimacy of the state, the Mubarak regime also used women’s rights as a tool to depict itself as inclined to liberalism to counter the growing internal criticism of its authoritarianism that was reaching global audiences. The Mubarak regime followed the footsteps of Sadat in using women’s rights as a tool to legitimize its power to local and foreign audiences against the rising Islamist powers. Similar to Jihan Sadat, Suzanne Mubarak’s work increasingly targeted an international audience and was honored countless times for her humanitarian work in international conferences. Her work added to the

\textsuperscript{46} Reforms she made included requiring the notification of the first wife that her husband had taken another. And the law would consider the decision to take a second wife as source of harm to the first wife and entitled her to file for divorce if she wanted to. It also allowed divorced women to keep children until they grew up.
discourse that the government used for its Western audience: the Mubarak regime was liberal and an enlightened power protecting Egypt from Islamists that would throw Egypt in the dark ages. Ironically, the government often banned NGOs promoting human rights including women’s groups and often appeased Islamist groups by easily giving into their demands around women issues. The irony of their discourse as being the liberal democracy that protected women from Islamist powers was highlighted when the government closed down the radical feminist Nawal El Saadawy’s Arab Women’s Solidarity Association and reassigned its license and assets to an Islamic women’s organization.

In the past decade, the government took on a larger role in the arena of supporting women’s rights. Most prominently, a new set of personal status laws were passed by Parliament and signed into law by Hosni Mubarak on January 29, 2000, energizing women's activists, but created controversy with the Islamist audience. It included the creation of a family court able to facilitate divorce cases, and specifically women's right to invoke *khul*. The new law also prohibited men from divorcing their wives without immediately informing them (*talaq al-ghiyabi*). Another contested law that passed was the recognition of *urfi* marriages, which is a

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47 Women may initiate a divorce on any grounds, so long as they return the groom's gifts of jewelry (the *shabka*) and dowry payments (*mahr*). The payments are often made in two installments, with the second often withheld in case of divorce. Women were thus able to ransom themselves from marriages, although the better educated and wealthier were obviously the greater beneficiaries from this aspect of the reform when poorer women could not afford to do so. The new law would allow such a divorce after intervention by one arbiter for each side. Sherifa Zuhur, “The Mixed Impact of Feminist Struggles in Egypt During the 1990s” *Middle East Review of International Affairs* 5, no. 1 (March 2001).

48 This practice was probably the worst abuse of the existing legal situation and stemmed from an earlier limited practice of pronouncing "I divorce thee" three times, (*talaq al-bid'a*) thus bypassing any efforts to mediate, or reconcile partners. Ibid.
customary marriage which does not need an official contract. \textsuperscript{49} Suzanne Mubarak launched the National Commission of Women (NCW), an apparatus that was made to promote progress in women’s political, social, and economic rights in 2000. This organ collected data on illiteracy, disseminated information about health services, partnered with international and aid organizations to provide training for women and facilitated the acquisition of ID cards to grant access for women to resources.\textsuperscript{50} The NCW would also gain a reputation of being an organization serving upper-class elite women and tied to Mubarak’s agendas.

Another method of maintaining the façade of political liberalism through women’s rights was the quota. The quota for women was made legal in 2009 expanding parliament to 518 members, and guaranteed seats for at least 64 women, all of whom would run against other female candidates in special polls. Although the quota is a tool which enhances female participation in political arenas when they are not given opportunities to be elected, it was put in place to demonstrate to the West that the 2010 parliamentary elections would be different and “freer”.\textsuperscript{51} The implementation of the quota system was lauded by Western observers as a strong step toward democracy. Gameela Ismail, a well-known and respected liberal female politician denounced the quota in 2010 and pointed out how most Egyptians viewed this reform with contempt: "This quota was established in order to ensure more seats for the ruling party…. It's

\textsuperscript{49} Many young Egyptians resort to ‘urfi marriages because marriage was beyond their financial means. Also particularly for sexually frustrated youth, they found it as a way of getting around religious strictures against premarital sex. Although many engaged in urfi marriages, the courts previously refused to consider them as legal causing complications for couples who seek to divorce or have children. While the new Egyptian law recognized women’s right to divorce from an urfi marriage, the law still denied women alimony and child support. Most Islamic scholars and the increasingly religious public condemned this marriage and called it as an un-Islamic cover for premarital sex.

\textsuperscript{50} Hatem, 240.

\textsuperscript{51} The parliamentary quota for women was previously enacted under Sadat in 1979 before it was repealed by the High Constitutional Court in 1985.
not the Egyptian women who need a quota. It's all the Egyptian people who need a quota in order to have their political and social rights heard." Some Islamist female politicians described their negative experiences running under the quota in 2010. In my interview with the now popularly elected member of parliament, Azza El Garf, who represented the Muslim Brotherhood’s Freedom and Justice Party, explained her experience with the quota in the last elections in 2010:

When they opened the quota in 2010, we (the Muslim Brotherhood) ran for sixteen seats through the quota. I personally was against this and that women need a quota in anything … I used it because I didn’t have a natural political outlet for us to work in. Gamal Mubarak made a statement two months before the elections that the seats reserved for women in the quota will only go out to women in the National Democratic Party. I thought that there will be no way that they reserve this space for their women only. It turned out that this was the case. They used the nazam il baltaga (“the thuggish order”) against us. When I placed my papers for elections, they imprisoned my husband, they vandalized our house, and took our money. I went to the human rights organizations and the National Commission for Women and they did nothing for me.

Although these reforms were viewed as positive advancements in advancing women’s cause, changes in women’s rights under Mubarak were seen as meaningless tokenism. Thus, while in the earlier nationalist period, women’s status was seen as a symbol of modernity in the new nation, now under Mubarak, women’s rights now would be viewed as a tool to depict the president as the defender of women and liberalism. In the post-January 25 era, the tensions between a new Egypt that ensures women’s equal rights, and ridding of the old system that used women’s rights to promote authoritarianism clearly emerged.

Not only did the state’s move to introduce change in gender relations within the family have little to do with its commitment to the rights of women, but it also made feminist activism difficult when women’s organizations became captive of the state’s political needs. Thus, women’s rights groups lost their autonomy and depended on the state to push for women’s

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52 Matt Bradley, “Some women say Egyptian quota system preserves status quo” The National, 24 November 2010 (accessed 5 January 2012)
53 Azza Garf (Parliamentarian of Freedom and Justice Party), interview with author, Cairo, Egypt, August 3, 2011.
advancement. As noted by various feminist women, although some initiatives brought about positive change, for many women’s rights activists, Suzanne Mubarak’s focus on women also was found as destructive, self-serving, and ironic. In my interviews, members of women’s organizations noted the contradictions in the regime’s policies around women’s rights and democracy, but nevertheless continued to depend on the regime for support in advancing women’s rights. Iman Bibars, chairwoman of the Association for Development and Enhancement of Women (ADEW) noted their conflicted relationship with the government: “We were not enemies with the government, but we were not friends. We were pragmatic. Sometimes we had to use the government to improve women’s lives. We were attacking the policies of the government, its program, but not the government itself. We were never confrontational.”

Hoda Badran chairwoman the Alliance of Arab Women noted how the intentions of the National Commission of Women at the start were well-meaning and its work brought positive progress. However, it changed over the years as women’s rights became a tool for the government over the years to gain credibility in the eyes of Western governments, as the calls for democracy after 9/11 and the invasion of Iraq increased. “..Suzanne Mubarak also changed, and corruption was escalating in the system. That council, instead of serving women’s causes, started to serve itself, getting more staff, building its ego. Mrs. Suzanne Mubarak was on the news every day. People started to get annoyed by her.”

Hoda Badran and other activists from women’s organizations explained how the Council that originally was made to support them, started to compete with them, drawing international funding from their organizations. “The council started to compete with the NGOs instead of backing the NGOs; the council started to get donors’

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54 Iman Bibars (Founder of AEDAW), interview with author, Cairo, Egypt, July 13, 2011.
55 Hoda Badran (Chairperson of Alliance of Arab Women), interview with author, Cairo, Egypt, July 27, 2011.
money and to compete with the NGO for funds. When we did good things, they took the credit.”

Not only were women’s groups competing with the government for funding, but there also was rivalry between the organizations for funding and groups found little room for collaboration. Asking her about the women’s movement in Egypt, Doaa Abdelaal, a consultant at the United Nations argued that:

Egypt doesn’t have a movement, it has NGOs, and we have an NGO-ization of the women movement…. There is a lot of competition. They compete for funding, for media attention; even in their relationship with the former regime I think that the feminists that are around right now are not the ones that are going to change anything. We need another generation of young girls to come in and bring back the movement.

Many feminists I talked with noted that the women’s movement stopped becoming a movement when organizations focused merely on reforming family laws. Doaa AbdelAaal noted: “Because of the wrong approach that women’s organizations had before the revolution, women have not been recognized as powerful agents of change… for so many years they reduced their focus to family laws….. They didn’t have a legacy among the people.”

After the uprising, women’s groups and women’s rights increasingly were the targets of attack due to their historical affiliation with Suzanne Mubarak and the old regime. The connection of many of the leaders of women’s organizations to the regime ruined women’s groups’ credibility especially after the revolution. Doaa Abdel Aal noted that “many other women were sitting

56 Ibid.
57 Doaa Abdel Aal (Founder of AEDAW), interview with author, Cairo, Egypt, July 13, 2011. A similar process of NGO-ization occurred to the women’s movement in Palestine and the rest of the Arab world. See, Islah Jad, “The NGO-isation of Arab Women’s Movement” Journal of Palestine Studies 2, 2004 (42-56)
58 Ibid.
beside the first lady too. So now we have this threat that whatever has been achieved is corrupted and affiliated with the old regime.”59

Not only would women’s rights be reformulated to reclaim power and reassert control from the old regime, but the woman question would also become a space to remove neo-imperial domination. Similar to the nationalist reformers’ consciousness of colonizers in the early twentieth century, understandings of the nation and gendered notions of citizenship were also being defined under the gaze of the same Western powers that propped up the Mubarak regime for decades. The arena of woman’s rights after the revolution would continue to be a site of cultural intimacy for Egyptians in relation to its observers, when the West “looked down” on Egyptians for engaging in the oppression of women, very similar to the colonial gaze nationalists worked under while defining their views on women’s rights. Thus, while the debates on how to build a democratic nation that emerged after the January 25th uprising were between members of the Egyptian community, “any non-westocentric discussion of relations between the community and the ‘stranger’ has also to include relations with dominant strangers such as the conqueror, the colonialist, the settler…”60 The sense of consciousness around the status of Egyptian women, heightened, particularly on the day that Hosni Mubarak resigned. Amidst the celebrations, a large group of men sexually assaulted an attractive white female CBS reporter, Lara Logan in Tahrir square. Although the incident was tragic and horrific, the coverage reproduced “one of the most enduring colonial tropes; the native (and in this case, foreign) woman who needs to be rescued

59 Ibid.
from uncivilized and misogynist Muslim men”. 61 Other comments written by Western readers to reports of the incident claimed that “Arabs have a long way for democracy and civilization”. 62 Even though Lara Logan’s incident exposed the problem of sexual harassment in Egyptian society which women organizations have continuously battled, this incident added to Egyptian public’s indefinite consciousness around the process of rebuilding the nation and the role and rights women would have in an Egyptian democracy.

Egyptians have been conscious of Western contradictory call for democracy in the Middle East while supporting the Mubarak’s regime with the second highest level of military aid to protect their Israeli allies. When Mubarak was in power, he assured his Western allies that an autocratic Western-friendly regime was a better alternative than the Muslim Brotherhood bogeyman that other Islamic “fundamentalists” who would come to power if full democracy were to be allowed. Stereotypes of the oppressed Muslim woman in Arab societies helped legitimize the contradictory American support of Mubarak. Discourse around “saving the Muslim woman” from Islamist takeovers excused and legitimized American support of Western friendly liberal dictators such as Mubarak. 63 Egyptians in this neo-imperialist age hoped to reclaim their nation by reforming its foreign policy to support popular views, and not let it be dictated by foreign interests. This would be especially apparent during the days of the uprising and clashes that would take place afterwards, when protesters would find the words written across the gas canisters used against them: “Made in the USA”. As the attempt to build and

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62 Ibid.
63 This neo-imperialist feminist discourse has excused and legitimized support military intervention and occupation in Iraq and Afghanistan for the sake of spreading freedom and democracy (regardless of the greater violence caused by casualties of innocent civilians) the to the Middle East by freeing the Muslim woman. Lila Abu Lughod, “Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving” Anthropology in the Global Age, 29 March 2011. (accessed 5 January, 2012).
envision an Egyptian understanding of democracy grew, greater emphasis was placed on the importance of restoring the authentic Egyptian woman not corrupted by outside influences, to bring about Egypt’s *nahda* (“renaissance”) would also emerge. Thus, all actors would be conscious of the Western gaze while building the post-January 25th nation, a process Egyptians did not want Western interference in.

**Conclusion**

The woman question in Egypt has a complex legacy entangled “between local, national, and transnational forces in which colonialism, nationalism, vision of modernity, the emergence of new regimes of power and regulatory institutions, and class consolidation intersected in complex ways to constitute ‘the Egyptian woman’ as an imagined political subject”. Although women’s roles and rights have expanded greatly since the early twentieth century, examining Egypt’s past revolutionary movements and state-building projects illustrates how the woman question continues to be at the core of the process of nation-building as well as defining notions of modernity and authenticity.

Women’s activism in the early twentieth century nationalist movement would have implications for transforming and disturbing the meaning of gendered relations and ideologies. Similar to the post-January 25 context, women during the anti-colonialist movement were given a larger space to re-conceptualize and transform their roles in society. However, as symbols and guardians of national authenticity, as well as with the traditionalist responses of nationalist elites intent on regaining masculine privileges, the feminist movement imbricated in colonialism and local political struggles, would also be resisted through morality and authenticity discourses.

