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Sundkvist, Emma

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EMMA SUNDKVIST
HUMAN RIGHTS STUDIES | DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY | LUND UNIVERSITY

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Joint Faculties of Humanities and Theology
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Abstract

This dissertation analyses feminist activists' use of human rights in post-revolutionary Egypt from 2011 to 2019. Drawing on interviews with feminist activists under three fieldwork trips, the dissertation investigates how: activists tried to implement gender equality in the country's new constitutions, navigated the shrinking public space after 2013, sustained their activism against sexual violence despite a fragmented movement and repressive politics, and how we can understand contentious streets activism against sexual violence from a human rights perspective. The overarching question is how activists pursue human rights activism in a post-revolutionary setting, focusing on what function human rights are given in a context of some opportunities but also growing constraints. To answer that question, the dissertation develops a three-dimensional framework that conceptualises human rights as law, language, and space-making. The dissertation thereby contributes to theories of human rights activism as well as research on women's rights activism in post-2011 Egypt. The three-dimensional framework helps to capture and analyse how human rights – whether used as law, language, or space-making – challenge different societal and political aspects of women's rights.

The findings and arguments draw primarily on semi-structured and in-depth interviews conducted under fieldwork trips in 2013, 2015, and 2019. The study also involves ethnographic observations and text analysis. The analysis of these source materials is based on the ontological position that to know what human rights are, we need to explore how activists use human rights and the ways in which they navigate their political surrounding. This position invites scholars to avoid applying pre-defined understandings of human rights and instead investigate how certain political conditions facilitate different modes of activism and what meanings and functions human rights acquire in them.

The thesis comprises four original articles. Article 1 concerns the drafting of two Egyptian constitutions after 2011 and how feminist activists attempted to integrate gender equality into different versions. The article argues that while activists used international human rights principles and a feminist definition of equality as their starting points, they also had to navigate the politics of the Egyptian constitution-making process to find resonance within their communities. Article 2 analyses the period after 2013, a period when the Egyptian political landscape became more oppressive under the rule of President Abd el Fattah el-Sisi. This article focuses on how activists pursued human rights advocacy during such conditions. It argues that, in a context where mobilization and activism for human rights are restricted, legal activism may have means and implications other than reinforcing state power. Article 3 concerns how young feminists try to sustain their activism, especially in their work against sexual violence, which became rather fragmented in the decade since the revolution. The empirical material comes from 2019, a point at which women's rights were integrated with revolutionary memories and emotions and gained a function of keeping the feminist struggle alive. The final Article 4 analyses the movement against widespread sexual violence in the turbulent political landscape from 2011 to 2013. By developing the concept of human rights as space-making, this article reveals how activism for women's right to bodily integrity transformed into a movement that claimed women's rights to reconstitute the preconditions for Egyptian politics.

| **Key words:** human rights, women's movement, Egypt, post-revolution, femnist activism ||

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*Revolution is not a
one-time event.*
Audre Lorde

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List of Original Articles

This thesis is based on the following publications, referred to by their Arabic numerals.

1. Sundkvist, E. "Navigating Human Rights, Feminism and History: Egyptian Feminist Activists' Demands for Constitutional Equality, 2012-2014." Under review process in *Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State & Society*.

2. Sundkvist, E. *"Feminism during Political Repression in Egypt: Making or Breaking Resistance through Legal Activism."* In *Gender in Human Rights and Transitional Justice,* edited by John Idriss Lahai and Khanyisela Moyo. (pp. 17-43). Palgrave Macmillan. 2018.

3. Sundkvist, E. "Sustaining Motivation: Post-Revolutionary Oppositional Consciousness among Young Egyptian Feminists." In *The Journal of North African Studies*. 1-25. 2021.

4. Sundkvist, E. "Human Rights as Space-Making: Performative Activism against Sexual Violence." Submitted to *Nordic Journal of Human Rights.*

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List of Acronyms and Abbreviations

AUC	American University in Cairo
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Violence against Women
CEWLA	Center for Egyptian Women Legal Assistance
ECWR	Egyptian Center for Women's Rights
EFU	Egyptian Feminist Union
EIPR	Egyptian Initiative of Personal Rights
FGM	Female Genital Mutilation
ICPD	International Conference on Population and Development
MOSS	Ministry of Social Solidarity
NCW	National Council for Women
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NWF	New Woman Foundation
PSL	Personal Status Law
SAP	Structural Adjustment Programs
SMT	Social Movement Theory
SSI	State Investigation Apparatus
WCWG	Women & Constitutional Working Group
WMF	Women and Memory Forum
WWCC	Wafdist Women's Central Committee

Introduction

"This time is the perfect time for raising human rights because the violations are so clear."

<div align="right">

(Mozn Hassan, Cairo 2019)

</div>

Cairo, January 1, 2019: The last time I met Mozn was at her organization's spacious premises located in the Cairo's central diplomatic area, Garden City. This evening, Mozn told me to meet her at a tea salon in the upper-class area of Zamalek. Many years ago, the authorities shut down the organization's office. When I arrive, I have to search for a while before I find her sitting at a corner table downstairs from the main serving area. She apologizes for rescheduling our meeting due to a cold, which persists with a noticeable cough and hoarseness. She orders a strong ginger tea and a shisha, while I go for the traditional nana (hot water with mint leaves).

I have met Mozn every time I have been to Cairo for fieldwork and she has introduced me to many of the informants who are part of this study. We also met in Tunis 2013, when we both attended a conference about women's political representation in the Arab region. Two years after receiving her MA in International Human Rights Law from the American University in Cairo in 2005, Mozn started and still runs the organization, Nazra for Feminists Studies (Nazra). Nazra aims to develop a feminist movement in Egypt. Over the years, Mozn has won prizes for her human rights activism, including, the alternative Nobel Prize, the Rights Livelihood Award. She is an outspoken, determined, and fearless activist. Within feminist circles in Egypt, she is an icon, almost a superstar. However, the regime considers her work, feminist ideals, and radical belief in women's rights to equality a dangerous threat to such an extent that she now faces lifelong imprisonment for receiving illegal international funding for her organization. Since 2016, she cannot leave the country, due to a travel

ban, and all her and Nazra's assets are frozen. Although the authorities shut Nazra down, the organization still operates among its members.

As at most of my interviews, Mozn and I converse at the outset. I usually begin with summarizing where my project is heading, what my focus is at the moment, and ask a general question about how she is and how she would describe the current situation regarding women's rights. Then she talks. Her replies are often 10-15 minutes long, however, with numerous interruptions as she takes deep and long drags on the shisha to the tune of bubbling water, during which I have the opportunity to ask her to develop her thoughts. This time is no different, but her mood is. She speaks quietly. So quiet that I later struggle to transcribe the conversation correctly, making me thankful for the technical tools that diminish surrounding noise. Hopes and visions for the future are not present as they were during our earlier interviews. This is not just because the vision of the revolution has been totally crushed, political activism in Egypt is gone, the public sphere is unavailable, or she is terrified for going to prison. At the moment, what concerns and grieves her is the fragmentation among feminists and women's rights activists, especially between older and young groups of feminists. She tells me that she does not believe that a movement necessarily always needs common ground or for people to work on the same issues. Constructive intra-movement criticism and discussion are signs of a healthy movement. As soon as these disappears, the movement has severe problems. "We can no longer sit down and discuss," referring in particular to the lack of intergenerational support. She explains that she and Nazra are isolated from the women's rights and human rights circles. "We are called the crazy feminists," she states.

What partly caused the fragmentation, according to Mozn, is Nazra's, along with other groups of mainly young feminists, support of a young woman, who in 2018, accused a leftist politician of sexual harassment. He was about to run for the presidential post and thus challenge authoritarian President el-Sisi. For the young feminists, supporting the young women was obligatory to not compromise with regard to gender oppression in their allied groups and political parties. Their conviction created significant tensions, and the young feminists were strongly criticized by the older generation for speaking up. For Mozn, supporting and mentoring young feminists is crucial, on the young feminists' terms. She explains that older feminists cannot dictate the issues on which young activists should focus and become upset if they choose alternative paths. To Mozn, generations of feminists build on each other's earlier achievements. Still, when young people enter the movement, they must be able to shape and frame their movement on their terms. They are the future of

feminism in Egypt. In my attempt to sense some kind of hope in Mozn, I find it is definitely her trust in the young feminists who have developed their political and feminist consciousness during the post-revolutionary years.

The epigraph was her answer to my question about the state of human rights in Egypt today. She states that human rights in the traditional sense are logical now because of the state is violating all the basic rights Egyptians should enjoy. I agree with her: the repression, arbitrary legal proceedings, police brutality, and injustices, which the Egyptian people revolted against in 2011, have become many times worse since el-Sisi became president in 2014. However, what the coming pages will show is that women's rights work in post-revolutionary Egypt has constituted much more than basic conventional human rights.

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At the time of writing in spring 2021, it has been 10 years since the Egyptian people, under the slogan "Bread, Freedom, and Social Justice" led a revolution against former President Hosni Mubarak's 30 years of authoritarian rule. Over these 10 years, the visions of a free democratic country that fueled the uprising have gradually disappeared. After Mubarak resigned, the country went through years of critical political turmoil, resulting in three presidents, of which one, Mohamed Mursi was ousted by the military, several interim governments, two constitutions, and hundreds of imprisoned, dead and disappeared dissidents. An even more iron-handed regime under former Defense Minister Abd al-Fattah el-Sisi eventually replaced the repressive leadership against which people had risen. That regime has managed to disperse the revolutionary groups and political parties that once made claims to the need for a democratic transition to civilian rule.

While the goals and objectives of the revolution consequently seem far from realized, there are traces of change that we may yet perceive, in particular, the changed status of, awareness about, and debates on women's rights. From the day Mubarak resigned, a wide range of activists, including individual feminists and groups engaged in promoting and claiming the integration of women's rights into the structure of the new Egypt. On paper, this struggle has generated several substantial legal improvements in the situation of women. Egypt today has a constitution that addresses violence against women and gender discrimination, a reformed penal code that criminalizes sexual harassment, and

a national strategy to end violence against women. These legal and institutional improvements are valuable victories for women's rights. However, it is uncertain how these changes have in practice improved women's status in society. The patriarchal and discriminatory structures remain, as does the problem of sexual harassment. At the same time, the regime tries to limit the women's movement with severe crackdowns on, detainments, and trials of its activists. Women who speak out, testify against, or criticize the regime for not eradicating, for instance, violence against women, risk legal consequences. Although the revolution profoundly transformed how women's rights are formulated in law and regarded as a social and political concern (Zakarriya, 2019), real change is not to be found in law, but in social reality (Said et al., 2015). Calls for an end to violence against women and an increase in women's political representation, previously marginalized from public and political agendas, are thus, unlike other revolutionary demands, not completely silenced. Despite the risk of reprisals, women continue to address violence against women and waves of uprisings on social media about women's rights continue. In contrast to other rights, continuing debates on gender oppression indicate that discourse in the country has changed and that women refuse to be silenced or censored. Behind this change is a determined, vibrant, dynamic women's movement of new and old activists, which over the last 10 years has succeeded to various extents in capturing the different phases of the revolution and in radically new ways fought to place women's rights on the political agenda at each of these moments.