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64 Bier, 73.
Not only would social relations between women and men be sites of transformations, but the relationships between women also were affected. When examining the institutional history of the leadership and activities of women’s organizations, we realize that gender is not an exclusive or totalizing category defining women’s individual experiences. Women’s experiences were also mediated by their class affiliations and the power tensions emerging from them. Similar to the growing division between liberal elites in control and men of different class-power structures contesting those in power, these tensions also emerged within the feminist movement led by women affiliated with Egyptian male elite. The complex religious-class-gender subjectivities mediated women’s experiences, further dividing the feminist movement as women joined other movements that at times challenged and reproduced hierarchies produced by the regime in power, demonstrating the complexities of women’s lives and choices.

By illustrating how gender has long been put in the process of organizing, legitimizing, and attacking political power under Nasser, Sadat, and Mubarak, a process in which gender is continuously constructed, one recognizes the genderedness of power and how the hierarchical dimensions of power are reproduced and contested. The Egyptian modern state reconstituted and benefited from patriarchy, as inscribed in policies and civil and personal status laws, delegitimizing binaries of East/West and secularist/Islamist.

As the cartoon in the beginning of the chapter demonstrates, political players struggle for control over the post-January 25 transitional process would also be linked to changes in the paternal system of power and inequality. These actors appear to have completely different visions for the nation and the women question. However, through the analysis of past power struggles and how they transformed and reproduced gender structure and meaning, one
understands to look more critically at the varied consequences of all actors’ visions for the new Egypt and the problematized tensions around ideals of equality, progress, authenticity, and freedom.
CHAPTER 2: THE MAKING OF THE TAHIRIR FAMILY

After providing an examination of the history of the Egyptian women’s political movement that emerged from the 1919 Revolution as well as how the Mubarak regime used gendered hierarchies to maintain political control, this chapter will examine the eighteen-day uprising and the gendered and familial discourse used to construct and configure the boundaries of a new nation excluding the Mubarak regime. Even though the mobilization of familial rhetoric has been used by activists in all nationalist movements to garner patriotic support, familial rhetoric also is used for political purposes by rulers to invoke obedience and loyalty of subjects to their rulers. Feminist scholars have critiqued and analyzed such familial rhetoric in discussions about patriarchy in the Middle East. For example, Deniz Kandiyote describes the idea of a “patriarchal bargain” in which, an older patriarch, whether a state ruler or a household head presides and is given the power and prestige of being responsible over his family. In return for the sovereign’s protection, the dependent family is expected to submit to sovereign’s authority.

Though my subject is the recent past, the discourse of family has a long history in Egyptian nationalism, and the metaphor has been indispensable to the creation of the Egyptian nation particularly during the Egyptian nationalist movement for independence in 1919. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Beth Baron and Lisa Pollard have done exemplary work to show how nationalists during this movement, re-appropriated this rhetoric from British occupiers and the king to stress fraternal over paternal ties, creating a sense of unity between the people.

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65 Deniz Kandiyoti speaks about the “patriarchical bargain” at multiple levels with an emphasis on households and gendered division of labor. See, Deniz Kandiyoti, “Bargaining with Patriarchy” Gender and Society 2, no. 3 (September 1988) 274-290.

66 The Egyptian Revolution of 1919 led to Britain’s recognition of Egyptian independence in 1922. Britain, however, refused to withdraw its forces from the Suez Canal Zone, factors that would continue to sour Anglo-Egyptian relations in the decades leading up to the Egyptian Revolution of 1952.
and belonging to the nation. Through such familial imagery, Egyptians were united momentarily for the common goal of overthrowing British occupation. Such rhetoric allowed for upper-class women, such as Huda El Shaarawi and Safiyya Zaghlul the wives of the nationalist Wafdist leaders and soon to be imagined as the mothers of the nation, to leave the seclusion of their harems to demonstrate, while poor women also filled the streets in protest.

Continuing to follow the parallels of this historical narrative, one explanation for the events of January 2011 is to say that the social contract fell apart between Egyptians and Mubarak, who had to increasingly attempt to find ways to regulate and maintain a façade of legitimacy. One of the results of this loss of legitimacy was that the public began to collectively envision a national “family” apart from Mubarak, and thus imagined a new Egyptian state. Without the support of Egyptians, Mubarak’s regime could not continue.

In his book, *Cultural Intimacy*, Herzfeld analyzes the “direct mutual engagement between the official state and the sometimes disruptive popular practices whose existence it often denies, but whose vitality is the ironic condition of its own continuation”. In a similar manner, I will examine the view from the bottom of the Egyptian protesters and the view from the top of the old state, which are “but two out of a host of refractions of a broadly shared cultural engagement”, and the interplay between their familial discourses. 67 I will show how the government’s official discourse is recast as a counter invention of tradition, as a variety of local actors - the people who joined the January 25th protests- propose an aggregate and more powerful alternative family. 68

Although protests happened throughout the streets and public squares in all of Egypt, I will examine the making of the family and the repertoires of contention used in *Midan al-Tahrir*,

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68 Ibid., 3
(“Tahrir Square”) in Cairo which was the central scene of the developments of the uprising. Its spatial centrality and historical significance enabled millions of Egyptians to come together and has made it a symbol of the Egyptian revolution for the world. Not only was it the epicenter of the January 25 Revolution but it continues to be the major stage where various religious, social, and political groups gather to call for their demands, and major clashes between protesters and the military have taken place.

**The Myth of Mubarak’s Egyptian Family**

During the eighteen-day revolution, a surge of familial discourse was used by state officials to reclaim their nation-state and portray a sense of “family crisis” created by outside elements. At 12:34 AM on January 27th, the government shut down the Internet to prevent Egyptians from connecting with one another, and to prevent the world from following the developments. Having control of the media, the government used state-controlled organs to warn the public that “outsiders” such as Al-Jazeera and Western media were the sources of chaos. The Egyptian regime accused the protesters of being spies for other countries such as Israel who aimed to destroy the country, and made absurd claims that these thugs were being paid a daily allowance in Euros and were served free meals from Kentucky Fried Chicken. Calls were made for “real” Egyptians to unite to combat those who threatened its unity.

Over thirty years, the regime constructed an image of the president as a “father figure” caring for the nation and maintaining its peace and stability, as a war hero, and as the only leader that many young Egyptians ever knew. He was physically present through pictures of him that hung in many of the streets and offices of Egypt. Protesters delegitimized Mubarak as the father of Egypt by noting his failure to fulfill his parental responsibilities to take care of his children.
For example, one of the jokes delegitimizing Mubarak as a ruler that spread on Facebook and Twitter read: “Hosni Mubarak is our father. And because he is our father, next Friday should be called Friday of Splitting Inheritance.”  

Another post that reflected the same sentiment argued, “Is there a father who does this to his children- who deprives them of their rights of living and from the good of their country? If you trace our history from the first pharaonic dynasty, the era of Mubarak was the worst of them all.” Thus, by using familial discourse to argue that a father should provide for and protect his children, especially when witnessing the state kill its own citizens, Mubarak’s pleas using familial credentials were dismissed.

Chants that mocked him as illegitimate and protesters who tore down and set fire to large posters of Mubarak indicated that protesters had crossed boundaries of fear and of the police or the consequences of revealing such public rejection of Mubarak. Protesters used gendered discourse to dismiss Mubarak as a leader. Among the many caricatures created to insult Mubarak and his family was one poster of Husni Mubarak dressed as a woman that was first displayed in Tahrir Square and later circulated on Facebook. The poster said “elect *Umm Tartar* as a National Democratic Party nominee for president in 2011”. Adorned with bright blue eye shadow, red lipstick and blush, and a bright yellow *hijab*, this transgendered leader, who had depicted himself as the father of Egypt, was now depicted with feminine characteristics and thus, unfit to be a leader.

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71 *Umm Tartar* is an insult translated as the mother of one who pees. *Tartar* is considered a dirty colloquial term used in poorer areas.
State officials also used gendered discourse in support of Mubarak. For instance, Omar Suleiman, the chief of the Egyptian General Intelligence Service, in a state interview declared protesters calling for the departure of Hosni Mubarak as not “part of the Egyptian culture”, saying “we all respect Mubarak as father and leader”.\(^72\) Mubarak also employed similar familial rhetoric. On February 1st, President Mubarak delivered an emotional speech and attempted to use familial rhetoric to lay common grounds with his citizens: “My fellow citizens, I address you today not only as the president of the republic but as an Egyptian citizen whose faith put me under the responsibility of this country ….”\(^73\) By defining himself as a citizen who is part of the horizontal connections of comrades who share Egypt’s past and future, Mubarak attempted to reclaim authority over the familial and nationalistic discourse used by the revolutionary youth leaders. He also asserted that he would not leave because of his attachment to Egypt:

> This great country is my country, the same way it is every Egyptian’s country — I lived here, and waged war for it and fought for the people and I will die on its land and history will be the judge of me. While the people may come and go, the country will remain and its security is in the hands of its children, and God has protected this country generation after generation.\(^74\)

By co-opting the language of kin and family, Mubarak attempted to establish cultural intimacy with the people and he sought to recast the violence used against the population as justifiable when it is done for the family’s welfare.

However, while Mubarak appealed to Egyptians through empty rhetoric based on notions of nationalism and familial imagery, a new family was being created within the space of Tahrir Square. The appropriation of the public space was not only important in terms of wresting power away from the state, but also in terms of providing the physical space necessary to reimagine the

\(^72\) “Suleiman: Mubarak is our father” *Al Jazeera*, 03 February 2011 (accessed May 23, 2011)


\(^74\) Ibid.
"family." The renegotiation over state power and familial logic occurred as strangers sat in circles on the ground, and shared meals and blankets during the nights in Tahrir. They would laugh with each other at jokes and humorous chants against Mubarak, read the news, wait for speeches that Mubarak would deliver, and support each other during life-threatening moments. A moment to meet each other physically and interact with different groups of different classes, religions, genders, and identities became life-changing for those who participated. I talked to men and women months after the January 25th uprising in the more divided atmosphere of groups vying for power and debating how the transitional process should proceed and what the ideal Egyptian state should look like. Nevertheless, when I asked them whether they joined the protests or not and their experiences during these eighteen days, their eyes lit up with pride and they spoke nostalgically about those days that seemed like a dream.

Participants in the January uprising that I interviewed all referred to the sense of usra “family” that was created between people who lived through these days would forever be tied to each other through this remarkable moment. They were tied to those physically in the streets with them, in other cities throughout Egypt, and even those who protested to show their support in countries across the globe. One 27 year old woman named Zeinab from the popular district of Imbaba in Cairo explain to me, “Yesterday I ran into someone whose name I did not know. But we saw each other, throughout the protests and were connected and bonded over our experiences during the revolution”. Gehad, a mature and articulate eighteen year old from Nasr City, who was active in the Muslim Brotherhood told me about how experiencing the revolution

75 Zeinab Ahmed (Member of the Adl (“Justice”) Party and translator), interview with author, Cairo, Egypt, July 20, 2011
76 Gehad Nasser (Member of the Muslim Brotherhood), interview with author, Cairo, Egypt, July 5, 2011.
had made her open to interacting and discussing with people of different identities despite their differences in political matters and how the state would be envisioned. According to her, they were bonded by a new nationality she called *ginsiyyati al-tahriri* (“my Tahrir citizenship”), a citizenship she maintained would be given to anyone who went down to the streets of Egypt during the uprising, or to anyone who wanted to go down but could not.\(^7\)

A familial discourse esteeming “the youth of the revolution”, “Egypt our mother”, “the mothers of the martyrs” and “the brothers and sisters of Egypt” was formulated. Children, women, the poor, Muslims and Christians were all partaking equally in the protests and sacrificing their lives for the love of the nation, and thus were granted a space in the family of Egypt. By envisioning and realizing a new nation which excluded state leaders and others who betrayed the revolution, a new Egypt was constructed joining men and women of different classes, religions, and ages who were “all in one hand.”

Juxtaposed to this new familial discourse created through shared experiences and interactions in a particular space, Mubarak’s familial discourse lost further credibility. The day after Mubarak’s first speech, February 2, was one of the deadliest days of the revolution. The regime ordered men on horseback and camels to storm Tahrir Square attacking protesters using whips, guns, and even swords against the peaceful protesters. Through this incident, later known as the Battle of Camel, people realized that these were not pro-Mubarak supporters as the regime was claiming, but were *baltagiyya* (“thugs”) commissioned by government officials. As the violence used against peaceful protesters increased with each passing day, Mubarak lost the

\(^7\) Zeinab Ahmed, interview with author, July 20, 2011
sympathy of Egyptians even further as they perceived him as selfish and driven by his lust for power, ultimately encouraging more protesters to join the protests.

Re-gendering the Egyptian Citizen and the Nexus of Women’s Participation

The world was particularly shocked by the images of women: unveiled, veiled, old, and young who participated in the revolution. However, when Egyptian women have participated as equal partners to men, during past revolutions as I described in the 1919 revolution or even in protests such as the April 6 Movement, the Khalid Said Protests, and the Kefaya Movement that led to the revolution, Egyptian men and women did not see this as something remarkable.

Women I spoke with discussed their participation in the 2011 uprising. Many were part of the ligan sha’abiyya (“popular committees”) groups that were extremely organized and helped provide service to the protesters who were protesting in the streets, whether being the inspectors of women at the female entrances to the square to make sure women were not carrying weapons, or cooking in the kitchen of Tahrir, or carrying vinegar covered handkerchiefs and onions to help protesters recover from the tear gas, or helping to care for the wounded in the make-shift clinics in the streets. For many, protesting at Tahrir became a family experience in which mothers took their children to protest. Many women who took their children down explained that they felt it was important to take their children to experience this historical moment that would change the future of their lives. The fact that women were also in the streets dying for their nation entitled

78 The April 6 Youth Movement is a group that started in Spring of 2008 in support of workers in El-Mahalla El-Kubra, an industrial town, who were planning to strike on April 6. Large protests over the brutal death of a young man named Khalid Said in the summer of 2010 and were seen as playing a large momentum that led to the revolution. A Facebook memorial page called “We are all Khalid Said” started by the Google marketing executive Wael Ghonim attracted hundreds of thousands of followers, and has become Egypt’s biggest dissident Facebook page. The Kefaya Movement (“Enough”) was a grassroots coalition started in 2004 that protested against Hosni Mubarak’s presidency and the possibility that power would be transferred directly to his son Gamal Mubarak. Another
them to be part of the revolution. This was also confirmed by the news circulating of women
dying just like men, and facing the same violence from Mubarak’s security apparatus. Sally
Zahran, a 23 year old girl who had no political affiliations, joined the protests on January 28th. It
was reported that she died after being clubbed on the head by pro-Mubarak thugs in Tahrir. She
joined the list of martyrs who sacrificed their lives for Egypt. The curly-haired smiling girl
became a symbol that spurred Egyptians to join protests when she was included in a poster that
circulated of the first Egyptian youths who died during the uprising entitled “The Martyrs of the
January 25 Revolution: the Flowers that Opened the Gardens of Egypt”. It was also symbolic of
the space guaranteed to women protesting when they were sacrificing their lives, and lost their
fathers, husbands, children for the sake of the nation.