This study is about that women's rights movement and the practice and mode of activism it pursued over the years following Egypt's revolution. The findings and arguments draw primarily on interview methods with elements of ethnographic observations and text analysis. Through empirical studies and a combination of these methods, I aim to explore what functions different practices of women's rights activism gave human rights during the post-revolutionary period, as well as how modes of activism were conditioned by and dependent on the particular political circumstances at play during certain periods. I study how women's rights activists navigated their political surroundings when engaging in women's human rights during the transition to the new state and social structures and how political opportunities enabled various modes of activism. I reveal that, while activists do not deviate from principles of equality, justice, women's rights to political participation, and bodily integrity, their various modes of activism give human rights separate functions at different moments in the transitional trajectory. Studying the different phases since the revolution allows a deep understanding of how

human rights can be a force for legal, social, and political change, enacted through different modes of activism.

The Egyptian post-revolutionary period, with its fluctuating political development, can thus inform us about human rights' multiple roles in a transitional context. After 18 days of revolt, leading to Mubarak's resignation, the country entered a period when the visions of the revolution were supposed to be translated into long-term and sustainable changes. The formal process was laid out by the military's roadmap. Women soon realized they were excluded from this process since they, for instance, lacked representation in the transitional constituting bodies, and were severely attacked in public spaces. The transition and the military's grip over the process exposed the country's patriarchal structure and women's long history of unequal political opportunities and status. Simultaneously, many groups became frustrated with how the military remained in control and delayed the transition to civilian rule. To these groups, the revolution was still ongoing and daily demonstrations and violent clashes between dissidents and military forces continued. The escalating violence and turmoil aggravated the situation for women in several ways, not least in terms of public sexual violence.

Research on women's rights and democratic transitions emphasizes the importance of women's movements for taking advantage of political opportunities to gendering the design of new regimes, including the ability to shift focus quickly from activism on the streets to formalized process (Beckwith, 2007; Seidman, 1999; Tadros, 2016). In revolutionary contexts, erasing the legacies of former regimes, transforming constitutional arrangements, and reconfiguring policies is necessary on all levels. Women's movements must be active in these processes to prevent actors with counter agendas from dictating the outcomes (Beckwith, 2007). Seidman's (1999) research on South Africa highlights that it is fundamental not to treat the (new) relationship between the state and citizenship as neutral since this, on the one hand, overlooks how women explicitly experience new institutional arrangements and, on the other, presumes women as solely recipients of state policy instead of active members in shaping it. In these scholarly works, the dominant view on women's human rights in transition is a legal perspective on human rights that focuses on how women's movements promote and advocate for improved legal rights. My study confirms the importance of integrating legal women's rights into the transition. Egypt's women's rights movement worked intensively to integrate gender equality into the constitution, improving formal legislation regulating women's political participation, and demanding the criminalization of sexual harassment. In these processes,

human rights were used as principles to meet the standard of equality found in international conventions with the state responsible for guaranteeing, protecting, and promoting those rights.

However, in Egypt, the formal process and street actions occurred simultaneously, which makes Egypt a significant case for studying human rights activism. Guiding this study is the premise that the post-revolutionary context underwent a twofold process – the long-term projects of integrating women's rights into the new state according to the military's roadmap and of responding to the serious problems that emerged during the ongoing revolution. Women's rights activists' engagement was required in both processes (Tadros, 2016). Due to Egypt's non-linear transition and parallel political processes, regarding human rights only from a legal perspective excludes human rights' inherent potential to have a rhetorical strength to transform public discursive language, as well as its inherent radical political force in reconstituting the preconditions for politics that frame who is eligible to be a political subject. Therefore, this study adopts an interdisciplinary approach to human rights and provides a profound understanding of the many different purposes and functions of human rights in transition. On the one hand, I analyze the integration of human rights in the formal transition process, such as gender equality in the constitution and women's statutory right to political representation. On the other, I explore how human rights became a political force against fundamental structural problems, such as increasing sexual violence.

I am particularly interested in how activists maintained and changed over time their practices of and engagement in human rights, based on the country's unstable and constantly evolving political conditions. This study captures moments in this course of events through fieldwork trips to Cairo in 2013, 2015, and 2019. Depending on the moment in history, the activists I met expressed different degrees of mixed emotions of hope, visions, and frustrations that arose from both political opportunities and obstacles. In the post-revolutionary context, women's rights activists had to navigate multiple actors, discourses, developments, and domestic and international historical and present currents. A recurring theme during the interviews I conducted over time was, in addition to the regime's attempts at dispersing political movements, the growing internal fragmentations within the women's rights movement. Fragmentation within women's rights activism in Egypt were previously investigated (El-Mahdi, 2010), but what became explicit in my later interviews was extreme disappointment at not being able to stay together when strong unity colored the activists' memories of the revolution. During my last

fieldwork period in 2019, during which the conversation with Mozn cited above took place, internal fragmentation was the most pressing issue among young feminist activists. Situating women's human rights within the framework of such an erratic movement and changing political opportunities provides a productive vantage point for analyzing the multiple meanings, roles, and implications of human rights.

My study reveals how human rights can be purely legislative and used either as international principles to demand states to protect them or as a strategic tool when other forms than legal activism are not possible. During specific periods, human rights legal activism was necessary for the women's rights movement, for instance, in the formal process of writing a new constitution. At other moments, activists invoked human rights as law strategically, since other modes of activism were restricted. In a shifting political climate, where access to public space varies, activists need to evaluate risks and costs and engage in different modes of action (Boudreau, 2004; Chua, 2012; Johnston, 2006; McAdam et al., 2003). In post-revolutionary Egypt, the relationship between closed and open political opportunities are such that, during oppressive periods, human rights have the formal role of becoming a principle basis for how the state should protect human rights through law and policy. However, legal activism is partly a pragmatic strategy for "becoming small" and avoiding state surveillance and interventions (Johnston, 2006; Chua, 2012). I define this dimension of human rights as human rights as law.

Human rights is also a rhetorical resource that may be used in attempts to transform oppressive discourses at the social, legal, and political level. This dimension, which I define as human rights as language, is used to explore women's rights activism against public sexual violence. This study confirms that framing and conceptualizing sexual violence in new ways was a practice that generated new social, cultural, and legal discourses.

Finally, my research reveals that human rights is likewise emancipatory in the sense that it can be a radical political force for reconstituting the precondition of politics. During periods when confrontational modes of activism were possible, human rights occupy a contentious role that challenges the fundamental conditions of Egypt's political community. By using the empirical example of vigilant street activism against public sexual violence, I introduce and develop the concept of human rights as *space-making*. Thus, I argue that human rights, whether used as law, language, or space-making challenge different societal and political aspects of women's rights. In all these shapes, human rights does different things depending on local conditions.

My work contributes to theoretical discussions on human rights' multiple functions and its roles in contexts under transition. My empirical research shows that we need to understand human rights as law, language, and what I define as space-making to explore how the women's rights movement engaged in all phases of the post-revolutionary context. However, these three dimensions of human rights cannot be conceptualized without exploring how activists used human rights and the functions and meanings they possessed in the social and political reality. Human rights' as law, language, and space-making are multifaceted and intersect and complement each other. Their meanings and implications may change over the course of a day, depending on local political developments. Therefore, I have not applied pre-defined understandings of human rights. The ways in which I conceptualize these three dimensions are based on how certain political conditions in Egypt's post-revolutionary period facilitated various methods of women's rights activism. I relate these modes to the roles activists gave human rights and how they enacted and used it. Activists' practices may be inconsistent, but the grounds for assessing human rights' validity and credibility should be the conditions that activists have to navigate. In this research project, I argue that the activists I met never compromised their principles of women's rights, but their different forms of activism gave human rights various potentials and roles in the transitional contexts in which they lived.

I use the term women's rights movement, to refer to the wide range of activists, groups, and initiatives that, in various constellations and through different methods, addressed women's rights during what Egyptians thought was a transition towards democracy. The terms human rights[1] and women's movement are both loaded with connotations that, on the one hand, necessarily define them and, on the other, risk creating strict categories for imagining complex phenomena and dynamic realities. This study recognizes human rights' multiple roles and functions in women's rights activism, which presumes recognition of human rights' potential to transform society on levels other than formal politics and law. The term women's rights movement, analytically refers to activism that strives to improving women's conditions legally, politically, and socially, within and beyond institutional frameworks.

The body of literature on social movements distinguishes a movement from other forms of collective actions in that it has the capacity to sustain itself over

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[1] In this research, I use "human rights" is/are used in both the singular and the plural. When I use it linguistically as singular, I refer to human rights as an analytical concept. In the plural, I refer to human rights as a list of rights.

time, mobilize people committed to a common cause, and the number of its participants are substantial (Molyneux, 1998; Tilly & Wood, 2015). However, Molyneux emphasizes that a women's movement may include different organizational expressions and is characterized by a diversity of interests, forms of expressions, and locations. Tilly and Wood (2015) argue that movements can have internal differences in visions for the future, how quickly change should develop, and other prioritizes. Even so, a movement is characterized by large numbers of people who collectively demand social change.

At the same time, a large body of research about gender activism in post-2011 Egypt differs in terms of how it conceptualizing the growing mobilization and actions against various kinds of gender oppression. The majority of the actors in the primary focus of this study refer to themselves as feminists and their activism as a movement, but are in various ways entangled with other initiatives, groups, and actors in the women's rights movement that reject this epithet. The term "feminist" is contested during Egypt's transitional period, as are "women's rights activist" and "human rights activist." For example, within the initiatives against sexual violence, one cannot find a singular identity among its members. The uniting factor was the common cause, which Mariz Tadros (2016) claims is gender justice. In Nermin Allam's (2018) research on the revolution's first phase, female activists did not frame their cause in terms of gender or rights at all, but as social and for the betterment of the entire society.

I use feminist/feminism as an analytical concept, meaning that activism can be analyzed as feminist, even if individuals do not use it to define their activism. The term feminist/feminism includes "within its range a nascent awareness that women have been oppressed because of their sex, and extending to a more complex analysis of oppression and liberation of women and an agenda of activism" (Badran, 1988, p. 16). To give an example, despite hesitation of activist groups that confronted sexual violence during the revolutions' aftermath to use the term "feminist", the groups did engage various analyses of why harassment must end. To some, it was a practical gender interest to refer to Maxine Molyneux's formulation, meaning that sexual harassment was not fully connected to gender equality but could be about making the streets safe for women (Langohr, 2015). Others perceived sexual harassment as an integrated feature of a wider structure of gender inequality and combatting sexual harassment was part of confronting these gender and patriarchal hierarchies in a substantial way. A conceptual use of feminism can treat these different ways of approaching sexual harassment analytically.

In a similar vein, I also use "human rights" as an analytical concept, meaning that I can identify and analyze activism within a human rights framework without activists explicitly referring to or using the language of human rights in their activism. By using human rights as an analytical concept, researchers can, with their specific understanding of human rights, analyze certain practices or language as those of human rights and identify lacks of, or inconsistences with human rights within movements or historical processes. Martin Ceadel and Annabel Bratt's research provide great examples of the latter (Slotte & Halme, 2015). However, this is not the same as denying activists the right to choose their own terms to describe their work. Rather, it allows me to use my empirical data to explore and expand theories of human rights, thus generating my three-dimensional framework of human rights.

Researchers on women's rights activism in post-2011 Egypt agrees on the fundamental shift in women's rights activism before and after the revolution, particularly concerning opportunities for mobilizing and carrying out activism in public space (Abdelmonem, 2015: Allam, 2018; Langohr, 2015; Tadros, 2016; Said et al., 2015). Youth-led activism against sexual violence is the clearest example of this shift. The difference is explicit in activists' ability to mobilize ordinary people, sustain their groups over a relatively long period of time, and create local resonance for their cause. Tadros (2016) suggests calling the activism a *gender justice movement*, grounded in its constellation of both women and men, and that their underlying cause was not feminist but promoting social justice and dignity for all. Tadros contrasts a gender justice movement with a *women's movement*, *women in movement,* and *feminist movement* none of which analytically captures the post-revolutionary forms of defending women's rights to bodily integrity. Skalli (2014) explicitly illustrates how many youth-led activists referred to themselves as human rights activists, which is an umbrella term in contrast to the controversial epithet of feminist activists. Allam (2018) found in her research that her informants often began their contact with a feminist disclaimer, arguing that they did not work for women's causes only, but for the causing affecting all of society or that their activism was nationalist or socialist.

Nevertheless, these research projects' findings are clear. What unites all these initiatives, independent of their self-labels, modes of activism, prioritized causes, or organizational structures, is their resistance to the dominant system and attempts to diminish gender subordination, which, according to Wieringa (1995), defines a women's movement. Alvarez (1990) suggests that a women's movement pursues gender interests and makes claims on cultural and political systems based on women's historically ascribed gender roles, which coincides

with my understanding of the multiple initiatives' shared vision. Hala Kamal (2016) outlines four waves of feminist movements in Egypt, of which the fourth emerged after 2011. The focus of this fourth wave, she states, are women's rights and women's bodies. In this movement, she includes activism against sexual violence, demands to integrate gender in the constitution, and improving political representation. These studies confirm that integrated into most activism were gender equality, social justice, dignity for all, and women's rights to bodily integrity. These are all values and norms found in conventional human rights documents, not least in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Violence against Women (CEDAW).

Therefore, the women's rights movement is a category that, in this study, includes, but is not limited to: the groups and coalitions aiming to integrate women's rights into the new constitution and reformed legislation, the activists who challenged the discursive terrain around sexual violence, the contentious activists in the streets combatting sexual violence, and initiatives for sustaining a focus on women's rights despite the return to repressive politics. Categorizing the women's rights movement as such, I do not include other women's movement such as the Muslim Brotherhoods women's movement nor other religious conservative women's movement that draw their frames of references primarily from religious sources even though the demarcation between secular and religious-based movements are not clear-cut, which I will discuss in Chapter 1.

Aims and Scope

The aim of this study is to explore what functions human rights play in different practices of women's rights activism during the post-revolutionary period and how modes of activism were conditioned and dependent on currents of international influence, domestic structure, and social/political developments. This study is based on three fieldwork trips during the period from 2013–2019. The empirical findings from fieldwork capture how the struggle for women's rights changed focus, depending on the current issues that, according to activists, were facing them and the political and social realties at play. Each article covers a different time period, focusing on specific rights issues and women's human rights practices. The first article concerns the process of writing the new constitutions and feminist activists' attempts to integrate gender equality into the texts (Article 1). As political developments resulted in the ousting of elected President Mursi shortly after the first constitution was

adopted, leading to a reform of the first constitution, this covers the time period from 2011 to 2013. While international human rights principles were the starting point for activists, they had to navigate the Egyptian constitutions' historical trajectory in order to find resonance within their communities without compromising with their feminist definition of equality.

Article 2 analyzes the period after 2013, when Egypt's political landscape once more oppressive. It focuses on how activists pursued human rights advocacy during such conditions. I reveal that, in a context where mobilization and activism for human rights are restricted, legal activism may have means and implications other than reproducing state power. The third article concerns how young feminists try to sustain their activism, especially in their work against sexual violence, which became rather fragmented in the decade since the revolution. The empirical material comes from 2019, at which point the post-revolutionary repressive regime had governed Egypt for almost five years. Women's rights were now imbricated with revolutionary memories and emotions and had the function of sustaining motivation to continue the feminist struggle. The final and fourth article analyzes the unique movement against epidemic levels of public sexual violence in the turbulent political landscape from 2011 to 2013. By developing the concept of human rights as *space-making*, this article reveals how activism for women's right to bodily integrity transformed into a movement that claimed women's rights to reconstitute the preconditions for Egyptian politics.

In addition to interviews with activists from different activists groups and organizations, my research relies on statements, comments, and documents published by the groups affiliated with the activists. Written criticism of and comments on the various drafts of the constitution appear mostly in Article 1, where they complement interviews with activists who were active in the feminist group that struggled to integrate gender equality into the constitution.

Guiding the analysis of this empirical study is the overarching question of how activists pursue human rights in different post-revolutionary periods. The empirical material I have collected has guided the following specific research questions:

1: How did Egyptian feminist activists define and construe gender equality and what function did they predict that their conceptualizations would have with regards to improving women's rights in the constitutions of 2012 and 2013?

2: How did Egyptian women's rights activists use legal activism to advance women's rights in Egypt's repressive political environment after 2013, when other forms of activism were restricted?

3: What motivated young Egyptian feminists in their efforts to sustain their activism against sexual violence, despite a fragmented women's movement and repressive political climate?

4: How can we understand activism against sexual violence in post-revolutionary Egypt within a human rights framework?

Each question corresponds to and is discussed in the four articles in this thesis. They concern how feminist activists tried to integrate and claim women's rights in practice at different political moments in Egypt's recent history, as well as the modes of activism they pursued. The three empirical questions and the fourth theoretical question develop the three-dimensional framework of human rights in Egypt's post-revolutionary political context.

Conditions for Human Rights Practice in Post-Revolutionary Egypt

The starting point for this study is that human rights practice is a navigation of competing political realities. This section aims to clarify how I understand these realities. By paying attention to discussions of competing political realities, I intend to highlight that they are prevalent in whatever role and function human rights take in different modes of activism. In post-revolutionary Egypt, I identify these realities as a nexus of international influences and principles, institutional and structural conditions on the ground, and social/political developments that provide various actors with local imperatives. My research arises from and relates to all these factors and aims to produce meaning about women's human rights practices based on my understanding of these conflicting realties. The articles discuss feminist activists' triangulation of rapid political developments that, on the one hand, cast certain women's rights issues as particularly important and, on the other, set the frames for how feminists could practice human rights. Navigating these political realities is a strategy for having resonance in society, creating incentives for sustaining mobilization, and directing activism at acute human

rights issues. Competing realities as an ontological starting point urges us to attend to "ways of doing" women's human rights (Reilly, 2011).

When using the terms "international influence" and "legal standards", I refer to Egyptian women's rights activism's global and regional links. This influence is not only a set of standards and principles to which activism and human rights practices relate, but also contributes to local allegations that women's rights activism is imported. It is worth noting that the political realities to which I refer above are a matrix because of their considerable overlaps and intersections. States and actors may embrace the ontological standpoint that human rights *is* an imperialist project and that the morality underpinning international standards and norms is not legitimate because it is relative to different ethnic, cultural, social, political, or historical backgrounds in the Global South. In Egypt, this is a forceful argument, and the discussion concerning the compatibility of Islamic values and human rights values often results in the relativist claim that Egypt as a Muslim country holds different moral beliefs and should thus not be forced to adapt to standards not valid within its own culture.

Although, for decades, Egypt invested in being recognized as a protector of international standards to maintain globally the image of a modern country, the tension between human rights and religion is embedded in Egypt's institutional and political structures and has implications for policy and legislation through reservations regarding the CEDAW and national discriminatory legislation. Moreover, this tension fuels widespread public suspicion of women's rights activists as Western agents trying to dismantle the authentic moral values of the country. This suspicion can also be located in anti-imperialist feminist academic debates and criticism of particular forms of women's rights activism that claim that international human rights is too distanced from the need and desire of ordinary Egyptian women to be relevant. Thus, local activists are censured and attacked by their own communities, while, at the same time, criticized by academic scholars, who all embrace the same underlining assumptions (Abu-Odeh, 2015; Elsadda, 2018). After the revolution in 2011, social and political developments made these stances intense, and they were utilized in various forms depending on the discourse at play. During the early phase of the post-revolutionary period, women's rights were perceived as the legacy of the old corrupted regime. Ex-First Lady Suzanne Mubarak was the president of the National Council for Women (NCW) and the regime's foremost champion of women's rights, reforming the Personal Status Law (PSL) (Elsadda, 2011). Under the Muslim Brotherhood's rule, the Western vs. Muslim discourse was at the forefront of the public debate and used to deny

against women's demands of gender equality. After 2013, the regime made proclamation that there was a conspiracy that threatened to the existence of the country, often underpinned by either terrorist accusations or Western ideologies (Elsadda, 2018; Allam, 2018; Tadros, 2016).

In a recent edited volume on women's rights, gender, and political transformation in the Arab world since 2010, Said, Meari, and Pratt (2015) insightfully elucidate my understanding of how gender activists are trapped between changing political, historical, and discursive realities and how deeply rooted ontological and epistemological assumptions maintain human rights as an ontological antithesis to cultural and religious identities. They argue that the ways in which women in the region engaged in uprisings and revolutions force us to deconstruct dichotomies of secular/religious and Western/Orientalist understandings of women's rights and agency. Further, they convey that we need to move beyond an evaluation of gender activism as either successful or not, and pay attention to changes outside formal politics and law, an argument to which I strongly adhere. Their volume challenges the assumption that women in the Arab world desire emancipation according to Western liberal ideas, although they may use international human rights as a frame of reference to resist gender injustice, violence, and discrimination. The chapters that challenge these dichotomies reveal that activists who draw on the CEDAW likewise draw on national heritage and identities to make their claims, and hence do not necessarily view local culture and global norms as an oxymoron. Accordingly, the editors conclude that using the CEDAW does not necessarily play into Western/Orientalist or secular/religious binaries, but is actually a way of escaping local discourses, which have used women to resist Western hegemony and colonialism (Said et al., 2015).