Other women who did not participate in the protests took care of the household while
their male relatives went to protest. They cooked for their neighborhood watch committees that
protected their houses from the hordes of prisoners released by the police and baltagiyya
(“thugs”) employed by the government to wreak havoc and deter protesters.79 They also donated
medical supplies and food to the protesters, and called their friends and families to check up on
them and encourage them to join the protests. Girls told me that they would try to initiate debates
on public transportation to push people to join. Safa, a 22 year old sociology student at Cairo
University would argue with men while riding the microbus and would ask them, “You guys are
going down right? How aren’t you? Everyone is going!”80

79 For more analysis on women’s experiences at home during the revolution read, Jessica Winegar “The Privilege of
Revolution: Gender, class, space, and affect in Egypt” American Ethnologist. 19 January 2011
80 Safa Khedr (Cairo University student and member of al-‘Adl Party), interview with author, Cairo, Egypt, July 20, 2011
While many families were emboldened to go down and join the protests as units, other families had internal disputes over whether they should participate or not. Many youth, girls and boys, were prevented by their parents from going down to protest out of concern of their safety or out of their belief that stability was better than the uncertainty. Many girls and boys snuck behind their parents’ backs to join the protests. Girls who described themselves as respecting their parents’ authority, experienced emboldened battles of tears and screaming against their parents. Yasmeen, a 18 year old girl, told me how she wanted to participate in the revolution but was prevented from her parents. “My parents found out I went the first day and they got angry and locked me up and watched me closely. They said something very weird for people who are educated. ‘You are with us and we are with the government. Wherever the government goes, we go, and you go with us.”

Yasmeen Mohammed (Helwan University student and activist), interview with author, Cairo, Egypt, July 25, 2011

Particularly during moments of revolt, women are given an opportunity to challenge gendered notions and are given greater agency to cross social boundaries. By nighttime, many girls followed their parent’s orders and reluctantly returned home, when society does not permit respectable women to be outside at late hours. However, many girls defied norms of appropriate behavior when they slept outside next to men as they occupied the streets. Images of women smoking cigarettes outside next to men, a behavior seen as un-womanly, was not condemned because the public was preoccupied with a greater cause than maintaining moral restrictions.

81 Yasmeen Mohammed (Helwan University student and activist), interview with author, Cairo, Egypt, July 25, 2011
This was condemned by government supporters and by state media and was used as a way to delegitimize the opposition.

Even though women during the Egyptian revolution publicly transgressed boundaries for the sake of the nation, women did not surrender their roles as cultural transmitters and did not reject male protection. Women gained agency in these moments in which women’s honor, dignity, and purity are conflated with men’s, families’ and the nation’s honor and dignity. Women asserted their sense of national identity and came into the movement by also accepting feminine roles as bearers of the community’s memory and children. Particularly, older women utilized the symbols of being "mothers of the nation" to gain agency by arguing that their responsibilities as mothers of the nation necessitated their venturing out of their homes, and behavior that may be deemed inappropriate during normal moments. Powerful images of older women kissing the faces of young security guards ordered by the government to kill Egyptian protesters was a method of shaming these men and reminding them that they all come from the same nation. Older women cried in the streets for awlad Masr (“the children of Egypt”), not to kill each other.

During the moments of the revolution, many women used feminine characteristics of needing protection of men and asking for them to come down and reassert their protection from the thuggish regime that violated men and their dignity years before the revolution. Inspired by Mohamed Bouazizi, the fruit vendor who set himself on fire and sett off the protests that toppled Zine El Aidine ben Ali in Tunisia, at least five Egyptian men set themselves on fire in an attempt to spark the same effects. The Egyptian government quickly denounced these acts as “nonsense”, as well as got Al-Azhar, seen now as a government puppet to issue a fatwa that labeled these acts
as suicide and thus *haram*, or religiously forbidden.\(^2\) Asmaa Mahfouz, a founding leader of the April 6 Youth Movement, days before the revolution shared a video on Facebook which went viral before the Egyptian government shut down the Internet. Playing on conservative notions of masculinity and femininity, Mahfouz challenged the Egyptian public to go to the streets on January 25th. Egyptians had watched Tunisians Asmaa Mahfouz declared in her video:

> …. It is said this man (Mohamed Bouazizi) died as a *kafir* (non-believer) …. because he committed suicide…. They (Egyptian men who imitated him) burnt themselves so we can have freedom, justice, and honor, and not live like animals…. I am going to give out fliers, I won’t put myself on fire, if the government wants to burn me let them burn me. And anyone in this country who sees himself as a *ragil* (man), come down! And whoever says that a woman should not protest because she will get beat up and because it is *haram* (religiously forbidden), then let him have honor and manhood and come down on the 25\(^{th}\) … come protect me and any other girl. Don’t be scared of the government, be scared of God. \(^3\)

Mahfouz entered the resistance movement by conforming to conceived notions of being a woman who is dependent on men for protection. She justified her unwomanly behavior by the lack of men who are performing their duties of fighting for their vulnerable motherland.

Mahfouz also responds to the debate around four Egyptians who set themselves on fire hoping to spark a revolution as Mohammed Bouazizi did in Tunisia.\(^4\) She challenged the public to rethink what is considered *haram* during this critical period: whether it is men who set themselves on fire, or women who go to the streets for the sake of reclaiming Egyptian’s dignity.

Many also marveled at the lack of sexual harassment within the spaces where men and women intermingled and marched. Over the past decades, the phenomenon of sexual harassment

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in the streets of Egypt, from catcalls to physical groping, has affected the women of Egypt, whether unveiled and dressed in Western form-fitting clothing or women wearing looser clothing and veils whether a trendy hijab or a niqab. A 2008 study of the Egyptian Center for Women’s Rights, a nongovernmental group, found that 83 percent of Egyptian women reported sexual harassment, and 62 percent of Egyptian men admitted that they had harassed women.85 These alarming statistics underestimate actual incidents. Many blame the rash of sexual harassment as stemming from the high number of frustrated men who cannot get married due to their inability to pay expenses of weddings, or on married men who increasingly depend on their wives and other family members to support them. Physically and verbally intimidating women from the streets was a way to reassert their masculinity despite the economic and political conditions that prevented them from being “men”. The lack of harassment during this revolution may have signaled that men have the opportunity to finally direct their anger towards the repressive patriarchal and thuggish power that was at fault for them not being able to fulfill societal gendered obligations.

As seen by the shifts in gender dynamics, not only did Tahrir become a space to eject Mubarak and his government from the new Egyptian family, it also became a moment for Egyptian citizens to redefine their own identities and in particular to reclaim unfulfilled gendered roles and responsibilities. Gender relations, state practices of control, and constructions of masculinities, “are sites of power and domination, and traverse one another and contribute to a

state of flux that may open up possibilities for challenge and defiance in the sort of differently situated subordinate subjects”.  

Bourdieu’s theory of how gendered identities are constructed is essential in understanding how Egyptian men and women perform their masculinity and femininity. In *Masculine Domination*, Bourdieu problematized the notion of an unchanging patriarchal order and rejected the idea that gender performance is effortless, internalized, and merely expresses one’s true, natural, biological self. Instead, he argues that masculinity and femininity are learned bodily dispositions that ultimately affect social hierarchies. The process of embodiment creates habitus, “a mediating notion that helps us revoke the commonsense duality between the individual and the social by capturing the internalization of externality and the externalization of internality,” or the trained capacities and structured propensities to think, feel and act in determinate ways. The creation of the female habitus and its actualization in social interactions combine to “make the female experience of the body…constantly exposed to the objectification performed by the gaze and discourse of others”. In discussing masculinity, Bourdieu notes that male privilege has its disadvantages, particularly the vulnerability associated with the:

…permanent tension and contention, sometimes verging on the absurd, imposed on every man by the duty to assert his manliness in all circumstances…. Men are characterized as aggressive, forceful, independent, and decisive, whereas women are characterized as kind, helpful sympathetic and concerned about others.

In line with Bourdieu’s argument, Egyptian women and men renegotiated and reconfigured gendered roles and identities on a daily basis to adjust to and affect their social hierarchies and

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86 Joseph, 220  
89 Bourdieu, 63  
90 Ibid.
the various groups to which they belong. Not only were women restricted by a patriarchal state and society, but also men were disadvantaged by the burden of being unable to fully perform their gendered social and religious obligations to support their families financially. After having a discussion with Zeinab around the difficulties of being a woman, she explained how difficult it is actually to be a man, even though she was unhappy with her lack of job opportunities as an educated woman. “As a girl, I see the life of my brother is hard. Because of work and because of marriage and responsibility it is hard. Life for Egyptians is hard for everyone.”

Constructions of Egyptian men’s masculinity have been destabilized and injured by a set of interrelated factors: the changing position of women in the household, and in public, antagonistic relations with state institutions involving random violence and the enhanced role of women as mediators with state institutions.

Not only were Egyptian men and women struggling to renegotiate gender in terms of performing responsibilities, but their gendered identities were affected by the government’s biopolitical form of power. Research has been conducted around the relationship between the government’s use of violence and the construction of gendered identities particularly with the end of the welfare state and its neoliberal remaking under Mubarak. This was symbolized by the Ministry of Interior’s acquiring of power and resources and its building of the formidable security apparatus, the State Security Investigations Service (SSIS) in the 1990s. These institutions were used to engage in a war against Islamists and undisciplined men, the cause of social terrorism and instability in the nation. Law 6 on thuggery was passed in 1998 to regulate behaviors deemed as “antisocial and threatening” which allowed arrests, humiliation, and display

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91 Zeinab Ahmed, interview with author, July 20, 2011
of power to discipline young men. In *The Political Life in the Cairo’s New Quarters*, Salwa Ismail analyzes the governmentality in space and bio-political form of power used to control citizens’ sociospatial practices, and how these citizens respond to these structures of control and domination. She provides a narrative of the withdrawal of the welfare state and how young men consequently were not provided schooling and formal employment.  

While the state was absent in terms of providing services to its citizen, the security state maintained control through men’s bodies who experienced random arrests, humiliation, and violence; men became the space through which state power is exercised. The state and its controlled media increasingly failed to blame the violence and disorder on the *baltagiyya* (thugs) of marginalized men, as seen by the case of Khalid Saeid in the summer of 2010 in which police beat to death a young man and attempted to cover the torture by planting drugs on him, creating national outrage and spurring protests against the security state’s form of violent control. As Egyptian men were subordinated by the state, and as women became mediators with the state and increasingly contribute to the finances of the household, there has been an increasing need to renegotiate gender relations in the family and the public for men’s masculinities. Men and women’s experiences in Tahrir allowed for the female and male habitus to be further disturbed.  

Many women and men explained the importance of women in pushing the men to display their masculinity and protect the women. When there were moments where there would be a lot of security forces, many men would scatter out of fear. Many women would go up to the front indicating that they would continue whether the men would protect them or not. Particularly in

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92 Salwa Ismail, *The Political Life in the Cairo’s New Quarters* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 139
93 Ibid.
the Battle of the Camel, one girl explained to me that many women would come up to the frontlines with their children as a means of making sure the men would stay firm in their places and would not retreat from the baltagiiyya the state hired to terrorize the protesters. One young man told a girl “if you weren’t with us in al- Midan (Tahrir Square) we wouldn’t have been able to nithbat (stay firm) and continue. We finished because of you, to protect you and to protect the revolution”.

Other images, accounts, and videos circulated online of women transgressing notions of respectable behavior when they led men in protest chants. Zeinab recollected that she and her brother went down to join the protests from the first day of January 25 after reading about these plans on the We are all Khalid Said Facebook page. After finally convincing her father to go down, her father asked her “Why do you go to Tahrir when you don’t need anything?” She responded:

I don’t want to go to the protests because I need something but I need to go to feel a sense of consciousness. I don’t feel like I am doing anything for this country. I feel like I don’t have worth. I feel guilty when people think I am better than them when I am not and just have a better education or some money. They hate me and it’s not my fault. They think I don’t feel for them…but I am not the reason that they are in this situation, there is someone else that is the reason, which is the system. I am going down for them. I also am doing bad in my life and in my profession and want to find a better job. And what I studied for years I can’t work with. I want to have financial and moral independence.  

She only saw five people standing outside: two girls, one old man an older woman, and one young boy standing in front of a church in Imbaba chanting with several police surrounding them. Zeinab asked the older woman why she was protesting: “Do you even know why we are having this protest?” She replied “All I know is you are saying what is in us. So I will chant with you”. Zeinab started to cry. Zeinab explained to me about how she participated in the chants and had come to a point of leading the chants. She recollected that:

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94 Zeinab Ahmed, interview with author, July 20, 2011
I was standing next to a young man leading the chants. He became tired and stopped and everyone became quiet. I had memorized what he was chanting from what I heard. Suddenly, I found myself saying those same chants and was the one leading the chants. When I went to streets with churches and mosques, I sang about the unity of Muslims and Christians, and when I reached stores with shops, I would lead chants on how the government has raised the prices of sugar and oil.  

Zeinab while chanting would look at the faces of people watching from the balconies from above to make them feel bad for not joining. She laughed to herself as she recollected how one woman in a balcony said to her son standing with her watching from the balcony, ‘Leave your home and go down ya ibn-al- kalb (“you son of a dog”), They have gone down for you”.  

Later on she ran into two boys “who were not the kind to join protests” that she knew. She was surprised and asked them “What are you doing here?” They responded “We joined the protests because we were embarrassed because we saw you. How is a girl chanting and leading a protest and we are not even responding to these chants?” Zeinab explained that particularly in areas such as Imbaba women would increase the hamas, (“enthusiasm”) of the men. She also noticed another girl she knew named Asmaa chanting. She explained that her neighborhood would not have a problem with women like us protesting when we look proper and our reputations are good and they know we are not doing something wrong.” This revolutionary moment and Tahrir square provided not only the space to renegotiate power over public spaces, but it also provided the space that allowed the transcendence of gender norms, ultimately furthering the progress of the popular uprising.

95 Ibid.
Revolutionary Marriages: Moments of Subject-Formation within Chaos

During the eighteen-day revolution, more than ten couples were married in the square amidst thousands of protesters.\(^6\) Instead of the expensive weddings that Egyptian bachelors used to complain about, couples chose not to hold their weddings at expensive venues. Most couples attended their wedding in casual clothes to match the revolutionary spirit while others wore tuxedos and wedding dresses but took their vows surrounded by army tanks and banners that called for the fall of the regime.\(^7\) News channels broadcast a couple who had their Islamic wedding procedures performed by a sheikh in the middle of the square with thousands of protesters who joined the sheikh in praying for them. One groom described how he was inspired by the revolution’s success and decided to get married at the square since “we want our marriage to succeed the way the revolution succeeded….the protestors are family now. We have lived, laughed and protested together in this square for the past weeks…”\(^8\) The weddings that took place in Tahrir contradicted the marriage crisis described as plaguing Egypt and preventing its youthful population from becoming fully adults.

Out of personal choice, economic difficulties, and changing social norms, an increasing number of Egyptian youth have been delaying marriage, one of the most important social events in the lives of Egyptian and other Arab men and women. Marriage as an institution plays a significant role in reproducing gender ideology when it turns Egyptian men and women into

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\(^7\) Ibid.

\(^8\) Ibid.
husbands and wives, and designates the way both sexes should act in their society and nation. When marriage is delayed, the liminal period in which Egyptians negotiate being neither children nor adults as they save money to marry is lengthened. Even though they are legally adults, the cultural meaning of adulthood is still defined by marriage- a bint (girl) becomes a sit (woman) when she is married, whether she is sixteen or sixty, and a man can only reaches manhood once he is able to leave his parents’ home and is no longer financially dependent on them. This marriage crisis during these eighteen days momentarily disappeared when youth asserted their notions of gendered roles and the Tahrir public envisioned a nation free of the social ills that plagued their country and created this envisioned and real social crisis.

Increasing divorce rates, the high unemployment rate, and informal forms of marriage have changed the institution in Egypt creating a social crisis in society. Specifically, the public has been concerned by the rising numbers of women and men delaying marriage, described by popular media as a problem “striking every house in Egypt” in the now “drowning” nation. This social dilemma and the public’s concern for the future of society with the decay of the institution of marriage echoes patterns of a similar marriage crisis in early twentieth-century Egypt, a metaphor used by Egyptians to critique larger socioeconomic and political ills of a semi-colonial Egypt, and to envision a free and modern Egypt.

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In her book, *For Better or Worse: The Marriage Crisis That Made Modern Egypt*, Hanan Kholoussy studies the marriage crisis in early twentieth-century urban Egypt. She argues that the public’s concern around the supposed rise in the number of middle-class men who were choosing bachelorhood over marriage was a metaphor to discuss the male subject’s loss of masculinity at the hands of colonial powers. The most common explanation that writers, reformers, and bachelors offered to explain the purported aversion to marriage was that men could not afford to marry because of Egypt’s foreign-dominated economy as food prices rose when food was requisitioned for the British army stationed in Egypt.

Debates around the marriage crisis in the press during the early twentieth-century reflected the middle class Egyptian man’s anxieties regarding his uncertain degree of control—both over the country and his rapidly changing female compatriot who increasingly penetrated the public sphere as the institution of harems which previously segregated sexes had dissolved and as women gained access to education. These advancements were encouraged by intellectuals who pushed for women’s advancement and saw it as crucial for the modernization project of Egypt. However, at the same time, women’s transgression into the public sphere caused panic in society when men’s masculinity was threatened, depicted by the exaggerated concern for the new trend of women seducing men, when only men should seek out women.

Fears of an Egyptian marriage crisis and the epidemic of Egyptian men and women reversing gender roles, had risen again under Mubarak. Displeasure with the delay of marriage,

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102 Hanan Kholoussy reexamines the production of the family, the nation, and sexuality by understanding how Egyptian men and women understood their gender identity to affect their marital and national identities and vice versa. One can draw parallels from Egypt’s semi-colonial experience to understand how the current ideological production has shaped notions of gendered identities and the current Egyptian marriage crisis.
increase in divorces, and the marriage of Egyptian men to foreign women became a central frame to criticize the government’s *infitah* “open door” economic policies and its foreign policy. Before the revolution, Egypt’s official statistics-gathering agency, the National Council for Social and Criminological Research, caused national panic when it announced that there were thirteen million single men and women in the country, up from nine million in the previous census.\textsuperscript{103} Although they compiled an issue to deny the agency’s report and lowered the number of bachelors and spinsters to a few hundred thousand, the public defined the metaphor of the marriage crisis to critique larger socioeconomic and political problems causing the decay of marriage.

In Egypt, more than one-third of the population is between 15 and 29. This demographic faces a particularly frustrating paradox: although the youth are being more educated, they have a high level of youth unemployment. Along with cultural and social changes in which more Egyptians – both men and women – delay marriage to mature professionally and mentally, the effects of neo-liberal economic reform in Egypt - high unemployment, low pay, and rising prices – have been noted as the main causes for why many young Egyptian men and women have delayed marriage. In 1999, the expense of marriage averaged four and a half times GNP per capita (LE 20,194) and for those marrying between 2000-2004 costs had risen to L.E 32,329.\textsuperscript{104} The cost of marriage rose in Egypt with social expectations around holding wedding celebrations they could not afford and acquiring the trappings of a middle class lifestyle including the real estate, furniture, jewelry, and appliances. Approximately half of all Egyptian men between the

\textsuperscript{103} Diane Singerman "The Economic Imperatives of Marriage: Emerging Practices and Identities among Youth in the Middle East." *Wolfensohn Center for Development No. 6* (December 2007), 6

\textsuperscript{104} Ibid.
ages of 25 and 29 are not married because they are prevented by their lack of employment or low-paying jobs and the increasing costs of life. Interestingly, although there are more unmarried men than unmarried women, the anxiety has focused on Egypt’s spinster crisis—the growing number of university-educated working women who are marrying at later ages. Many labeled these women who delay marriage as the cause of the problem of unemployment in Egypt and perpetuating the marriage crisis. These women are blamed for taking men’s jobs, who now cannot afford to propose to women, making them spinsters. And as seen by the changing reality for Egyptian men and women, traditional masculinity and its constructed opposite femininity were not being performed. Past and present imagined marriage crises and the resulting discourses surrounding the bachelor who was not performing masculine behavior by not being able to perform gender ideals of being the sole provider, and the spinster who was characterized with manly traits for working and increasingly contributing to the costs of marriage, reflected the greater concern and reconfiguration of the roles of men and women in the Egyptian nation.

Thus, these newly-married revolutionary youth not only found moments of love within protest, but they signified the celebration of a new beginning for a free Egypt in which Egyptians are not deprived of their economic, social, and political rights. Holding these symbolic marriages in the space of Tahrir, created the revolutionary groom and bride who were demonstrating new notions of Egyptian subjects: a husband who was not emasculated by the state and could afford to support a family, and the wife who was willing to sacrifice for the good of the family—within the privacy of her home as well as for the good of the nation. This revolutionary moment created a new habitus for masculinity and femininity, allowing for these marriages to take place. Even though these marriages became acts of citizens reclaiming their nation through familial
discourses, these instances of nation-building and citizen subject-formation would have future implications after the January 25 uprising. These “self-governing subjects” would be expected to behave in accordance with the ideals of the newly defined nation, particularly in regards to reasserting notions of women performing notions of the ideal Egyptian woman who tends to her family while men playing the role of the protector and breadwinner.¹⁰⁵

**The Final Days**

Mubarak gave another speech on February 10th, which many expected would be the speech in which he would resign. Thousands congregated in the square and watched the screen broadcasting his speech in anticipation, along with Egyptians in their households, and the global audience watching the developments in anticipation. Rather than resigning, however, Mubarak proposed reforms such as amending the constitution and repeating that he would not run for presidential elections. He attempted to push his “children” to sympathize with him by recollecting how he sacrificed for his country during the victory in 1973. In response to international pressure pushing him to step down, Mubarak announced that “I cannot and will not accept to be dictated orders from outside. No matter what the source is and no matter what the excuses and justifications are”. For the first time, he ironically sided with the Egyptian public who were angered by his foreign policy that was widely perceived by Egyptians as serving American and Israeli interests. He continued to make promises to amend the constitution and even scrape the decades-old emergency law. These promises would have been considered substantial only a few weeks before, but were unremarkable for the protesters who advanced this far and had excluded the idea of returning to the idea that Mubarak could be their leader. Some

cried in despair and other yelled in rage. Chants were yelled “He leaves, we will not leave!” Protesters raised the soles of their shoes to the screen, a symbol that the notion of the respected father was ultimately dismantled.

The next day on February 11, Omar Suleiman announced in a short thirty-second speech that Mubarak had stepped down and would turn power over to the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) headed by Mohamed Hussein Tantawi. Eschewing the familial rhetoric that Mubarak had used throughout the eighteen days, he proved that at this point the Mubarak regime had acknowledged it had lost control over the particular discourse it used to justify its rule. Egyptians erupted in celebration, and the world that watched the drama of a revolution unfold over the eighteen days also celebrated with Egyptians.

Egyptians continued to re-claim their country as news sources reported images of men and women picking up trash and sweeping the streets of Egypt that they once littered, calling it the first revolution in which protesters cleaned up after themselves. The marginalized youth formerly blamed as the cause of social unrest were defined as gidān (“brave”), self-sacrificing, and trustworthy enough to take Egypt and restore the true potential of Egypt that was prevented by the stifling of a corrupt government that failed in protecting and serving its public.

Questions would arise around how the Supreme Council of Armed Forces would fit in the Egyptian family. There was concern during the initial eighteen days that the military would not jeopardize its special status with the regime, However, during the protests, the army refused to

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106 The people living under other authoritarian rule celebrated and gained more confidence in the possibility of joining their Tunisian and Egyptian brothers and also toppling dictators who similarly ruled their nations for decades.

107 All of Egypt’s rulers have come from the military and have relied on its support, when a group of army officers seized coup through a coup in 1952,
shoot at the protesters and allowed protesters to scrawl on the tanks statements such “Mubarak must go” and “our money”. When the military claimed that it would not interfere with the revolution, Egyptians in celebration took pictures with army tanks and handed their babies to be kissed by heroic hands of the soldiers, and admitted them into the new family. Chants erupted of “al-shaab, al-gaysh, eid wahda”, “the people, the army are one hand” asserted their belief that the Supreme Council of Armed Forces would be part of the new nation and would help guide the nation through the transitional phase to democracy. The army was depicted as the savior of the revolution and the protector of the Egyptian family, a thought soon to be debated.

Conclusion

This chapter depicted the gendered process in which the Tahrir family was made. During the eighteen days in January, the government and the people used familial discourse to include and exclude who belonged in the family. In this revolutionary moment, in which state power was renegotiated by the masses, gender roles were transgressed and reformulated to construct a new family which ultimately excluded the despotic father and his old government. The bonds between the citizens were imagined as a deep horizontal comradeship of individuals ready to die.

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108 In return for their loyalty, the generals enjoyed access to profitable business and land deals.

109 On February 13th, Tantawi announced that the constitution would be suspended, both houses of parliament would be dissolved, and that the military would rule for six months until the elections would be held. However, the prior cabinet created by Mubarak in a failed attempt to quell the protesters, and Ahmed Shafik the former air force officer that Mubarak appointed as prime minister, would remain to serve as the caretaker government until a new one was formed. The leaders of the protests pressed the military that the prime minister sworn in by the ousted leader and the cabinet filled with figures from the old regime had to go. They suggested Essam Sharaf, a former transportation minister as a possible replacement. He was popular among revolutionaries due to his rare stance towards the revolution when he led protests on February 4th by faculty members of Cairo University calling for Mubarak to step down and the parliament. Shafik resigned on March 3rd, a day before major protests were planned to force him to step down, and the military announced that it had chosen Essam Sharaf as the new prime minister.

On March 4th, Sharaf headed to Tahrir to gain the consent of the revolutionaries who were celebrating the removal of Shafiq’s transition government and calling for the implementation of the rest of the demands. Shafiq addressed the crowds and said in his speech “I draw my legitimacy from you” and reiterated his commitment to push for democratic transition. He received a warm welcome from the protesters who chanted, “Put your head up, you are Egyptian” and “Welcome Essam beik (‘sir), Tahrir welcomes you”.

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for one another to reach the common goal of toppling Mubarak. Nationalistic songs about the martyrs who would never be forgotten, the brotherhood created during the eighteen days, and the Tahrir spirit reminded Egyptians that the revolution should never be forgotten and would not let the blood of martyrs go in vain by continuing to seek the demands of social justice, liberty, and equality. The Tahrir family would be referred to as the ideal practice of engendered citizenship as well as the sense of belonging, equality, and liberty in the imagined visions for how the new Egyptian nation should look like. The revolution symbolically restored the role of the public in politics when people could make collective claims on the government, and those in power were held accountable for their decisions to a public that broke a barrier of fear. A new type of politics and began to emerge in which protesters would continue strikes, sit-ins, form petitions, and join emerging political parties that would push their demands and their hopes for the future.
'A tragic metaphor for Egypt'
A group of people passed near a woman who was drowning in the sea. The Salafi refused to extend his arm to save her because he thoroughly washed himself to pray. The Muslim Brotherhood member insisted on consulting the Supreme Guide first. The April 6 Youth member asserted on reaching an agreement with at least 130 youth coalitions. A Tahrir revolutionary demanded a million man march next Friday named "Friday to save the drowning girl". Those in Abbassia Square insisted that if she did drown she would not be considered a martyr and questioned why she went into the sea in the first place.... ElBaradei shuddered as he took out his iPad to tweet "A woman's dignity is in her right to life".... Asmaa Mahfouz said that SCAF was behind the woman's drowning and it was responsible for saving her.... The Minister of Interior stated: "We don't have a sea". SCAF decided to form an investigative committee to know who the third party was who pushed her into the water. Sadly, this lady is Egypt.  