Other empirical research also contests these binaries and reveals that gender activists are perfectly capable of integrating local and global norms in the pursuit of claims for change when navigating the specifics of their political and social realities. While Said, Meari, and Pratt take gender and agency as the starting point for their analysis, my main focus on human rights deepens these arguments by investigating the interplay between human rights and political transformation. This requires more attention to the ontology of human rights. Niamh Reilly (2011) critiques the assumption that human rights, particularly human rights feminism, *is* a form of Western governmentality, an assumption which is relatively widespread in academic discussions.[2] Reilly argues that

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[2] See, for example, Abu-Lughod (2013), Brown (2004), Cornwall & Molyneux (2006), and Grewal (1999).

such assumptions are not convincing because many empirical studies demonstrate otherwise. Resonating with Said, Meari, and Pratt, and Reilly asserts that empirical research is fundamental to our being able to understand how local activists, while drawing on international norms and legal standards, navigate and circumvent domestic historical contingencies and local conditions to establish cultural legitimacy, as well as projects that counter neoliberal globalisation structures that are destructive to women's emancipation. By locating human rights at the center of analysis (not gender or agency), guiding this study is the perception that human rights are not only found in legal activism and actions pertaining to the CEDAW, but can also be identified in activism and political change outside of formal politics. In this study, I thus focus on the relationships between international influence and the structural and political discursive terrain on the ground, with the understanding that human rights are marked by social and cultural fluidity and diversity and shaped by colonial legacies and nationalist and religious dynamics.

Revolutionary Egyptian Women in Retrospect

That Egyptian women took an active role in the January 25th revolution and the following political developments is nothing other than a continuation of women's roles in the revolution against English colonial rule in 1919 and the Free Officers Revolution against King Farouq in 1952. A widespread misconception among Western scholars and journalists in 2011 was that Egyptian women's participation in the revolution was unique. Therefore, this section recognizes Egyptian women's historical involvement in uprisings. However, significant to this study, is exploring the aftermath of these two revolutions in relation to the status of women's engagement in nation-building. Accordingly, this section's main aim is to outline how the events of 1919 and 1952 affected women's movements and the framing of gender issues in Egypt. What travels as an echo through history is that Egypt's revolutions in one way or another shaped and integrated new gender issues into the political agenda and fostered the women's movement's attempts to participate in the new political orders.

During the early month of the independence struggle in 1920, women from the upper- and middle- class formed their first formal political organization, the nationalist Wafdist Women's Central Committee (WWCC) as a response to the all-male Wafd nationalist organization. The Wafd Party was a national liberal political party, led by the revolutionary statesman Saad Zaghloul, with

massive support among Egyptians, and a key actor in the independence struggle. The WWCC was led by the feminist pioneer Huda Sha'rawi and the organization came to have a central role in the Wafd Party's success (Badran, 1988). Statements by members of the Wafd Party at the time reveal a welcoming of women's engagement and their role in the nationalist struggle. However, Badran describes that the WWCC did not intend to solely be "surrogates or rubber stamps to male nationalist politics" for the sake of consensus during crisis, but wanted to raise its own voice and demands (Badran, 1988, p. 27).

Egypt gained formal independence in 1922. The year after, on the fourth anniversary of the first women's demonstrations, the first independence feminist organization, the Egyptian Feminist Union (EFU), led by Huda Sha'rawi was established, making Egyptian feminism became a public form of activism. The government accepted the constitutional draft a few months later and recognized Egypt's religious and ethnic pluralism, while denying equality between women and men. Egyptian feminists now became more convinced than previously that the nation-building project that preceded the constitution's adoption was based on nationalism with a strong patriarchal character (Badran, 1988). The constitution defined the state by recognizing only adult male citizens as members of it, based on inter-religious national unity (Hatem, 2000).

The exclusion of women's suffrage intensified tensions between women activists and the Wafd Party. Scholars argue that the constitution was a turning point for feminist nationalists who were not rewarded for their participation in the nationalist struggle (Ahmed, 1993; Badran, 1988; Baron, 2007; Saadawi, 1997). When they did not gain recognition at home, Egyptian feminists reached out to the West for solidarity and took their struggle to the international arena. The EFU sent a delegation of Huda Sha'arawi, Nabawiyya Musa, and Saiza Nabarawi to the International Suffrage Alliance meeting in Rome 1923. On their return from this meeting to Egypt, Huda Sha'arawi and Saiza Nabarawi removed their face veils when they stepped out from the train to the sound of a large group of cheering women. This move came to signify the end of the harem system, the segregation of the sexes, and the beginning of a public, open, organized feminist movement in Egypt (Badran, 1988, p. 29).

Women's exclusion from politics and the nation-building projects continued, for instance, in not allowing women to participate in the opening ceremony of the new parliament in 1924. The women's committee and the EFU responded by joining forces and sent to the parliament 32 nationalist and feminist

demands, including among others, women's suffrage, more education, work opportunities, and improved health care (Badran, 1988).

Until 1952, when Gamal Abdel Nasser revolted against King Farouq, Egypt's feminist movement was a militant, heterogeneous movement, with demands of which were for political rights such a suffrage, as well as education and labor rights. The aftermath of the Free Officers Revolution in 1952 affected the feminist movement differently than did the revolution in 1919. Nasser's introduction of state-sponsored feminism coopted women's rights into its nationalist program and constructed the working woman as an expression of the regime's modernization project (Bier, 2011; Hatem, 1992), which weakened alternative feminist activities, distancing them from their grassroots foundation (Allam, 2018). The most explicit expression of Nasser's gender politics appeared in the 1956 constitution, in which equality between women and men is articulated in Article 31: "Egyptians shall be equal before the law in public rights and duties, with no discrimination among them therein on the grounds of sex, origin, language, religion or creed." With the constitution, Nasser increased women's public role through the implementation of the rights to be elected to political councils, attend university, work, and to receive equal pay and contraception. However, Nasser also restricted all forms of organized political activity and thus political parties and the feminist movement was highly circumscribed.

By allowing no space for making claims on the state, Nasser's state feminism both enabled and restricted women's agency (Bier, 2011). Family laws lagged behind the rights the new constitution bestowed on women, which created a rather paradoxical situation for women who were now regarded both as public figures, as well as the corner stone of caregiving mothers and wives (Hatem, 1992). While public feminist activism vanished under Nasser, Mervat Hatem (2000) and Laura Bier (2011) contend that the politics of gender did not completely disappear, but found alternative outlets. For instance, Aziza Hussein became a prominent advocate for family planning and birth control and led the campaigns to reform the personal status law, challenging men's unilateral right to end marriages by divorcing their wives (Kamal, 2016). Zahia Marzuq's involvement in social development projects as the undersecretary of the Ministry of Social Affairs reveals her generation's access to new institutions (Bier, 2011). Bier stresses that professional and intellectual women did not entirely endorse state policies, but maintained their contesting role against Nasser's nationalist project (Bier, 2011).

The ways in which Nasser's regime coopted gender issues, and women activists' collaboration with the regime mirrors the political realities under

Mubarak's regime, as well as the aftermath of the revolution. The question of whether collaboration with the state is in favors of women's rights or is solely counterproductive has been debated within the Egyptian women's rights movement for as long as this collaboration has existed. Activists who have collaborated with Mubrak's state feminism have often been criticized for legitimizing the regime. After the revolution in 2011, similar debates arose, which I explore mainly in Article 3. Young feminists who criticized the leader of a prominent revolutionary party met strong opposition from feminists who were engaged with the party. Other feminists chose to take advantage of the small public space provided by el-Sisi, with the proviso of toning down their criticism of the regime. State feminism's control of women's rights and the ban on feminist organization continued throughout the 1970s and into the 1980s. In 1980s, civil society took on an active role in Egyptian society with the organization of non-governmental organizations (NGO). In Chapter 2, I explore and discuss this development, and how Mubarak regime's gender politics affected women's rights NGOs' activism.

Disposition

The following chapter provides an overview of Egyptian women's rights activism before the revolution that situates the findings of my study in the playing field of opportunities for and constraints on women's rights activism in Egypt (Chapter 1). I then review the key concepts from the current body of research on human rights, women's movements, and social movement theory and outline my theoretical framework (Chapter 2). Then, I present my methodological approach and method (Chapter 3), and a summary of the articles (Chapter 4), which is followed by an appendix containing the four articles.

As this is a compilation thesis in which the articles are structured in line with established scholarly formats, each article discusses methodology according to its own theoretical framework. Hence, there is a risk of repetition. I have tried to avoid this by organizing the chapter on earlier research and theory (Chapter 2) as well as that on background (Chapter 1), so that they speak to the whole of the study, including all the articles. The earlier research and theory chapter (Chapter 2) discusses the central debates pertaining to my topic and contextualizes the theoretical concepts used in the articles in detail. Also, the methodology chapter (Chapter 3) develops issues that are only discussed briefly in the articles.

1. Framing Opportunities and Constraints for Women's Rights Activism in Egypt 1980-2011

In this chapter, I provide an overview of Egyptian women's rights activism before the revolution to situate the present study in the broader context of research of opportunities and constraints for women's rights activism in Egypt. While I refer to a women's rights movement in this study, I actively refer to women's rights activism in this chapter. There is a disagreement in the literature about whether or not gender activism before 2011 can be considered a movement, due to the lack of a unified, broad, collective mobilization for women's rights. Apart from a few exceptions that I will discuss, the main actors in advocating for women's rights were traditional NGOs, coalitions, and networks within civil society. At the same time, women have been at the forefront of Egypt's many other contentious political movements during the last several decades, including the labor movement, the student movement, and pro-democratic demonstrations against authoritarianism and injustice, but without a particular focus on women's rights and gender oppression. This section does not aim to take a stand with or against definitions, but to outline and discuss the various existing perspectives.

My overview identifies the opportunities and constraints for activism as related to international human rights, state feminism, and religion. I move beyond the focus on whether women's rights work in Egypt has been successful or not, elitist or not, Western influenced or not (Abu-Lughod, 2010; Al-Sharmani, 2009; El-Mahdi, 2010; Tadros, 2010, 2016). Instead, I discuss the structural conditions with regards to the overarching aim of my study: exploring what functions human rights had through different practices of women's rights activism during the post-revolutionary period and how modes of activism were conditioned and dependent on currents of international influence, domestic structure, and social/political developments.

Revolutionary women's rights activism and feminism in Egypt goes back to the de-colonization period, when the new state was built and citizenship was framed. However, because its high relevance to this study's primary focus, this chapter focuses on the Mubarak period beginning in the early 1980s. At that time, women's rights were recognized as human rights in international politics, which influenced the Egyptian state, women's rights work in the country, and the rapidly growing numbers of NGOs. I begin by discussing the opportunities and constraints for women's rights activism that arose in relation to the Egyptian state's advancement of international women's rights, the local structural changes that enabled NGOs to expand, and the increasing influence of Islamic discourse. Finally, by drawing on several women's rights initiatives as examples, I illustrate how human rights can have various functions and roles, depending on how activists have incorporated human rights with other institutions of power, such as religion, authoritarianism, and law.

Opportunities and Constraints

As this chapter shows, many of the factors enabling opportunities for women's rights activism in Egypt beginning in the 1980s also constrained that activism, which indicates that human rights and activists were caught within rather contradictory elements of social and political realities. I understand opportunities and constraints here in line with how social movement theorists understand the social, political, economic, and subjective conditions that allow activism to surface, expand, and resonate (McAdam et al., 1996; Tarrow, 1983). Feminist theory expands upon this scholarship, revealing that women and men do not have equal access to political opportunities and that constraints affect activists along gender lines (Allam, 2018). Further, these conditions are not just local processes, but are to a great extent affected by international currents of human rights, religion, and transnational feminism.