As expressed in a humorous yet dark poem that was circulated in the social media spheres throughout the year of 2011 and 2012, after the eighteen day uprising, the Egyptian family immediately began to change. Now with Mubarak deposed, interests would diverge and political powers with different visions for how the transitional process should proceed, as well as their visions for the new nation destroyed the unity displayed within the Tahrir family. The revolution symbolically restored the role of the public in politics when people could make collective claims on the government, and those in power were held accountable for their decisions to a public that broke a barrier of fear. A new type of politics began to emerge in which protesters would continue strikes, sit-ins, form petitions, and join emerging political parties that would push their demands and their hopes for the future. 

Although the initial uprising was secular in nature, as expected, the Muslim Brotherhood and other Islamist groups’ legitimizing ideologies and power bases became the dominant force in the transitional process. Not only were these highly-organized groups trusted by a majority as

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they worked on the ground providing a wide array of social services to the poor that the state did not deliver, but they promised to solve the country’s problems through “morally” defined visions. In addition to the tensions that arose after an uprising composed of a variety of sectors of the population who now were no longer united under the common goal of toppling Mubarak, a hidden majority did not participate in the protests. They condemned the continuing protests and strikes for causing instability, as the cause of the lack of security in the streets, and for disrupting their lives as the economy plummeted. While views of the transition period diverged from below, SCAF, the power supposed to lead the transitional period to a new state system for Egypt, increasingly mirrored the old regime’s methods of control; it would attempt to steer the revolution in a direction that would preserve its interests.

Since nations are modern constructs, examining the myths, symbols, and discourses is essential in understanding how nation-states are imagined and built, and ultimately will give a better glimpse in understanding the shifts in power in this chaotic transitional process. The centrality of gender to examining the forces grappling for power today is striking when there are “multiple meanings of the nations- in terms of membership, boundaries, and origin in myths- and the ways in which these meanings are permeated with notions of masculinity and femininity”. We can explore how powers of varying ideological orientations, goals, and outlooks shifted these boundaries, myths, all conceptualized and contested through gender issues.

111 A small segment of this force also organized to claim its share of the public space and would organize protests against the revolutionaries that called for justice against the deposed president and later SCAF; they would name themselves the “We Are Sorry Mr. President Coalition” and “The Silent Majority Coalition”.

In this chapter, I analyze the early gendered imaginings of various political powers and restructuring of the state, and how women (imagined and physically) have been the center of this process. As in past revolutionary processes, Egypt as a woman increasingly became the central trope for how “she” would be envisioned. Thus, the process and struggle to attempt to reach the demands of the revolution and to achieve Egypt’s democracy would also be highly gendered. In this chapter, I will explore the questions that past feminist scholars have asked to examine the historical myth-making that has been centered on Egypt envisioned as a woman, and are relevant in examining the post-January 25th setting in which different visions for the nation are articulated and debated. These questions include: If the nation is imagined as a deep horizontal comradeship, a fraternity ready to die for each other, as Anderson describes it, how do men and women belong differently? How and by whom will the boundaries be constructed? And when there are tensions between defining the nation as a “horizontal comradeship” all equal to one another and a “family”, in which each individual is provided a different role, what are the implications for gender?

I describe how with the uprising, the protesters initially had “taken back” public space and consolidated a moment of creating the ideal Egyptian family. However, as the competition for this space between old and new political forces became more divisive, the poetics of Egyptian nationalism symbolized by Egypt as a maternal figure increasingly became infused with sexualized rhetoric and was gendered in specific ways. With the shifts in power dynamics, the inequality and exploitation between members of society –both old and new - began to emerge and take forms of gendered discourse and inequality. Tracing how political actors regulated women, defined gendered citizenship, and manipulated the women question for their own
purposes will be crucial in understanding the development around women’s status in Egypt today. Discourses concerning power and authority reveal a similar proliferation of discourses in regards to gender roles, these two discourses – that on power/authority on one hand and gender roles on the other – intersect and inflect with one another. Despite women’s activism and the increased space for their activism, as women, their mobilization differed structurally and symbolically from men in their society. Constituting the actual symbolic configurations of the nation, and signifying particular national identities, women became the imaginary and physical site for viewing the nation and re-defining the borders of the hierarchal order.

**Re-engendering Martyrs and its Implications**

Gendered relations first were being re-conceptualized within the Tahrir family. This can be seen in the shifts in engendering of martyrs and protesters in relation to SCAF and its increasing control of the revolution. Even though the gendered dynamics of the initial uprising gave women more agency within the Tahrir family, after the uprising, the more constricting gendered norms of the past increasingly appeared and would play more of a regulatory role in defining the role men and women should play. These dynamics would shift depending on the actors in the public space and the political climate, shaping when and how women would be included and excluded. As the political climate regressed closer to Mubarak’s authoritarianism under SCAF as well as the rise of more conservative Islamist forces, discourses around the role and space for women to participate in the transitional process would also would regress.

As described in the second chapter, although there were many women and girls who died during the eighteen day uprising, Sally Zahran was the icon of the female martyr when her picture was placed in the center of the first poster of the January 25 martyr family, published in a
full-page of the newspaper Al- Masry-Al Youm on February 6th. She was the only woman displayed of eleven martyrs, centered in the middle of the martyred family. This poster after the revolution was circulated not only in social media and videos mourning and honoring the youth who died for the revolution, but also became present in posters I saw around the streets of Egypt. However, weeks after the protests, the circumstance surrounding her death became the center of debate. First, there were debates on how she should be represented. Some argued that the picture of Sally with her curly hair showing was not a true depiction of her. According to many, just before the revolution, Sally had started wearing hijab and had died with her hair covered. Exposing pictures with her without her hijab was an attack to her modesty and piety, and some even expressed that her mother was pained by seeing Sally’s honor being tarnished without her hijab on. Facebook groups with thousands of members emerged demanding that the picture of Sally be removed from all posters with the martyrs, or at least put a picture with her wearing a hijab as seen below. Other versions of the posters circulated even removed Sally from the center and instead replaced her with another martyr.

In addition to enforcing gendered standards for how Sally the martyr should be depicted, debates also emerged about whether or not she was a martyr. While reports before had mentioned that she had died in Tahrir during the Friday of Anger on January 28th after a blow to
the head, as Al Masry Al Youm reported on February 6th, this story now was under question. Now people argued that she had died far from the square in the confines of her home in Sohag, an Upper Egyptian town where she was from. On February 24th, her family was interviewed on a popular talk show and her mother provided another story. Her mother actually had refused to let her join the protests in fear for her daughter’s life and had trapped Sally in the apartment in a confrontation, from which she consequently fell out of the balcony to her death from the 9th floor. In a political meeting I attended with the Social Democratic Party’s women’s committee, boys and girls debated what had happened inside her home. Some argued that Sally was hit by depression and had committed suicide and intentionally jumped out of the balcony to her death.

Now not only was she not a martyr, but she was defying Islam by committing suicide and could not enter paradise. Others countered this story with another report that she had been heroically in the streets from January 25 and January 28 and refused to go home and rest, thus had not eaten properly in days. She decided to return home on the night of the 28th to quickly change and eat. However, the effects of the teargas and the lack of food made her dizzy while standing in the balcony and she fell out of the balcony and died. The questions around her death were similar to the controversy around Mohammed Bouazizi, the Tunisian street vendor who set himself on fire in protest of harassment and humiliation that was inflicted upon him by the government. However, the memory of him is more sympathetic as his act of protest sparked the Tunisian revolution, the catalyst to the uprisings in the rest of the region. The early arguments around Sally’s death and how her body should be presented revealed how many of the old gendered norms would return as being female now destabilized notions of martyrdom and protest. Regardless of how she died and what she was wearing, these debates depicted how
women were further removed from the national fraternity when even the esteemed space of martyrs was harder to claim for women.

In contrast to the shifts to Sally’s appearance, I noticed the forms and shapes of male martyrs depicted in the graffiti of the walls of Egypt and posters hung in the streets. One poster in Downtown Cairo caught my attention was of Shehab Hassan Shehab who held his dumbbells with the background of the sphinx and Egypt’s pharoanic history behind it claiming that “Egypt is the first country in the Middle East”. In Shehab’s Facebook page that his friends or family members probably created for him in commemoration of him, the martyr posts nationalist statuses calling for his friends to not lose the blood he and others spilt for his country. Shehab embodied what it means to be masculine by working out. His physical prowess juxtaposed with Egypt’s antiquity showed how Egyptians illustrated the notion that the strong male body was connected to the might of Egypt’s nation and future. Only when men were masculine and were not subordinated by the state and subjected to its violence, would Egypt rise to its throne.

Depicted by the shifting gendered conceptions, tensions surrounding the inability of men to perform their responsibilities as men marginalized, subordinated, and subjected to violence by the state, have returned since the downfall of Mubarak. Although women through their participation in the uprising and continuous strikes afterwards reformulated conceptions of gendered relations and women’s activism, using Connell’s reasoning, the more that males are
subordinated, denied patriarchal benefits, and associated with females when they have the least access to patriarchal dividends and the fewest attributes of hegemonic masculinity, the more extreme their gender differentiation from females will be.\textsuperscript{113} How the memory of Sally was marred even within the idealized family of martyrs immediately after the uprising would prelude the upcoming gendered tensions, debates, and violence occurring within the Egyptian family in the reordering of power.

\textit{Engendering the Future Ruling Father and the first steps in the transitional process}

On February 15\textsuperscript{th}, 2011, the Supreme Council of Armed Forces appointed a committee to recommend changes needed to ensure free and fair elections in the future and remove the built-in guarantees that allowed for political control by Mubarak and the ruling party, until a new one would be drafted and approved. Not only was this process closely watched by the public and outside observers as they would be the first steps taken on the path towards the new nation, but these amendments would be voted on in Egypt’s celebrated first free democratic process on March 19\textsuperscript{th}, which would pave the way for new parliamentary and presidential elections within six months, only later to be delayed.\textsuperscript{114} These amendments were drafted in only ten days and were offered to the public for discussion for only three weeks before the vote. Many argued that they were written hastily and did not go far enough. To the dismay of feminists, the committee had eight members, most of them politicians and judges, and all of them men. And the head of

\textsuperscript{113} Connell, 2005
\textsuperscript{114} The committee proposed that the future president would only be allowed to serve two four-year terms, instead of unlimited six-year periods. Other amendments would make it easier for individuals to qualify to run as a presidential candidate and reinstate judicial supervision for elections. It would also be more difficult for any leader to maintain the state of emergency. The date of the parliamentary elections would be changed by SCAF and delayed until December 2011
the committee was an Islamist judge, angering many who believe that the army had made an agreement with the Muslim Brotherhood to share power.

Although restrictions that basically only allowed the ruling party to nominate a presidential candidate were removed, feminists were particularly angered by Article 75, which now guaranteed that “Egypt’s president is born to two Egyptian parents and cannot be married to a non-Egyptian spouse. Neither he nor his parents shall have another nationality except the Egyptian ones. He shall practice his own civil and political rights.” According to feminists, formulations of the amended article suggested that only a man could only run for president in Egypt, because the female pronoun for president was not included; thus they believed that the article was referring to the president as a male, and the foreign spouse as the wife. Although some defended the article with its current formulation as not excluding women when it was merely using the default male pronoun, this mere amendment had a deeper history.

This article was written in response to the nature of Husni Mubarak’s family. Suzanne Mubarak was not only half-Welsh, but she and their two sons owned British passports. The ruling family’s dual loyalty to Egypt and Britain also reflected the reality that Egypt had never extricated itself from colonial-type relationships when the West supported the autocratic regime in return for maintaining its interests in the country. Such laws and stipulations for proving one’s Egyptian patrilineal purity, and allegiance to the nation revealed the importance of creating an

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115 The old article of the 1971 constitution stated: ”The President of the Republic should be an Egyptian born to Egyptian parents and enjoy civil and political rights. His age must not be less than 40 Gregorian years” Official website for Referendum Guidelines. http://referendum.eg/constitutional-amendments/76-75.html (accessed September 5, 2011)
Egypt that was authentic, along with the anti-western discourse that would be used by state actors and new political powers for their advantage.\textsuperscript{116}

While liberal groups condemned this clause, many conservative groups argued that the president should prove his authenticity and loyalty to the nation. This amendment would become particularly debated during the presidential elections and would affect the outcomes of the presidential elections that would be held in May 2012. Hazem Abu Ismail, a Salafi lawyer turned preacher and one of the strongest contenders for presidency would be excluded by this law when evidence emerged that his mother possessed US citizenship before she died.\textsuperscript{117} This controversy was ironic in light of the anti-US rhetoric he used and rigid visions for an Islamic society, in which gender-segregated workplaces would be instituted, women would be ordered to wear hijab, and women would only work out of economic necessity.\textsuperscript{118} The vision that he used which excluded women from the strictly moralized public sphere to build an image of authenticity and piety would help him gain widespread popularity from an increasingly powerful Salafi base. Ironically, the same reasons he would use to authenticate himself as a moral leader would also be what disqualified him for the struggle for presidency when his mother made him as an outsider by law.

In April 2011, Bothaina Kamel, would announce that she would run for presidency, making her the first women in Egyptian history to run for presidency. I had a chance to interview

\textsuperscript{116} The perceptions around Suzanne Mubarak as someone who was foreign would not only affect this law, but as she was perceived as the guardian of “women’s rights” when she pushed for women’s advancement, a campaign against women’s rights would soon occur. This would be again justified as an attempt to rid Egypt of the foreign corruption on the authentic Egyptian family, whether the family within the household or the family of Egypt.