Women's Rights and State Feminism in Egypt

The increasing international awareness of women's marginalization that gained attention from the 1970s as a result of several international conferences and campaigns addressing gender-based violence, women's rights to development, and other activities (Afkhami, 1995; Chen, 1995; Merry, 2006; Moghadam, 2005; Peters & Wolper, 1995) opened up new opportunities for pursuing women's rights activism in Egypt. Egypt integrated itself into these

international developments. Together with Tunisia, the government was at the forefront of a proposal that the UN dedicate a decade to discussing women's rights agendas in the international arena (Elsadda, 2019). Egypt ratified the CEDAW in 1982, however, the government made reservations with regards to Articles 2, 9, 16, and 29, often with reference to the role of religion.

According to the CEDAW committee, Article 2 is conceived as the very essence of states parties' obligations under the convention. The article requires states to take all measures necessary to eliminate discrimination against women, including modifying and abolishing laws, regulations, customs, and practices, that constitute discrimination. It is also the article, which evokes the highest numbers of reservations from states. Egypt's states that it will comply with the article as long as its content does not contravene Islamic Sharia law. Article 9 concerns women's equal rights to men in terms of acquiring, changing, or retaining their nationality, including equal rights with respect to the nationality of their children. In 2004, Egypt amended the law that forbids women from passing on their nationality to their children, in cases when the father is non-Egyptian. With the new amendment allowing Egyptian women to grant their nationality to their children, the reservation against Article 9 was lifted in 2008 (UNHCR). Article 16 regards women's equal rights to men in marriage. As with Article 2, Egypt, in its public reservation statements asserts that Islamic Sharia law provides complementary rights to wife and husband and that the sacrament of Islamic marriage will not be put into question. Egypt's reservation to Article 16 refers to the:

> sacrosanct nature of the firm religious beliefs which govern marital relations in Egypt and which may not be called in question and in view of the fact that one of the most important bases of these relations is an equivalency of rights and duties so as to ensure complementarity which guarantees true equality between the spouses, not a quasi-equality that renders the marriage a burden on the wife. (United Nations, 1990)

Egypt expresses reservation with regards to Article 29 (1), due its refusal to be subjected to "an arbitral body of any dispute which may arise between States concerning the interpretation or application of the Convention. This is in order to avoid being bound by the system of arbitration in this field." (UN).

Since its ratification, Egypt has introduced several legal amendments regarding family matters that, according to Al-Sharmani (2017), can be viewed as the state's aspiring to make good on its obligations to international conventions and uphold its image as a modern country. For instance, Sonneveld (2009) elucidates the international influence manifested in the chronological

amendments of gender-related laws and the organizing of international conferences. Attention to women's rights language further increased in the national public sphere during the preparations for and hosting of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) in Cairo 1994, as well as during Egyptian delegates' participation in The Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing the following year.

Moreover, between 2005 and 2010, the NCW adopted a five-year national strategy that would strengthen women's legal rights in a comprehensive manner, not only in family matters, but also in the areas of labor, social welfare, citizenship, and criminal cases. One component of that strategy was to link the goals of empowering women legally to the international feminist agenda and eventually to eliminate Egypt's reservations regarding the CEDAW (Al-Sharmani, 2017).

Mona El-Ghobashy (2008) argues that, despite its lack of democratic governance, Egypt's ratification of treaties and the internationalization of Egyptian politics gave local groups and activists space to employ the concept of the rule of law to contest state violations of rights. Referring to the situation after the revolution, Hoda Elsadda, who was part of the feminist group working on gender equality in the constitution after 2011, is convinced that:

> this imagined role of Egypt as a key player in international politics and membership in the international club of civilized nations was a key factor in the negotiations over Article 11, or the "women's article" in the Egyptian constitution endorsed in 2014. (Elsadda, 2019, p. 58)

At the same time, the increasing awareness of women's rights, new international developments regarding the role of governments in supporting these, and local developments in policy and political ideology fostered a governmentalization of women's rights in the region (Abu-Lughod, 2010). Egypt and many other Arab countries manifested state feminism through establishing National Councils for Women headed by "First Ladies" (Elsadda, 2019). The Egyptian NCW was established in 2000, led by the President's wife, Suzanne Mubarak. The NCW's role was to inform the government of the impact of its policies on women and children (Sakr, 2004). Tadros (2016) states that the NCW was a hybrid of quangos (quasi-NGOs) and gonogs (government-organized NGOs). The NCW was institutionally a para-state body that enjoyed the status of an autonomous organization with its own budget, board, and structure, while, at the same time, it captured and redirected non-profit funds from the official aid system (Tadros, 2016). The NCW was a core recipient of foreign funding, which increased its potential to strengthen

its visibility and claims of representing the country's gender agenda. The council also worked as an umbrella organization for other women's NGOs and an umbrella organization channeling large sums of funding to smaller groups. One major impact of the council has been its power to dictate a significant number of women's rights projects and determine when and in what issues the women's rights groups can participate. For example, at Beijing +5, in 2000, the Egyptian delegation involved state-sponsored representatives and the former first lady held a speech in favor of microcredits and female entrepreneurs (Zuhur, 2001).

Elsadda concludes that in Egypt's authoritarian postcolonial state practice, the NCW gradually became the arms of state manipulation of women's rights issues. The council was intolerant of dissenting voices and exclusionary rather than inclusionary. For example, during preparations for reforming the PSL in 2004, several women's rights organization stated that they were excluded from the debates before the law was implemented. The only actor in contact with legislators and ministries was the NCW, and the women's NGOs did not have the chance to provide their reflections on or opinion about the reform (Al-Sharmani, 2009). The "primary goal was to nationalize women's rights agendas, making it the prerogative of council members to act as the sole representatives of women's rights issues in local and international forums." (Elsadda, 2019, p. 59). The NCW's status among funders and its power over policymaking outcomes placed women's rights activists in a complex situation. A proven way for activists to strategically influence the government was to affiliate with the NCW. At the same time, many activists were concerned that in the long term, such a strategy would result in the NCW becoming further able to capitalize on activists' demands and agendas in deeply problematic ways (Tadros, 2016).

Consequently, while international women's rights encouraged the state to advance the principles of international treaties and provided a space for activists to apply pressure on the regime, the scholarly literature reveals that international women's rights played a double role in the postcolonial authoritarian state (Al-Sharmani, 2017; Elsadda, 2019; Tadros, 2016). It makes clear that, while the international women's rights movement has fostered the government's aspirations to improve the legal status of women in Egypt, the government's underlying motive has been to maintain its high international reputation and to attract foreign donors. This has, in turn, made the state attentive to restricting narratives others than the national one. Maha Abdelrahman (2004) identifies the Egyptian state's hostile attitude towards human rights organizations in its employment of a nationalist discourse. This

discourse accuses activist groups and NGOs of serving Western powers that undermine Egypt's sovereignty. The organizations have been blamed for producing fabricated reports of human rights violations in Egypt and creating sectarian splits by asserting that the state discriminates against Copts and Shia Muslims. Foreign funding was viewed as an act of betrayal and a neo-imperialist project aiming to consolidate Western economic domination. With these arguments, the former regime has been able to justify its protection of the country's security and sovereignty, partly by tightly controlling over the civil society and its financial recourses. The Ministry of Social Solidarity (MOSS: previously, the Ministry of Social Affairs) has through various laws not just categorized NGOs as either welfare or development organizations, but has moreover controlled all their ongoing projects and monitored their foreign funding (Abdelrahman, 2004).

The legacy of state feminism and the First Lady Suzanne Mubarak as the champion of Egyptian women's rights played a crucial role after the revolution. Women's rights were equated with Mubarak's authoritarian regime and top-down politics, which the revolution aimed to oust. Some groups accused Suzanne Mubarak of enforcing Western ideals and degrading Egyptian family values by implementing reforms in family legislation. Other groups claimed that she highjacked women's rights to benefit the state's political agenda. As a consequence, as Tadros (2016) argues, if there was anything the vast variety of religious, liberal, or leftist activists agreed upon after 2011, it was their revulsion regarding the NCW. In Chapter 2, I further discuss how this legacy affected the women's rights movement in the aftermath of the revolution.

In addition to the global attention to women's rights and its impact on governments and state leaders, the civil society was affected by donors shifting their funding from the state to funding actors in civil society. Within the development discourse occurring during the advance of neoliberalism and its anti-statist logic in the 1980s, states were blamed for failing in regards to several of its economic and welfare responsibilities. The dominant model of development at that time favored the free market, monetary stability, and limitations of the state, which were moreover the main features of Structural Adjustment Programs (SAP) designed by the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank (Abdelrahman, 2004). These tendencies were mirrored in Egypt, as elsewhere in the MENA region. Due to legal changes in the registration of civil organizations in the 1980s and 1990s, the country experienced a mushrooming of independent NGOs (Abdelrahman, 2004; Al-Ali, 2000), among which many focused on women's rights.

The NGO-ization of Gender Issues

In addition to the changes in international economic politics, the increase of NGOs in Egypt must be understood within the context of the restructuring of civil society and emerging ideological debates on gender issues. When the Mubarak regime lifted the decade-long ban on feminist and women's rights associations, activists began to restructure. Egypt now had its first feminist NGO, the Arab Women's Solidarity Association beginning in 1982, initiated and run by the writer and outspoken activist Nawal El Saadawi. At the same time, the revival of political Islam, with its conservative gender analysis, and new economic realities generated new critical problems for gender and feminist activists. Demands to reform the PSL, emerging debates on sexual and reproductive rights, and women's increased presence in the formal and informal labor markets stood in stark contrast to the religious discourse that created intense public and intellectual debates. In reaction to these new structural and ideological realities, feminist and women's rights activists saw the establishment of NGOs as productive and promising, since they were more independent than the authoritarian structure of political parties (Pratt, 2001). In the coming decades, the number of independent feminist and women's rights NGOs multiplied, despite the strict political and economic monitoring of civil society actors.

Several scholars argue that the international language on women's rights and the mushrooming of women's rights NGOs changed the conditions for voicing collective demands. Nadje Al-Ali (2003), Hala Kamal (2016), and Hoda Elsadda (2019) refer to a women's movement when analyzing the work of the many women's rights and feminist NGOs operating in Egypt since the 1980s. Al-Ali (2003) emphasizes the diversity of NGOs working on gender issues in terms of focus, methods, and ideological origins and reveals how increasing awareness of women's rights as a result of conferences and transnational feminism created spaces for activists to collaborate and advance grassroots activities. Hala Kamal (2016) calls civil society feminist movement emerging in the 1980s the third wave of feminism in Egypt. For example, she emphasizes organizations' collective women's rights work in relation to the ICPD. The preparations for the conference created unique opportunities for Egyptian civil society organizations to place women's rights on the national agenda. While human rights and feminist organizations had previously been operated in isolation from one another, the ICPD caused NGOs to collaborate to create networks, coalitions, and pressure groups to raise awareness about continuing gender oppression in the country, despite Egypt's ratification of international conventions (Al-Ali, 2003; Kamal, 2016). Activists from different ideological

standpoints began addressing and debating formerly taboo topics such as female genital mutilation (FGM), reproductive health, abortion, and gender violence.

An example of such a coalition was the FGM taskforce that emerged after the ICPD, which Mariz Tadros (2016) argues is one of the first and most successful collaborations among different civil society actors advocating for women's rights. Despite the diversity of its members, the coalition succeeded in creating consensus with regards to some complicated relationships, policy messages, and actors. Tadros states that the activists' deep understanding of different actors' agendas, politics, and roles in the battle for ending FGM explains the taskforce's success. Moreover, the taskforce members possessed great ability for framing FGM differently according to their audience and made productive use of different political opportunities. For example, the period directly after the ICPD was not the right moment to advocate for legislation against FGM, and the taskforce directed their effort towards cultural and societal changes, with help from medical experts and religious actors. The integration of Islamic scholars and clerics into women's human rights advocacy was not isolated to the taskforce, but became a more explicit element over the last few decades with respect to several different questions, including family legislation.

At the same time, when analyzed as part of the "NGO-ization" of gender issues in the Global South, the mushrooming of NGOs is generally criticized for its lack of ability to substantively challenge the oppression of women (Alvarez, 2009; Jad, 2007). Islah Jad (2007) and Mariz Tadros (2016) argue that NGOs' organizational structure and funding dependency prevented them from independently framing projects, advocating for change relevant to women's actual needs, or mobilizing largescale, and longlasting programs, since the various groups had to compete against each other for funding. Coupled with the issue of funding was the repressive and unpredictable political environment and state policies regulating civil society actors. All NGOs in Egypt must register with the MOSS and thus comply with the highly restrictive NGO law. In addition to strict regulation of funding and activities, the MOSS prohibited any NGO from joining international networks or domestic coalitions before receiving government permission to do so, which prevented any broad mobilization or collaborations among different organizations. Any activity not registered and permitted by the MOSS could result in the dissolution of the entire organization. While the MOSS operated as the formal power, the Ministry of Interior used its informal power through the State Investigation Apparatus (SSI), the domestic intelligence agency, to block, close, or forbid NGOs from operating on security grounds (Tadros, 2016). In order to survive,

Egyptian NGOs were forced to work both with and against the state, find loopholes in the laws, and negotiate the political environment and demands from the SSI.

Against this background of a hostile political environment and the organizational structure of NGOs, the hundreds of women's rights NGOs operating in Egypt under Mubarak constituted a form of "good governance" within the neoliberal political ideal of weak states and strong civil society (El-Mahdi, 2010; Tadros, 2016). Women's rights NGOs professionalized gender issues, and in contrast to bottom-up collective struggles, an educated elite decided which issues should receive public attention (Jad, 2007).

Another influential power factor, which increased in the beginning of 1980s was Islamic discourse. As religion came to represent the normative framework in Egypt's public and private spheres, to a great extent because of the Muslim Brotherhood as an opposition movement, Islamic discourse emerged as a site of negotiation for both the government and women's rights activists, with different implications and outcomes.

Women's Rights Activism and Religion

Just as the Egyptian state was eager to live up to the ideal of a modern country that enhanced the development of women's rights, the government simultaneously strived to assert its religious legitimacy by partaking in and legitimizing the dominant religious discourses that had gained prominence after the rise of the influence of Islamic groups in the 1970s (Al-Sharmani, 2009). As a response to the growing number of Islamic groups seeking to influence national and legal agendas throughout the region and the state's compliance with some of their demands, often with a gender analysis that conflicted with gender equality, women who desired to live as practicing Muslims, while enjoying equality and justice, entered the space of Islamic religious knowledge. Women and groups approaching Islam with a gender discourse often referred to as Islamic feminism engaged in many different projects and initiatives throughout the Muslim world. They elucidated the historic, patriarchal interpretations of religious texts and re-read these from a female perspective. While parts of this movement constituted of a spiritual engagement, many initiatives were political and aimed to influence legislation and national religious discourses.

Researchers working on this topic view the imbrications of religious belief and feminism with enthusiasm, skepticism, and ambivalence. Whereas some do not

see any obstacles to conflating a feminist subject with religious practice and gender justice and recognizes the discourse's dynamism and heterogeneity (Badran, 1996, 2005, 2009; Foley, 2004; Ong, 1996), others claim that this form of struggle cannot be deemed feminism since there are embedded inequalities in religion that never can be "reformed" away (Majid, 1998; Winter, 2001). Some scholars question the effectiveness of the political stream of Islamic feminism and whether it is possible to include the diversity of Muslim women, as not all use Islam as an initial identity marker (Moghissi, 2011). Others question the productivity of such approach, as it is unable to disentangle itself from controversies over accurate interpretations (Balchin, 2003, 2011; Kandiyoti, 1991, 2011).

In addition, such political projects have usually been marked as existing at the crossroads between secular and Islamic feminism, a problematic binary that categorizes different initiatives that often "conceal the ambiguities and fluidity of identities, strategies of engagement and framing of ideas" (Tadros, 2011, p. 8). Beyond the complexity of naming certain practices and defining their boundaries, integrating Islamic knowledge into women's rights activism has fueled a debate over the trend of conflating religious discourse and human rights within gender politics. Abu-Lughod (2010) locates this strategy in the development of local NGOs' more intensively highlighting the Muslim identity of women, which, in Egypt, has been particularly explicit in women's rights NGOs' work towards amendments to the PSL. Many of the NGOs in my study have increased their work with progressive religious scholars to reveal alternative interpretations to Egypt's family legislation.

However, my own study of an Cairene women's rights NGO in 2011 for my MA thesis argues that research exploring how the framework of international human rights coexist with Islamic knowledge conceals the complex positionalities of feminist critiques beyond the simplifying binaries of religious vs. secular (Sundkvist, 2020). Many activists and groups see no obstacles to conflating these two frameworks. For strategic reasons, however, groups may choose to highlight religious frameworks for building local constituencies (Al-Sharmani, 2013). The ways in which women's rights activists engaged with Islamic discourse was in particularly explicit in the reforms made to the family legislation, a vital feature of Egyptian women's rights work before the revolution.

Another significant effect of women's rights activists' need to navigate religious discourse during Mubarak's rule is how it was implicated in feminist research on gender justice projects in Egypt. Sara Farag (2021), who presents a nuanced historical narrative to the binary assumption of secular vs. religious

based form of feminism in Egypt, argues that, in tandem with engaging in progressive interpretations of Islamic law, women's rights activists also engaged in intellectual discussions of international human rights. However, feminist scholarly work paid almost no attention to this dual process. Farag claims that researchers' neglect of the development of human rights specific to Egyptian feminists is due to a blind focus on Islamic feminism as an oppositional binary to secular feminism. Another factor that contributes to this neglect, she stresses, is that the anti-imperialist critique embedded in much feminist research in Egypt conflates international human rights and the professionalization of women's rights organizations, with the result that research attends exclusively to formal legal projects.

This study confirms Farag's argument and reveals that scholars researching feminist activism in the MENA region have not been interested in intellectual and philosophical discussions of human rights ideas at all. The key issue here, I would argue, is that, researchers interested in Egyptian gender justice projects, only conceive of human rights as what I define *human rights as law*, that is, the international political discourse in which human rights is conceived as a normative legal language. My main argument in this study is that conceiving of human rights in this narrow, singular way excludes women's rights activists' capabilities to navigate and use human rights in multiple ways. In women's rights activism, human rights possesses multiple meanings and function, may be invoked in parallel with religious knowledge, and is circumscribed by local political contexts. However, to be able to capture and analyze these processes, a three-dimensional approach to human rights activism is needed.

Women's Rights Activism Between the State, Civil Society, and Postcolonial Legacy

As I discussed above, during the Mubarak era and the civil society feminist movement (Kamal, 2016), opportunities and constraints existed in the state's attempts to advance women's rights, while, at the same time, the state blocked alternative voices and played into the growing Islamic discourse in Egypt. Further, I have pointed to civil society's ability to collaborate, while being restrained by a hostile political environment and its organizational structure. In this section, I provide a few examples of how these factors played out in different women's rights initiatives, which undergird this study's main

argument: that we need a multiple understanding of the function of human rights in particular contexts and at particular historical moments. First, I discuss the imbrication of religion and legal activism into reforming the family law.

Women's rights activists' engagement in family legislation began in 1979, when they argued that parts of the law were unconstitutional. Singerman (2004) mainly focuses on the PSL Coalition, which consisted of a range of high-profile lawyers and academics well acquainted with Egyptian law and religious legal discourse. Ten years after their initial work, the Islamic discourse had become embedded in Egyptian political and public spheres. In order to avoid vocal Islamic elements, the coalition decided to turn towards consciousness-raising projects, instead of focusing on parliamentary processes. Singerman's research on the PSL Coalition thus elucidates the group's careful reading of Egyptian society. It evaded all possible criticism of its recommendations through close attention to Islamic historical interpretations of the marriage contract. The coalition conducted archive research on court rulings and the evolution of the PSL, engaged with reinterpretations of religious doctrines, and exemplified the law's deficits by referring to hadith from the prophet allowing women to divorce without fault. They networked with other activists, academics, and clerics to avoid the religious establishment rejecting their efforts. However, the recommendations emerging from these methods were postponed. The coalition estimated its recommendations were not socially accepted due to the hostile public debate around the marriage contract.

The debate over reforming the marriage contract acquired attention anew in relation to the ICPD conference in 1994 and the Fourth Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995. Several drafts were presented during these years, but rejected by either members of the women's movement or religious institutions (Sonneveld, 2009). With increased support from the government and, in particular, First Lady Suzanne Mubarak, the PSL Coalition decided to approach the law itself by engaging with state authorities, ministries, and people inside the ruling party (Singerman, 2004). Coalition members remained convinced that if women were to change the law, they had to formulate their legal and ideological arguments according to Islamic law. Many activists rejected both the collaboration with the state and the religious framework. However, the coalition members believed that, strategically, this would be the most productive way to achieve changes, if any at all were to be achieved. The government passed PSL No. 1 in 2000 and received significant criticism from both religious authorities and women's rights activists. Despite this,

Singerman (2004) argues that the PSL Coalitions' work was a great learning process for activists and NGO leaders. They managed to outmaneuver and anticipate their opponents within the People's Assembly and the ruling party. Egyptian women's rights activism took women's rights to an advanced level by developing their legal activism and ability to resist. Later, this strategy had spillover effects to other reforms, such as the law allowing Egyptian women married to foreigners to pass on their citizenship to their children.

However, the other side of this process is that passing a reform is one thing. It is another to ensure that the legal system is compatible with new laws. For example, Sonneveld (2009) suggests that the implementation of family courts in 2004 that was part of the PSL reforms resulted from USAID's extensive engagement in and funding of Egyptian domestic affairs connected to gender reforms. Therefore, the state pursued reforms despite the fact that judges did not take arbitration seriously as part of their jobs. The motives for the new family courts are to retain the values of the family as sacred and to provide quick, effective, and just outcomes for the litigants (Al-Sharmani, 2009). The obligatory mediation sessions are carried out by three experts in psychology, law, and social work, respectively, and may last for a period of at least 15 days. Al-Sharmani (2009) and Sonneveld (2010) conducted fieldwork inside the family courts where mediation takes place, and they reveal how these seemingly beneficial procedures operate in reality. Al-Sharmani explains that, since it is only obligatory to file for mediation, but not to attend the sessions, husbands are often absent, and sometimes even the wives are as well. The mediation sessions are take place in non-private spaces, which are inconvenient for discussing family disputes. Al-Sharmani further argues that the sessions are ineffective procedures and lack knowledgeable, experienced mediation experts.