\textsuperscript{117} According to a presidential poll by Al Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies published April 2\textsuperscript{nd} 2012, Abu Ismail ranked second with 23 percent support.

her and ask her about her experience during the revolution, her background on her activism, and why she decided to run for presidency. The main reason for running was to ensure that women who were part of the revolution have the right to presidency. “We had the revolution to get our rights. If you don’t demand your rights now there won’t be room for you in the picture.” She expressed her responsibility as “a daughter of Tahrir” to protect the revolution from SCAF. Asking her whether it would be difficult to run for presidency given social norms (even in Western societies) that prevent women from running for presidency, she expressed that even though it would be difficult, she expressed how “people do not care about gender, as long as you deliver”. Although Bothaina Kamel would run for presidency to counter this law, Egyptians were increasingly against the idea of a woman to be president. Dalia Zaida--a human rights activist, the head of the American Islamic Congress, and nominated as a parliamentary representative for Hizb al-□Adl (“Justice Party”)--explained to me the public’s refusal against women holding the presidency position. “I did a survey on March 19th during

119 Bothaina Kamel hosted a popular Egyptian radio program called "Nightime Confessions" from 1992 to 1998 in which she would face resistance from conservative viewers while she tackled sensitive issues such as sexual abuse, social pressures wearing hijab, and premarital sex. Her show would be removed six years later due to conservative pressures. She later worked as a news presenter for Egyptian state television, and hosted a show called "Please Understand Me" on Orbit TV, a Saudi Arabian-owned network. After an episode she recorded that tackled Mubarak’s hidden billions was not aired due to Saudi’s complicit role in protecting Mubarak’s money, her show stopped airing.
120 Bothaina Kamel (2012 Presidential Candidate), interview with author, Cairo, Egypt, August 10 2011
121 She also felt that unlike other presidential candidates who announced their candidacy, she understood the demands of the revolution as she campaigned throughout Egypt to ask ordinary people what they wanted to see for the nation. Unlike other candidates she noted, she was joining the continuing protests and often times place herself in danger, gaining the respect of those who also were continuing to protest. Her platform would reflect the demands of the revolution: “My slogan is ‘Bread, Freedom and Human Dignity!’ My campaign is based on fighting poverty and corruption.” Ibid.
122 Although she stressed the importance of ensuring women’s rights particularly with the backlash brought with the rise of the Salafist movement, she criticized women’s organizations for being “cultural and not on the ground”.
123 Dalia Ziada (Head of American Islamic Congress in Egypt), interview with author, Cairo, Egypt, July 20, 2011
124 She explained why the feminist movement would not support Bothaina Kamel as she had no experience in politics and was not popular as other women such as Gameela Ismail. The Justice Party is a political party founded after the revolution by a group of people from different movements including the April 6 Movement, the National
the referendum and polled several places throughout Cairo just to ask this one question: ‘Would you agree to have a woman as president in Egypt one day?’ I interviewed 1300 people, and of those 480 were women. The answer was 100 per cent no”.  

Reactions I received when discussing the possibility in interviews and casual discussions mirrored the refusal found in Dalia Ziada’s survey. They explained that there are gendered roles that are expected by the Egyptian president that women could not perform, whether in terms of physical differences or social and religiously constructed differences between women and men. One female Brotherhood member explained why she and most of Egyptian society would be against the idea of a female president:

I am against the idea of a woman being president. Why? Because in the end, for a president position we need someone who doesn’t get ill and who her emotions does not control her... who every month does not get her period… because there is a length of time where she is tired when she has her period. There is no way a president could be pregnant. Or can you imagine her leading the army?

A male Brotherhood member explained to me the justification on why women were not allowed to run for presidency in terms of his vision of an authentic Islamic state that Egypt should follow:

“Under the Islamic state, a woman cannot hold the state because the leader is also amir il-

mu’minin(“ the leader of the believers”), and has religious obligations that a woman cannot perform. But a woman can hold control over buldan (“provinces”) meaning that women have the right to run for parliament.” Debates around this article and what are the likelihoods of a

Association for Change and Kefaya. The party describes itself as a party of various political ideologies on the political right and left, rather than a certain political ideology.  

125 Ibid.  
126 Sara Ahmed (Member of the Muslim Brotherhood), interview with author, Cairo, Egypt, August 20, 2011  
127 The Muslim Brotherhood, attempting to portray itself as a moderate and democratic force, pushed that although it would not elect a female president, it would not argue if the public chose a female president. However, as Moushira Khattab noted “Islam is a very sensitive issue for all Egyptians. If someone says this no one would elect a woman. If the Muslim Brotherhood or Salafis say they wouldn’t no one would elect one.” Moushira Khattab (Former Minister of Family and Planning), interview with author, Cairo, Egypt, July 20, 2011
female president being elected, seem trivial when both Arab and Western societies still grapple with the idea of whether women are physically/mentally fit to lead a nation. However, examining the discussion around the president’s authenticity, and perceptions around roles the president should carry out, depicted how individuals and politicians envisioned and grappled with understanding their gendered notions of equality, religion, and democracy.

For three weeks, liberal and conservative groups debated the amendments proposed by the constitutional committee. Leading figures and young activists of liberal groups were attempting to garner support for people to reject the votes arguing that the constitutional amendments were not enough and the ruling military council was rushing the process and called for protests to demonstrate against these changes. On the other hand, Islamist groups pushed for a yes vote, arguing that this would allow a transition quicker from military rule and an earlier date for the elections. The deeper tension between these divisions was around what groups would benefit from early elections. Liberals feared that earlier parliamentary elections meant that unlike the younger parties still organizing themselves, the more established groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood and old figures of the National Democratic Party would dominate the parliamentary elections, bringing back remnants of the old regime in control and Islamists who they thought would threaten Egypt’s identity of the state. Even though the proposed amendments to the constitution were not affecting Amendment 2, which stipulated that shari’a was the main source for the constitution, this referendum became a religious debate around the religious identity of the state.

The referendum would be the spark to one of the largest debates that have emerged since the revolution is the question of the nation’s identity: whether the nation will be a civil state
(“dawla madaniyya”), a religious state (“dawla deeniyya), or different variations of the two.

Although most political groups did not call for amending Article 2, women’s bodies were used by both liberals and conservatives to depict what were the consequences for women if the other camp were to take power. A viral video of a Salafi sheikh Hazem Shouman exclaiming that a secular state means that your mother will take off her hijab. The opposite fears were dictated by liberals who voiced their concern that women would be forced to cover and retreat home if Islamists took over. Many liberal activists expressed to me their anger from how Islamists used the religious card to garner public support in the referendum and in the parliamentary elections. While Islamist interviewees noted that liberal activists should accept the outcome of the popular democratic vote, Asmaa Mohamed, a 32 year old woman from the Muslim Brotherhood also voiced her disappointment that Islamists were misusing religion for their advantage.

“Salafists said that if you vote no and do not accept the reform to the amendments, it means that you are saying no to Article 2 which preserves the Islamic identity of Egypt. This referendum was not about this at all. This is a political game…. Sadat had given the Islamists Article 2 to appease them, in doing so, he changed nineteen other articles for his advantage to preserve his interests…. This is what it is about….it is about interests”

She pointed out the parallels by which Islamists currently used religion to their advantage and how past presidents also invoked religious symbols of those codes to limit the boundaries of civic debate and expand their control. Regardless of whether Asmaa believed whether a democratic nation that supports equality and freedom could be derived from shariah, she disapproved with how politics was being mixed with religion to further interests of Islamist organizations in the similar ways in which Sadat had compromised with Islamist powers to make

129 Asmaa Mohamed (Political activist and member of the Muslim Brotherhood), interview with author, Cairo, Egypt, August 20, 2011
The main source of the constitution in return for allowing Sadat to further authoritarianism and legally lengthen presidential terms.

Liberal groups also engaged in gendered politics. One political advertisement against the amendments proposed, was named “rebuilding the constitution”, but used the term “tirqui’”, which refers to the operation done to rebuild the hymen for women who lost their virginity. The video begins with a woman lying on a couch seductively in a short white robe. The male narrator asks, “What does it mean if you support the proposed changes to the constitution? It means that a woman who her whole life used to play, and now with a small operation, they want you to marry her. We think you deserve better than this.” The commercial ends with the woman now in a white wedding dress smiling mischievously to herself, while the innocent groom stands unaware of what trouble he is getting into. The destruction of the Egyptian family through the unregulated forms of intimacy was a metaphor for the consequences for the new nation if these amendments passed, and demonstrated how both liberals and Islamist actors used the same sexual rhetoric to depict the consequences of voters’ actions. Familial honor around women and nation, once offering a measure of protection to female family members during the uprising, now was used in a violent manner and as a means of controlling behaviors. The tension between protecting Egypt out of love of the nation and for greed of power to control continued to play out through examples of this divisive gendered language, images, and symbols as the transitional process became more divisive.

On March 19th, the public voted overwhelmingly in favor of the amendments made initially to the referendum (approximately 77 percent were in favor, while 23 percent opposed the changes). The voter turnout for the referendum marked the highest in Egypt’s modern history, with approximately 41 percent (18 million) out of 45 million eligible voters. Many interviewees I spoke with pointed out how even the lines for women voters were even longer than men’s, indicating women’s excitement to be part of the transitional process. Although images of the public excitedly lining up to practice their rights of voting were moving, it also foreshadowed the methods in which political actors continuously used gendered politics in a regressive manner in order to assert control over the transitional period.

After the uprising, the gendered norms that allowed for women’s greater participation immediately began to be restricted. Regressive gendered language, images, and symbols mirrored the divisiveness of the transitional process as various political groups battled for greater control.

*Go home and cook, it is not your time: Feminist’s’ exclusion from Tahrir and the impending backlash on women groups*

After the exclusion of women from the constitutional reform committee, and the resulting article appeared to bar women for running for the Egyptian presidency, feminists organized a women’s protest to take place at Tahrir on March 8th coinciding with International Women’s Day. Feminists seized this as an opportunity for women to remind Egyptians of their full participation in the revolution and that they should not be excluded in the process of rebuilding
Egypt. As they reached Tahrir, women realized that the turnout would be less than expected and the majority of women who participated in the protests were not interested in joining them.

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Although this protest was held only three weeks after the toppling of Mubarak, and women used the same nationalist discourse to seek their claims chanting “men and women one hand” while handing roses to the soldiers standing to protect the streets of Egypt. The main idea of the protests according to Nehad Aboul Komsan, the head of the Egyptian Center for Women’s Rights was to: “celebrate all martyrs, men and women, and to remind society of the role women played during the revolution.” These women did not receive a Tahrir welcome, but were received by a crowd of men ready to reject them. After speaking to feminists who attended this protest, women speculated that these men were not those who initiated the revolution. Judging by the identical banners they carried and the organized fashion of these men, other women speculated they were pro-Mubarak thugs who were hired to intimidate them. Others speculated they were Salafists who were harassed and prevented from dictating their opinions under the Mubarak regime, and now were free to voice their views also came to the Tahrir space at the same time to demand their rights. Moushira El Khattab, the former Minister of Family and Planning and a participant in this rally, explained that the backlash on this day represented a crucial turning point in the revolution since the departure of Mubarak:

133 Nehad Aboul Komsan (Head of the Egyptian Center for Women’s Rights), interview with author, Cairo, Egypt, July 20, 2011
This is a moment of change. During the revolution, we were not chanting about religion. We had a corrupt regime that we all wanted to get rid of. Now the agenda has changed and there are several agendas and leaders. 82 million Egyptians were not at Tahrir Square. The people I saw, those were not the people who initiated the revolution. Now those who were not at Tahrir are coming to take their rights and this was coming to surface.\footnote{Moushira El Khattab (Former Minister of Family and Planning), interview with author, Cairo, Egypt, July 20, 2011}

Awaiting them at the square were crowds of men chanting, “No to women, yes to FGM,” and “El sha‘ab yureed isqat al-madam” (“the people demand the removal of the Lady” (referring to Suzanne Mubarak). Men and women got into heated religious debates on what the proper role for women should be. Men used verses from the Quran that were strategically used to accuse women of neglecting their duties as females for wanting a larger role in the rebuilding of Egypt such as “stay home and raise presidents, do not run for president.”\footnote{Ahmed Awadallah (Blogger), interview with author, Cairo, Egypt, July 5, 2011.} Other counter-arguments used by men included: “why didn’t God send female prophets?” and “your voice is ‘awra (“naked”) you should not be heard”.\footnote{\textit{\textsuperscript{\textcopyright}Awra} in Arabic linguistically means a hidden and secret place. A person’s ‘awra refers to what must be kept hidden, usually referring to parts of the body that need to be covered. Some Islamic scholars consider a woman’s voice as \textit{\textsuperscript{\textcopyright}awra}.} Referring to the nation’s religious identity they yelled “you won’t make it secular”. A young male blogger who I interviewed and had attended the protest to support women’s rights was called a faggot defending whores, and he wasn’t Egyptian for doing this. The march ended with these men circling them and advancing their harassment to a physical form. Men encircled small groups of women, groped at them and tore their banners.

Western media covered the March 8 incidents extensively and continued to generate the neo-imperialist rhetoric about whether Egypt was ready for democracy. Many condemned the physical abuse used against these women, many also argued that it was not time for feminists to...
call for their demands. Egyptians had to work together to complete the unfinished demands of the revolution. This narrative matched many historical patterns in which when female nationalists who would call for women-based interests would be told by male nationalists their concerns were secondary to the greater cause. Moushira Khattab pointed out this contradiction:

Since the revolution, everyone in Tahrir has been free to say what they want to say and everyone is demanding their rights. Labor groups are calling for a pay raise, temporary workers are calling to be permanently hired. If you see the demands of textile workers, teachers, doctors who were going also to protest, they were not national but were specific to their own group. This is very sad and bad what happened when it shows that everyone can ask for their rights but women.138

I asked young women who were active politically but did not attend the March 8 protest why they did not participate and why they thought such a backlash occurred against feminist groups. They agreed with the majority of Egyptians who believed that calling for rights as women was not of immediate concern in relation to other demands. Zeinab unsympathetically responded that it was impossible for anyone to accept them.