Several scholars argue that, throughout the reforms to the PSL, the Egyptian state's dedication to meeting both international and religious goals have often translated into an uneven, mixed process of family law reforms (Singerman, 2004; Sonneveld, 2010). Al-Sharmani's interviews with several activists convey that the result of the government's motivation of being recognized internationally "led to passing laws and initiating new legal systems without addressing some important legislative gaps as well as putting in place the mechanisms needed for the implementation of the new laws" (2009, p. 98).

I bring up the example of the PSL reforms because the process speaks to the contradictory pros and cons of human rights as law in authoritarian contexts with an influential religious discourse. On the one hand, the ways in which activists engaged in the process illustrate the productive side of legal activism

in the Egyptian context. Singerman (2004) emphasizes the relevance of engaging in social change using legislation due to Egypt's hostile and repressive environment, in which other forms of activism is restricted. On the other hand, they reveal how the international politics of human rights may encourage rapid reform processes that often result in bleak, fragmented outcomes, with a low political motivation to seriously prepare for or follow up the legal systems' ability to integrate and carry out the reforms in the ways in which they are proposed. In Chapter 2, I further discuss the implications the state's different political motivation for ratifying international treaties have on the actual implementation of the same, arguing that Egypt can be categorized as a strategic ratifier (Simmons, 2009). Al-Sharmani (2010) points out that the implementation of the family courts was pursued without a comprehensive dialogue with civil society actors or consciousness-raising among grassroots activists . For legal reforms to be effective, they require adequate and effective mechanisms of implementation and enforcement, as well as a supportive environment. If we contrast the reforms to PSL with the earlier discussion on the work of the FGM task force, the criminalization of FGM in 2008 was preceded by intensive grassroots and consciousness-raising activities. The role of the new law thus became an extension of social changes already taking place in the country (Tadros, 2016).

In comparison, the dominant focus on law in activism against sexual violence before the revolution provides an example of how legal activism can have rather problematic implications in an authoritarian context. During the Mubarak regime, public sexual harassment was an everyday experience for Egyptian women in public transportation and on the streets. However, it was not until the mid-2000s that a shift in focus around sexual violence against women in Egypt emerged. Abdelmonem (2015) identifies 2005 as the year when activists, as well as the public, recognized sexual harassment as a prevalent issue in Egypt's urban public space. At that time, Egypt witnessed various collective political activities: largescale labor strikes, democracy demonstrations, and student protests. The hundreds of people (thousands in the labor strikes) protesting against the lack of labor rights, the potential succession of Mubarak's son Gamal Mubarak, the invasion of Iraq, and against Israel's occupation of Palestinian territories, were remarkable in the Egyptian context. The state was under international pressure to democratize and therefore allowed controlled democratic spaces. Women were at the forefront of these activities, not least in the labor strikes that female textile fabric workers initiated and organized (Duboc, 2013). During these demonstrations and protests, it came to light, the security forces harassed and sexually assaulted women. Attention was also paid to attacks by young men on women

celebrating the festive holiday Eid, which made a few women's rights NGOs recognize a problem they had previously neglected. However, the definitions of sexual harassment were blurred. Consequently, in contrast to after 2011, sexual harassment was not included in the discourse of sexual violence.

Beginning in 2005, the dominant means of addressing the problem, advocated by the Egyptian Center for Women's Rights (ECWR), was to call for state interventions such as increasing police presence and strict control over deviant working class young men. Several researchers problematize the ECWR's exclusive focus on demanding police presence and legal reforms (Amar, 2011; Langohr, 2015). Focusing on policing young men only reinforced an already-authoritarian regime's power and ignored the fact that the state was among the worst perpetrators of assaults on female protestors. The ECWR's approach conforms to what Naber and El-Hameed (2016) call gender equality feminism, which isolates the issue of sexual violence from the militarized and patriarchal nature of the Egyptian regime. Amar (2011) argues that the ECWR strategy and method of confronting sexual harassment mirror the dominant human rights and transnational feminist discourse in favor of improved laws and security enforcement. In contrast, he argues, the organization, El-Nadeem, an NGO that concentrates on helping victims of torture, chose to stay focused on state violence and police brutality. Amar (2011, p. 312) writes:

> El-Nadeem kept the light of critique on the state; on the practices of the state security services and on police and prison officials. Shame and immorality and hypocrisy were to be exposed in the security state (not among working-class boys). And middle-class professionals who collaborated with the state (in particular, doctors, social workers and aid officials) were held responsible for "crimes against humanity."

One of Amar's conclusions is that NGOs do not necessarily fit into the dominant human rights discourse. El Nadeem's work turned the security regime inside out (Amar, 2011), thus conforming to the revolutionary feminist's constant attention to the structures of state violence (Naber & El-Hameed 2016). The approach of El-Nadeem has become far more prevalent since 2011. NGOs and activist groups remained highly vocal in critiquing the state's involvement in assaults and how it legitimized sexual violence by neglecting the problem and generating a victim-blaming discourse. This strategy is correlated with a severe risk of being marked by the regime as a national threat. Several activists were detained and interrogated for expressing the opinion that the regime had shortcomings. However, as my study reveals,

after 2011, the transformation that the revolution encouraged made women more eager to resist sexual violence in all its aspects despite these threats.

The last example I would like to address in relation to the paradoxical intersection of the postcolonial state, the NGO-ization of gender issues, and the secular/religious divide is the initiative, Women for Democracy, that emerged as a response to the assaults to which women were subjected during the demonstrations in 2000. However, Women for Democracy was short lived and after one public rally, it dissolved due to internal disagreements. The groups consisted of academics, NGO professionals, and activists with secular and religious ideological standpoints with various experiences of gender activism. El-Mahdi's (2010) research with the group exposes how the activists struggled with the dichotomies of secular/religious and Western/authentic. They accused each other of being too pro-state, too pro-West, too pro-religion, too elitist, too radical, too funder-driven, and did not manage to overcome these differences. Further, because many of the women knew each other from activities within the NGO sector, they introduced earlier controversies and tensions into the group. One of the tensions was NGOs' competing positions in relation to international donors, which shaped much of the NGOs' work. El-Mahdi argues that perceiving the Egyptian context as too repressive or hostile for a women's movement to develop (Al-Ali, 2003; Moghadam, 2005) is not valid, since other movements have occurred and sustained during such conditions. Instead, the state had effectively compartmentalized women's rights activists, which deeply affected relational structures within and among activists.

The tensions El-Mahdi conveys as existing within the group were created by the state's systematic and harsh control of women's rights activism. The regime had forced women's rights activists to partly work with the state by registering with the MOSS and, at the same time, becoming extremely dependent on Western funding. The NGO law prevented women's rights activists from creating strong allies, as well as the opportunity to benefit from overlapping mobilization structures or coalitions. Further, the state used the dichotomy of West vs. authentic women's rights and reinforced this tension by proclaiming itself as the "true" champion of women's rights. In addition to El-Mahdi's assessment that Egypt's "stick and carrot" politics created a vital obstacle to the Women for Democracy's ability to grow and sustain itself, I believe the example also speaks to the multiple hardships that alternatives to NGO activism encountered during the Mubarak era. Replicating women rights activism through NGOs was initially perceived as a free, independent, and promising tool to advance women's situation. This chapter reveals that, over

the years, this form of activism became the only possible tool, while also allowing the regime to control activists, intra-movement developments, and large-scale mobilizations. At the same time, women's rights NGO initiatives sometimes managed to build collective pressure pertaining to common gender questions.

However, the dominant debates around women's rights before the revolution manifested themselves as polemics over how to approach gender justice, which still was perceived to derive from an authentic Egyptian perspective. Al-Ali's (2000) study of secular women's activism in the middle to late 1990s reveals how the activists were caught between political and cultural discourses and accused, mainly by "Islamists," of embodying an extended arm of Western interests. Ali argues that the activists' attempts to present themselves as part of a picture of an authentic Egyptian culture only reinforced the "Islamists'" false idea. US historian Margot Badran (1996) contests the accusation that feminists and women's movements in Egypt were Western puppets by pointing to the country's history of feminist activism interconnected with and shaped by the independence and liberal movements in the 1920s and the formation of the EFU, headed by Huda Sha'arawi. She argues that anchoring feminism in a specific location is a political project that derives from a particular understanding of culture as static or from a need to perpetuate the constructs of "West" and "East." Egypt has long appropriated and woven "alien elements" into its vital indigenous culture (Badran, 1996, p. 32).

Concluding, as Elsadda (2019) argues, the history of the women's and feminist movements in Egypt is a history of appropriation, manipulation, and negotiation with power held by an authoritarian postcolonial state. "We have accumulated a lot of experience and skills in confronting challenges, accommodating setbacks, and surviving against all odds" (Elsadda, 2019, p. 62). In the next chapter, we move on to the theoretical framework of the study. There, the problematic binaries that stymied the Women for Democracy and shaped the political reality for women's rights activism in general are further explored and problematized in relation to human rights theory and practice after the 2011 revolution.

2. Prior Research and Theoretical Framework

This study primarily connects three research fields: *human rights research, women's movement research*, and *social movement research in authoritarian and transitional contexts*. This chapter discusses these fields of research separately, as well as their overlaps. The main political issues concerning feminist activism in post-revolutionary Egypt that I have identified through my research – rights, opportunities and constraints – can arguably be positioned where all three fields intersect. Over the last decade, women's rights have been at the center of discussions about human rights merely as universal standards. This research emphasizes the importance of contextualizing women's rights, particularly regarding modes of practice, for being able to draw conclusions regarding what human rights mean and what they actually do for marginalized people (Biersack et al., 2016; Levitt & Merry, 2009; Merry, 2006; Zivi, 2012; Zwingel, 2012, 2016).

In line with the argument I make in this study, political scientist Niamh Reilly (2011) suggests that paying attention to the forms women's rights projects take is important if we want to deepen our understanding of the meanings various forms of practicing human rights outside state and legal institutional frames create and elucidate human rights' counterhegemonic potential. Reilly's argument is a response to critical readings of the women's human rights paradigm and its role in underpinning, or not, emancipatory transnational feminisms in a context of increasingly fragmenting globalization. In her recent case study of the Iranian women's movement, Nicole Nickerson (2020, p. 477) argues that:

> practical case studies may offer evidence for a theory of human rights universalism, and that the human rights system is therefore worth pursuing in the future, not only as a substantiated moral goal, but also as the necessary protective shield of local advocacy promoting human rights values.

Furthermore, Sarah Farag (2021) states that research on Egyptian feminism has contributed to the binary position on religion vs. secularism. She urges for a rewriting of Egyptian feminism and the development of human rights thought as an integral part of the intellectual, political, and activist history of Egyptian feminisms. Reilly, Nickerson, and Farag's calls for directing research towards engaging with the ways in which women's movements practice activism and how human rights ideas play into this, point to the relevance of this study.