If I was even in the streets, I would not have even sympathized with them. No one would understand the call or the demands of this march. They chose the wrong time and a wrong place for them to organize a protest. They were very unorganized… dul banat nukhub nazleeen yitdala’o, (those are a bunch of elite girls going down to be spoiled). This would not have happened if they went in a group of 1000 or 2000 women from various regions and looked different from them.139

Through this experience, feminist activists realized the difficult challenge they would face as the public did not sympathize with feminist groups when they were seen as one of the main recipients. For Fatima Khafagy, house member of the Alliance of Arab Women and a member of the Social Democratic Party, “It was a good thing, in the end, as I understood that we need to be more organized and stand together.”140 However, after the March 8 incident, women’s groups and the rights they pushed increasingly would be the targets of attack due to their historical

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138 Moushira Khattab, interview with author, Cairo, Egypt, July 20, 2011
139 Zeinab Ahmed, interview with author, Cairo, Egypt, July 20, 2011
140 Fatima Khafagy (house member of AAW and member of Social Democratic Party), interview with author, July 20, 2011
affiliation with Suzanne Mubarak’s corruption and the old regime. Since the revolution, this discourse has intensified as a public campaign targeting this state-sponsored feminism as not representing the authentic views of Egyptian women, and that “men” yet did not have their rights, so why should women? Consequently, women’s rights and the advancements they have been made have been labeled as corrupt and inauthentic, and thus were in need for revision.

_The Backlash on Women’s Quota_

As the women’s quota was put in place during the most rigged elections in 2010 and only women who represented the NDP were elected, the quota would be targeted and eventually removed after Mubarak’s fall, something that most liberals and Islamists agreed upon. Women’s group members argued that although the quota was used to promote the ruling party during Mubarak’s era, they believed it should be reinstated to help include women representation in formal politics. Dalia Ziada explained her stance:

> I was against the quota during Mubarak time... it was bringing in more NDP people in. But now I am for the quota because it’s a mentality problem in Egypt. Egyptians need to see women in powerful positions and women need to prove themselves in these positions. They cannot wait for people to vote them in…. People would tell me women are for food and women are for kitchen. When we are done with all of the men we will think of women. If we wait for people to vote for women it is not going to happen.  

I asked Azza El Garf who previously ran under the quota in 2010 as a Muslim Brotherhood candidate whether or not she supported the quota as a tool if it were used fairly to give women the opportunity to gain experience in politics. Interestingly, she argued that affirmative action for women was _haram_ ("forbidden") when it was discriminating against men. She argued that true democracy would allow for the women who were authentic Egyptian women (implying

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141 Dalia Ziada (Head of American Islamic Congress in Egypt), interview with author, Cairo, Egypt, July 20, 2011
herself) to gain the support of the population, unlike the Westernized elite women who were privileged by the past regime.

I believe there should be no tameez (difference) between men and women – Islam says the woman is shaga’eq (twin) to the man… there should be no difference in the laws except in inheritance because her father and son have the responsibility of providing for her…. The ladies who are there to serve society, they will still be here. The ladies who were represented in the government, they weren’t serving the country… Let the woman be active in the political trends she wants and she must go in with her culture, and her knowledge, and the trust of the people for her. Whoever represents society must truly represent it.  

Another young female activist from the April 6 movement shared the same sentiments. Rather than using Islamic discourse, she explained how she had gained respect of men during the sit-ins in Tahrir after January 25 and for her commitment to the cause. She believed that women whether political activists or feminists, also had to prove their commitment to the revolution in the same manner:

I’m against the quota. It makes no sense … if you work hard if you prove yourself to men … you prove that you are their equal. For example, in this movement, the men say I am their brother…. This is because when they get in a quarrel I do not run away but I let them know that ‘I got your back’. You cannot come up to men and demand ‘I am your equal’.

Safaa, also a young political liberal activist from the Justice Party agreed with these sentiments. Even though she, like all women I interviewed, addressed their difficulties as women due to patriarchy prevalent in Arab society, she also saw joining women’s organizations or calling for affirmative action as a form of discrimination by drawing differences between men and women:

A big group of Egyptians see women as second citizens. But I would not want a quota nor would I join a women’s group because I am against tameez (“difference”). I am olyila, (“small”), but my place is here and I am trying to take it. Since the revolution, a lot of women used to see themselves as small and couldn’t do things men can. And this has changed. Women are more active politically. A lot of women voluntarily want to participate and have bigger hamas (“vigor) than anyone. Ladies had this hamas, enthusiasm before and there was so much they wanted to do before but they couldn’t.

142 Azza Garf (Parliamentarian of Freedom and Justice Party), interview with author, Cairo, Egypt, August 3, 2011.
143 Ghadie Nasser (April 6 Youth activist), interview with author, Cairo, Egypt, July 23, 2011.
144 Safaa Harak (Justice Party member), interview with author, Cairo, Egypt, July 23, 2011.
These reflections demonstrated that women, although they understood that women would not be represented formally in the political process, were against the previous methods used by the regime to advance women’s rights. The changes that the military brought about to the electoral law would be that two thirds of parliament would be elected through a proportional list system and one third through stipulated single ticket voting. Although the new law said each proportional list must have at least one woman, most parties (liberal and Islamist) placed their candidates at the bottom of their lists, weakening their chance for success. Eventually only one percent of the parliament would be represented by women. And four of the eight women selected would be representing Islamist currents that would dominate the parliament. Although women recognized that they would not be fully represented, many understood their needs as secondary, and a longer struggle that would come eventually if a democratic society was instituted.

**The Supreme Council of Armed Forces: The Guardian of the Egyptian Family?**

In May 2011, when I arrived in Egypt, I noticed the revolutionary pictures around Sadat metro station (located in the heart of Tahrir) conveying the initial narrative to the revolutionary family. These paintings along with similar posters SCAF hung around the streets of Egypt, painted an image of the army as the protector of the revolution and as part of the Egyptian authentic family. The resulting family of Egypt consisted of a maternal figure Egypt carrying her young child, the youth of Egypt who were no longer marginalized, but were the promise of “her”

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future. The army watches Egypt in a protective manner, almost as if he is the father of this new Egyptian family. Egyptians knew that the initial demands of the revolution which called for social justice, equality, and freedom were ideals that would be difficult to attain, and the process of building the appropriate nation mirroring the ideals of the Tahrir family that were imagined and demonstrated in those eighteen days would be a long process. How the Supreme Council of Armed Forces (SCAF) would guide this process would have long-lasting implications on the development of the new nation-state.

Although SCAF was initially accepted into the Tahrir family, increasing signs that SCAF joined the revolution for its own interests were apparent as generals attempted to build the institutions of democracy and direct the course of Egypt’s transition in a manner that preserved its power. Similar to the orders by the old government to the protesters during the uprising to return home to prevent chaos, SCAF also urged for protesters to return to their homes after the uprising and trust the Council in transitioning the government. SCAF arrested and tried thousands of civilians including bloggers, journalists, and protesters in closed military trials since the revolution. The emergency law, which was not dismantled with the security vacuum caused by the absence of police in the streets, resulted in violations of freedom of expression as the SCAF has banned peaceful protests.

The officials in the military junta defended these actions as methods to prevent acts of hooliganism after the revolution, and that these trials were to restore stability to the country. On the 9th of March, a sit-in at Tahrir Square was dispersed violently with reports of mass arrests and torture in the vicinity of the Egyptian Museum. Reports emerged of army officers detaining women, beating them with sticks and hoses, torturing them with electric shocks, stripped them,
and photographed them while naked. A man in a white lab coat forcibly performed “virginity tests” on the women. Women deemed “not virgins”, falsely or otherwise, were threatened with being “exposed as prostitutes” publicly. Seventeen women were detained in the military prison were brought before a military court on March 11 and released on March 13. They were later sentenced to one-year in jail for attacking soldiers, disrupting traffic, being caught with Molotov cocktails and knives, among other charges; however, the sentence was suspended and they were released.  

One of the victims who would be the face of the virginity tests scandal, Samira Ibrahim, described her experience: "I saw with my own eyes a general giving the orders. It was planned. They wanted to humiliate us so that we would not protest anymore." She recounted how she was taken into a room at a military prison for what she thought was going to be a routine search, but a woman told her to strip. A man then subjected her to five excruciating minutes of examination, where her naked body was exposed within view of jeering soldiers at the door to the room. He determined she was a "girl", meaning still a virgin, and demanded she sign a statement affirming it. Samira pursued a criminal case against her ordeal and was the only one to take her case to court, breaking the fear not only from the military, but social stigma that prevents women from reporting sexual violence when they feared bringing shame and dishonor to themselves and their families. After the Egyptian military tribunal would acquit the army

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147 Ibid.

148 She was first afraid to tell her family. When she told her mother, her mother advised her to keep silent if she wanted to get married or live honorably in Upper Egypt. However, her father who saw electric prod marks on her body, remembered memories of his own detention and torture under Mubarak’s government as an Islamist activist. He told her “history is repeating itself” and helped her file a court case against the military council.
doctor who conducted the virginity test, Samira would claim on her Twitter account: “No one stained my honor. The one that had her honor stained is Egypt. I will carry on until I restore Egypt's rights.” After outcries by protesters, civil society, and the international media, the army initially denied that the tests had been carried out, and then promised to launch an investigation. Later they defended their abuse by claiming that these women “were not like your daughter or mine” and were sleeping with boys in tents in Tahrir, and were done to “protect the girls” in the context of Egypt’s “oriental culture”. Samira would become a symbol of the corrupt practices of SCAF in continuity with Mubarak’s regime, dishonoring and defiling the honor of the martyrs and Egypt’s women.

Through virginity tests, the military attempted to intimidate women activists from continuing to protest. It also attempted to assert to the public that the military was playing the true role of the defender of the nation-state by reinforcing its moral order that was now being shaken. By labeling the women as whores and accusing them of participating in lewd behavior in the tents set up for the sit-in at Tahrir, the military asserted itself as protecting and reinforcing the heterosexual nation; for the “nation-as woman” trope only works if the imagined body/woman is assumed to be (heterosexually) fertile. Asserting that the beloved country now was envisioned as a prostitute or defended by unemployed men and loose women who were sexually unregulated, SCAF depicted itself as a power that would protect the nation-state from the revolution that had gone too far and needed to also be regulated before destructing the nation. Due to accusations and initial criticism of SCAF, it would release a decree on March 31 that

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149 Ibid.
150 Ibid.
151 Ibid.
amended seven articles in the penal code and enforced severe punishment for sexual harassment. Following the revision, Article 267 now states that those found guilty of raping women will face a life sentence or the death penalty. An additional clause in Article 268 stipulates that whoever commits an assault or threat or is involved in any way in such acts of aggression faces a minimum prison sentence of seven years.\textsuperscript{152} Like the old regime, it used women’s rights as a tool to ward criticism that it was sexist to its local and pubic audiences.

These incidents exposed the many signs that the military junta was quickly turning the revolution into a military coup. Not only did SCAF mirror the orders by the old government to protesters during the uprising to return home to prevent chaos, but used the same tactics to intimidate and discredit movements with revolutionary potential as going against gendered norms. Also similar to the old regime, SCAF labeled the revolutionaries who once were seen \textit{gid’aan} (“brave”) as \textit{baltagiyya} (“thugs”) using violence against the military in its skirmishes and as imposing their will over the interests of the nation. Similar to the 1998 law that the government imposed against “social terrorism”, in March 2011, SCAF issued The Thuggery Law, defining a thug as: “…A thug is also that who shows off strength…to threaten or conduct violence with the purpose of hindering the application of laws or resisting authorities or disturbing national security or harming a victim’s peace of mind, or to cause damage to property.”\textsuperscript{153}


\textsuperscript{153} Salma Shukrallah “Who Are Egypt’s Thugs?” \textit{Ahram Online}, July 7, 2011 http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContentPrint/1/0/15715/Egypt/0/Who-are-Egypts-thugs-.aspx (Date Accessed: September 6, 2011)
While the army which symbolically played the role of state’s protector against foreign threats in the minds of Egyptians before the revolution, it reasserted its presence now as the guarantor of domestic stability. However, as revolutionaries lost faith in the Supreme Council of Armed Forces, the army and its space in the family increasingly would be envisioned differently and excluded from the family by protesters and other forces uniting to protect the demands of the revolution. Cartoons, posters, and chants all discussed how the Supreme Council of Armed Forces was part of the same family of Mubarak as SCAF would not protect its’ interests, but would rather protect the order that would not allow a new economic order harming its interests, nor a political order that would put the military’s budget, interests, and actions under civilian scrutiny.

The skirmishes that erupted between the protesters and the security forces during the summer, and the months close to the parliamentary elections in December depicted similar dynamics to that of January 25th uprising with a variety of women and men participating, only now advanced with the techniques they adopted from the days of the uprising. The families of martyrs, military prisoners, and those who continued to protest at Tahrir became physical reminders that the demands of the revolution were not met. Respect was given to the mothers and the families of the martyrs who continued to push the basic demands that all of the public could support. I noticed how although female activists were given less of a space to rally the crowds as political parties now dominated the stages, the mothers, wives, and sisters of martyrs or imprisoned men were given the stage in basic rallies. One mother of a martyr shared her story with an attentive crowd at a Friday protest in June.

We were in Tahrir 8 days respectfully. We were surprised by baltagiyya in Maspicio during our sit-in there. The police would come to swear at us… One man came to me at 2 AM and offered money for the death of
my son. I responded, ‘No. I have only one son and I had no one else and he is a martyr God willing’. And I consider all of you my sons… God will not take me from you all. I am talking from the heart of every mother grieving over her son. Who is getting the right of the martyrs?  

The protesters yell back: “Hangibuh! Hangibuh!” (“We will get it! We will get it!”) The gendered symbols of mothers of martyrs, women who lost their honor through these virginity tests, and the army and its security apparatus who were not part of the Tahrir family but were thugs using violence to protect the old order, would be methods of evoking the basic demands of the revolution and for the public to step up and support them.

As parliamentary elections approached, the skirmishes between protesters and security forces increased as well as the gap between those in the streets and the larger majority who preferred stability over political turmoil. SCAF increasingly ignored the demands requested by the Tahrir Square protesters, and abused its executive powers to the detriment of Egypt’s transition. SCAF would release a document stipulating supra-constitutional guidelines making SCAF continue to be a dominant political force in Egypt even after the parliamentary elections. Other guidelines released included “only the armed forces has the right to discuss matters related to the armed forces or discuss its budget… and the president can only declare war after gaining the consent of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces”. While SCAF made statements that it did not seek to keep power and wanted to transition to a civil society to the media, scenes of violence in Tahrir and other cities against protesters depicted the contrary. SCAF would use gendered violence against women at an increasing level to intimidate women from protesting.

As the protesters and the army struggled for control over space, women’s bodies would become a

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154 Protest in Tahrir Square, June 2nd, 2011
155 Reports were that on June 28th, 2011 clashes broke out between protesters and the police after families of martyrs killed in the January 25 revolution were attacked near the Ballon Theater in Agooza.
(virtual and physical) space for the army, protesters, and the disapproving public that wanted stability over how the transition should proceed to debate on how to define the lines between maintaining stability and continuing the revolution, and to what extent would the military be allowed to abuse its power.

Women during these clashes were targeted during these protests. Several videos and testaments of women on media talk shows were circulated depicting how women were being dragged across the streets by their hair, beaten, and sexually assaulted by security forces as a means of intimidating women from protesting. While the public declared them as loose women who should not be in the streets during these violent periods, protesters in the streets and those who supported them from the safety of their homes discredited the labels that these women were improper through redefining gendered identities. Girls who were being attacked were not weak and defenseless but were seen as riggal (“men”), while those who used violence in a thuggish manner, the police, were unmanly for using excessive violence against women.

For example, a diagram that circulated on Facebook depicted how the woman who was being objected to violence was the riggil, “the man”, while the six policemen attacking her were sita sittat (“six women”). As seen, even though gendered notions were being recycled when being a man is seen as a positive attribute and a woman is seen as a sign of weakness, the re construction of gendered identities were being reinterpreted in different ways to condemn SCAF’s violent grasp for control. On December 17th, 2011, a graphic video circulated of a young unidentifiable woman wearing hijab and a black
‘abaya (a long Islamic black dress) being knocked to the ground during a protest in Tahrir Square and dragged and beaten in the streets by helmeted soldiers.

While she was being beaten, her ‘abaya was ripped, and her shirt was pulled over head covering her face and exposing her midriff and her blue bra. A soldier stomped on her torso with his heavy boots. Six soldiers set upon a female protester named Azza Helal who attempted to come to her rescue. After they were done beating her exposed body, they hastily covered her limp body with part of her ‘abaya. This horrifying video shocked Egyptians and stood out from the numerous incidents of women protesters being subjected to sexual harassment and violence. Not only was this girl wearing a hijab, but for Egyptian society, she was the token of what a pious woman should dress like, when she chooses to wear a loose ‘abaya to hide the shape of her body rather than wear Western fitting clothing that a conservative religious society finds increasingly inappropriate. For such a woman to have her sanctity defiled as if she were a Western woman being objectified in a lingerie advertisement was the worst form of violence and humiliation for Egyptians. Unlike the weak reaction around the other women who were abused and beaten in public clashes, the appearance of this woman resulted in a greater reaction.

The “blue bra girl” quickly became a symbol of the abuse of power by SCAF. All groups came together demanding the end of military rule: men and women, liberals and Islamists, feminist activists and those who scorned them. Unlike the March 8 International Women’s Day
Protest, this march was made up of women from all religious and political groups. Around 6,000 women and 2,000 men marched on December 20th in Tahrir Square chanting anti-military slogans and denouncing the excessive and systematic use of violence and sexual abuse by the Egyptian army against female protesters. Although SCAF quickly published an apology on Facebook to “Egypt’s great women” after the march started, these apologies were quickly dismissed. Protesters chanted, “The women of Egypt are the red line”. Posters of images of women being violently attacked with the words of “fadihat al-gaysh” (“the shame of the army”), reoriented the shaming techniques used on women for protesting to the rightful owners. Women now became the line which could not be crossed in terms of the military’s thuggish violence and control over the country. Many observers noted that this was the largest demonstration since 1919 when women mobilized under Huda Shaarawi in anti-colonial demonstrations against the British. A cordon of men protected the march and made sure they were not attacked. Some feminists were disappointed that these women’s marches depended on men and had to depend on stereotypical notions of honor. Nevertheless it also provided a platform for feminists and women to unite for the first time and claim the public space claiming their anger of being excluded from the process.

However, this indignation was not shared by all Egyptians seen by the debates arising about the authenticity of the video or dismissing the violence through gendered attacks. These debates took place on social media sites and within households. Some argued that women should not be protesting in these dangerous situations. Others attacked her morality and called her

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157 Accusations emerged that the video of the woman in the blue bra being attacked was fake and the picture of her was photoshopped. However, the video was not captured by an amateur using a cell phone camera but by a Reuters photographer.
promiscuous for wearing a ‘abaya without anything underneath. Others noted that she should have worn more clothing under her ‘abaya, especially given girls are subject to harassment and violence. Some took this attack further by attacking the kind of ‘abaya she was wearing. They suspiciously noted the kind she was wearing was buttoned rather than the style that is worn over the head. They believed that the soldiers were the victims and wrongly placed in a bad situation when she intentionally wore a ‘abaya that was buttoned rather than the style that is worn over the head so once the ‘abaya is slightly pulled, she would be immediately naked. Those protesters focused the blame on the girl and not on the conditions that gave rise to such sexual harassment and abuse, relieving SCAF of blame and shifting the blame on the girl.

Images of the scene circling the shirt pulled over her head were sent around Facebook to discredit these claims and that she in fact was wearing clothes underneath. Women attending the protest responded to this absurd attack on the women’s morality with the chant “Aywa ana labsa ‘abaya kabasin, eish ‘arafny iniku nagsin?” 158 (‘Yes I am wearing a ‘abaya with clasps, how am I supposed to know that you are contemptible?’) These chants and Facebook debates attempted to refocus the attention rightfully on the act of violence and not what women are wearing, which should not justify violence acted upon them.

Another large protest would be held that Friday named “Regaining Honor” which included a variety of political trends on behalf of fallen martyrs, women who were attacked, and also religious scholars who had fallen. 159 At the same time, thousands of protesters gathered in

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158 آيوا انانا لابسا عبايا كباسين ايش عرفني انكو نجسي؟
159 A leading Azhar scholar Sheikh Emad Effat – was killed by security forces in clashes while protesting causing national anger.
Abbaseya Square in support of SCAF in protests called “No To Vandalism” called by independent movements such as “I am sorry, Mr. President”, “The Silent Majority Coalition”.160 The pro-army protesters attacked the women who join the protests in Tahrir in protests in Abbaseya chanting “From the ladies of Egypt to Ghada” addressing a young woman who was beaten by the army, “Your end will be annihilation”.161

Hillary Clinton who responded to the beating and sexual abuse of female protesters after the global outrage around the “blue-bra girl” made a statement that, “This systematic degradation of Egyptian women dishonors the revolution, disgraces the state and its uniform, and is not worthy of a great people”.162 One banner depicted below at the Abbaseya demonstration responded to these words with a poster attacking Hilary Clinton’s personal life saying “From Egypt’s Women to Hilary [sic] Clinton. Focus your attention on Monica Lewinsky’s scandal.” Such a poster could only be written when the secretary of state was also a woman and could be shamed in the similar ways Egyptian women were to retreat from the public space and mind her own internal affairs, within her nation and her household, and not interfere in Egypt’s democratic process. The fact that women were the ones who supposedly wrote this poster indicated that Egyptian women did not need her saving. Salafist

161 Ibid.
channels like El-Naas also made statements warning that the blue-bra woman incident was used to usher in increased Western imperial interference in domestic affairs. These clashes in the end, did not disturb the parliamentary elections which would result in the electing of an Islamist dominated People’s Assembly. However, the gendered discourse revealed the debates around women’s claim to space, the parallels of proving her authenticity with that of the nation and those who were defining it, and cultural intimacy around Egypt as a woman and the discourse of guarding “her” honor that would be used increasingly in a regulatory and constricting manner.

Conclusion

Since the eighteen day uprising, a variety of sectors of the population who now were no longer united under the common goal of toppling Mubarak, as well as a hidden majority did not participate in the protests have emerged. In parallel, a similar proliferation of competing gendered representations of the revolution, political activism, and the nation have also emerged. The boundaries and myths of the nation, as well as who belongs in it also have shifted depending on the political actors competing and asserting their power. Consequently, the space that allowed for the transcendence of gender norms during the eighteen days also has been configured. More constricting gendered norms would increasingly appear and would play more of a regulatory role in defining the role women and men should play. Women, imagined and physically, are the primary space in which these notions are conceptualized and contested, as seen by actual gender practices that have been performed during this chaotic and ambiguous transitional process.
CONCLUSION

On April 23, 2012, *Foreign Policy* published an article by an Egyptian feminist journalist Mona El Tahawy. Her article entitled “Why Do They Hate Us?” provided a men hate formula that relies on a mix of Islam and culture to explain why women lack major rights in the Arab world. The article was filled with Orientalized pictures of women’s naked bodies that were painted in black to signify the oppression of women who are shrouded in the black cloth of the ‘*abaya* and the *niqab*. To prove the deep hatred for women in Arab societies she proceeds to cite a series of abuses against women including: the continuing practice of female genital mutilation in Egypt, child marriages in Morocco, and Saudi Arabia’s ban on women from driving. El Tahawy calls for her Western audience to discard notions of cultural relativism when the real problem is that Arab men simply hate their women. And with the rise of Islamist powers since the Arab spring, the hatred towards them only will be further unleashed. Ultimately, she predicted that the upheaval the Arab world was experiencing would lead to an even more disastrous outcome for the Arab woman’s agency and her rights.

Her controversial article sparked a deluge of tweets, blogs, and articles that either applauded her for her courage for speaking about the misogynistic Arab culture or bashed her for attempting to speak on behalf of all Arab women. Although some scholarly articles were produced that engaged with her arguments, in the end, many continued to speak in terms of binaries of whether or not Arab men hate women, or whether the Arab societies were deserving of democracy. Rather than continue to perpetuate simplistic explanations to why women face

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163 Mona El Tahawy, “Why Do They Hate US?” *Foreign Policy*, 23 April 2012
social, economic, and political abuse in the Arab world, producing scholarship that grounds the
position of women in this chaotic transitional period in a nuanced manner is deeply needed.

The reaction to her article revealed the fascination, the sensitivity around, and the
political significance of the future for women’s rights and roles in the Arab spring. Although
women’s roles and rights in Arab societies can be used as measures for how democratic or free a
society is, with the neo-colonial interest in liberating oppressed Muslim women, this litmus test
in the Arab context has been used in a harmful manner, often used by authoritarian leaders to
depict themselves as the liberal protectors of women from the rising threat of the Islamist
bogeyman. The long history of how women’s rights has been taken up by the state as a tool of
control has produced in the minds of many Egyptians, a close association between feminism and
cultural imperialism, causing the backlash on feminist groups who have worked for decades to
improve women’s rights in Egypt. These built in tensions have culminated in a greater
acceptance of versions of cultural authenticity around women’s roles and rights espoused by
Salafist and conservative groups that now have become linked to the patriarchal control of
women.

The struggle for control over the transitional process that would change the nation-state
structurally and ideologically has been linked to changes in the paternal system of power and
inequality. Thus, the backlash on women’s rights and women’s participation should not be
described as simple hatred of men against women. By using gender as a tool to analyze the
political changes and struggle for power in the transitional period, I have demonstrated how both
women and men have suffered as victims living under colonial, neo-colonial, neo-liberal, and
authoritarian control. All political actors that have emerged since the transitional period have
been active in politics of gender to legitimize their authority and attack other’s political power. As the transitional process attempts to tackle largely untransformed structures that continue to regulate its subjects at every level, gendered discourses that emerged from these processes have been sexualized and regressive, whether manifesting in secular or religious forms.

As I have demonstrated, Egyptian women have historically been the terrain for viewing the nation and defining boundaries for the nation indicating who is included and who is excluded, as well as helping understand notions of authenticity and modernity in which the new Egyptian nation would be built. These boundaries are socially defined and fluid. As symbols of the nation, women have been constituted by power in the struggle of gendered politics, but at the same time they have become vehicles of power, providing women various options in redefining their own agencies. Thus, to provide the narrative that women have been excluded from the transitional process is incomplete and unsatisfying. As power relations constantly shift in this transitional period, there have been profound changes occurring in the realm of gender relations. Particularly, women’s larger and explicit presence in the public political sector usually associated with men have disturbed and unsettled gender relations and ideologies.

Women’s political participation not only has resulted in profound changes in the realm of relations between women and men, but relations between women themselves have completely transformed. As we have seen, since the revolution, plural gendered modernities have explicitly emerged all with emancipatory aspects as well as disciplining and subordinating consequences. With the rise of Islamist groups, we must recognize the plurality of feminist projects that often are articulated in non-secular traditions, resulting in women explicitly articulating different visions for their roles, rights, and interests. However, with the common nationalistic struggle,
women’s plural modernities in this period often converge and have created instances in which women have united in moments where they have been severely excluded in this transitional process, creating new possibilities for a women’s movement in Egypt.

**Future Research**

The transitional period is still chaotic and there is great uncertainty to where the future of Egypt will be headed. At the time this thesis was written, Egyptians have yet to elect the president who will be democratically elected for the first time in their history. A new constitution reflecting the ideals of equality, liberty, also encapsulating Egyptian authenticity, and who defines these notions still is to be determined. There is confusion to what role SCAF will have in shaping the state and to what extent the state will remain controlled by the military. Future research projects will definitely need to connect the relationship of this chaotic transitional period to when the state has been fully consolidated and its implications to women’s rights, women’s activism, and the meaning of gender to what unfolds in the near future. However power is consolidated and the constitution is defined is that women will continue to become the imaginary and physical site for viewing and defining the new Egyptian nation.
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