In this chapter, I position my work within the three fields of research mentioned above and discuss its potential contribution. Moreover, I draw on specific theoretical developments in the "critical turn" of human rights (Lundberg & Strange, 2017) as having the potential of opening up rather than shutting down the possibility for political engagement (Zivi, 2012) as well as transnational feminist research on women's movement praxis in authoritarian and transitional contexts. This body of scholarship aids my attempt to understand the multiple functions and roles bestowed upon human rights during political unrest and times of uncertainty. Accordingly, this theoretical section develops and expands the theoretical discussions made in the articles.

Human Rights: A Three-Dimensional Framework

What do we mean when we talk about human rights, and how do we know we are discussing the same thing? Lorrin Thomas (2015) poses this question in a review article on two studies of human rights. Thomas outlines different ways in which scholars understand, approach, and write about human rights and argues that because scholars perform analyses from interdisciplinary as well as conflicting disciplinary approaches, it is vital that they not draw on vague formulations of the meanings of human rights. Following Thomas's concern, this section develops a three-dimensional framework to define human rights generated from my empirical findings, which I find necessary for analyzing women's rights activism in Egypt after 2011. Guiding me here is the overarching focus of my research: what function human rights had and what they *do*, instead of what they *are*. Consequently, I am not interested in philosophically determining the true meaning of human rights, why we have them, and what is their basis, but rather in investigating what human rights do when practiced through activism. What do human rights as law do for people in specific contexts? What do they do when used as language and as space-making, respectively?

I begin by developing the framework on human rights as law from the perspective that human rights functions as international standards that activists use to apply pressure mainly on states to live up to those standards through guaranteeing, protecting, and promoting rights in national legislation and policies, and as a strategic tool when other forms of activism are restricted. Following this, I build on the literature regarding human rights as language and develop a framework for this approach as a discursive rhetoric resource for activists, which serves not just as a resource for translating international standards in relation to the state, but also on a social and cultural level, to challenge oppressive and discriminatory discourses around rights violations. At the end of this section, I develop human rights as space-making using theories of human rights as performative practice. While the legal approach to human rights presupposes equality before the law, human rights as a performative practice recognize their emancipatory potential through negotiating the precondition of politics, rather than by making claims aimed at reforming politics (Hoover, 2013; Zivi, 2012). These three dimensions are not mutually exclusive, but intersect and complement each other. Together they constitute a framework for capturing multiple and various modes of activism and exploring the roles human rights played in Egypt after 2011.

Human Rights as Law

My understanding of human rights as law is guided by the functions legal dimensions of human rights possess for activists. Article 1 explores the attempts of the WCWG, consisting of mainly feminist NGOs, academics, and lawyers, to integrate gender equality into the constitutions of 2012 and 2013. I argue that the dominant frame of reference in the group's work was the CEDAW and the substantive equality model for the assurance of women's equal rights, opportunity, and status in the constitution. The group demanded that the constitutions articulate its respect for international treaties and that its articles reflect the principles of non-discrimination and equal opportunity through a quota system, among other mechanisms. Consequently, feminist activists demanded a transformation of domestic legislation. In this process, human rights as law had the function of integrating the principles and norms of international treaties into domestic legislation. Feminist activists wanted the state to oblige itself to uphold the international norms and principles found in the CEDAW and the UDHR by including them in the constitution.

However, it was not only international principles that played a significant role in this process. Rewriting the constitution as part of the revolution was central

to mark the freedom from the former president's autocracy, and the constitution played the role of establishing a shift from old and new Egypt. To exchange the legal legacy of the former regime for a constitution that reflected the revolution's visions was, therefore, a requirement for many revolutionary groups (Kamal, 2015). I thus argue that we must situate the meaning and function of human rights as law in relation to the legal texts it aims to transform and the status that particular legal text possesses at particular historical moments.

To understand the function of human rights as law, we must also recognize that, while states may ratify international treaties and incorporate them into national legislation, the implications of doing so can vary to a great extent. Research reveals that ratification may have little positive, even negative effect, on domestic policy in terms of protecting human rights (Goodliffe & Hawkins, 2006; Hafner-Burton & Tsutsui, 2005; Hathaway, 2001; Keith, 1999). Ratification of international agreements is a cheap pathway to international legitimacy since enforcement is rarely called into question. Therefore, states ratify agreements without the capacity or will to enforce norms and principles in domestic politics (Hafner-Burton et al., 2008). In Article 1, I reveal that feminist activists were deeply knowledgeable of this complexity and vigilantly followed how the recognition of women's human rights in the constitution was implemented in actually in national legislation.

Another factor affecting how human rights as law functions for activists is the reasons the state ratified international treaties in the first place. Beth Simmons (2009) distinguishes between sincere ratifiers, false ratifiers and strategic ratifiers. The first refers to the states that adhere to and value the principles of international treaties, and therefore commit to them through ratification. Some states ratify treaties in order to encourage others to do the same. The second category includes states that commit to treaties and adhere to them in domestic legislation without ratifying international conventions. Finally, strategic ratifiers, to which the Egyptian state belongs, are states that sign international treaties for diplomatic rewards and to avoid international criticism, but with few resources or political will to implement them nationally. Former Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak invested considerable effort in portraying Egypt as a state on which to rely in international politics. Committing Egypt to ratifying international treaties was a vital piece of that puzzle. Following increased international attention to gender issues, Egypt reformed the family law significantly under the first half of 2000s, improving women's status in marriage and family. At the same time, this allowed the regime to monopolize

the women's rights issue and proclaim itself as their foremost champion at the cost of local organizations (Elsadda, 2019).

What is evident is the empowering function international treaties have on social movements and political activism. One reason states, more than ever before in history, give up portions of their sovereignty to international treaties is the hard work by social movements, transnational and national democratic movements, and (international) non-government organizations (IGNO/NGO) (Simmons, 2009). Human rights as law has the function of serving as an authoritative instrument for these groups to bring to notice that governments are internationally and domestically accountable for refraining from abuses and violations of the agreements they have participated in constituting. Tsutsui, Whitlinger, and Lim (2012) argue that activists play a crucial role in lobbying state actors with regards to various international treaties, which have helped overcome the previously weak capacity to enforce them. Human rights as law has created the opportunity for social movements to push for international efforts to advance human rights principles. International human rights as law is thus a springboard that pushes states to respect, promote, and advance gender equality and non-discrimination. Mona El-Ghobashy (2008) and Hoda Elsadda (2019) recognize that Egypt's ratification of treaties, despite the lack of democratic governance, provided a space for activists and feminists to advance and use the rule of law and to contest state violations of rights.

That said, human rights as law shapes, on the one hand, the messy interface between international law and domestic politics and, on the other, that between the state and its citizens. The mainstream approach to legal aspect and domestic politics of international human rights is the process through which rights-holders struggle to advance or elucidate the denial of rights they possess. Such human rights activism takes place within the legal framework, which critical voices argue is a top-down process of static subjects' aspiration for protection of human rights as objects from above. The main concern for human rights is thus the question of implementation, in which the state plays the central role in realization. James Ingram (2008) views this as a problematic paradox, since each individual's entitled right to protection from violations by the sovereign state depends on the state's superior power. In addition to this problematic vertical relation between rights-bearers and the duty-bearers, while movements, activists, and individuals may have improved chances for making demands and pressing governments to comply with international norms and principles through reformed laws and policies, they do so within existing preconditions of legal and social frameworks. Given the circumstances for realizing or advancing rights, McNeilly (2017) argues that human rights,

perceived as a relation of objects and subjects, engaging in or claiming certain rights, predates the practice and situations do not necessarily change through human rights activism.

In her often-cited article, "The Most We Can Hope For," Wendy Brown (2004) further suggests that the human rights paradigm promotes the depolitization of rights since it excludes and displaces alternative routes to justice and equality. Since rights are not simply rules and defenses against power, but can themselves become tactics and vehicles of governance and domination, the existence of human rights, she claims, does not necessarily decrease the overall power and reach of the state. Instead, in the promise to protect individuals from suffering, human rights produces a specific subject with particular needs of protection. However, Brown's critique goes hand in hand with her general skepticism of law as primary source for diminishing unjust power relations. Brown (2002) argues that politics through legalism is unlikely to foster open-ended and polyvocal discussions about how we structure life regarding what we value, what we should prohibit, and what is collectively possible. In turn, this pre-empts our explorations of the constitutive causes of oppression or injury and thereby means to lose opportunities to "address at a more fundamental, or at least far-reaching, level various troubling conditions which appear to require redress" (Brown & Halley, 2002, p. 20).

Relating human rights as law to this study's primary focus, (i.e., what function human rights have and what they do), I believe it is vital to situate the above critique in every particular political context in which human rights plays a part in activism. My aim is not to denounce the critique, or suggest that we replace human rights as law with another approach. Instead, I want to highlight the need to closely investigate the function of human rights as law in the specific context of post-2011 Egypt. Forming a new regime included erasing the legal legacy of the old one. A new constitution and reformed domestic laws were both central to the revolution's demands. Women's rights activists' engagement in the formal legal process was thus inevitable, based on their goal of creating a gendered constitution and future state, which Article 1 explores.

However, as Article 2 reveals, legal activism has other functions, too. When Egypt's political climate became oppressive again after 2013, groups and NGOs, which, for several years, had engaged in contentious political action were forced to return to the traditional NGO work of legal advocacy and report writing. The activists interviewed in Article 2 provide nuance to the presumed static relationship between law, rights, activism, and politics. In repressive states, legal activism, debating, and advocating legal reforms can have similar effects to direct action in other societies. My study suggests that one of the

reasons activists engaged in legal activism is because it was perceived as a low-risk activism. This means that activists have enough motivation to act against the law considering the material and social rewards and the relatively low costs in terms of threats from the security. Some of these rewards are relatively clear, since the Egyptian government reformed the penal code, criminalized sexual harassment, and initiated a national strategy against violence against women, all of which feminist activists view as results of their vocal feminist demands. In other words, when all other channels for resisting or challenging the present situation are closed or highly restricted, legal activism gains a particular status among activists. Replicating the amendments of the PSL in Egypt during the second half of 2000s, Diane Singerman (2004, p. 170) emphasizes legal activism's crucial impact in authoritarian contexts. She argues that "resisting political authority on its own terms and ground can offer greater protection and legitimacy to political activists, particularly in contexts where authoritarian policies and violence constrain many varieties of 'normal' politics."

One can also conceive of legal activism as a performative practice. Karen Zivi (2012) suggests that rights-claiming does much more than aiming for a particular legal outcome, but is a practice of changing the status quo by opposing the very meaning and possibility of personhood. Her understanding of law and rights-claiming is in stark contrast to Brown's view that rights-claiming excludes alternatives public debates about injustices and marginalization. Zivi argues that rights-claiming is a contestatory practice that opens up discussions and debates about the boundaries regarding who is eligible or not, included or not, in political communities. The legal activism to criminalize sexual harassment in Egypt generated such debates. A claim for certain rights is often one piece of a wider public debate, and in Egypt, women's bodily integrity in relation to sexual harassment was a daily public concern for many years. Activists proclaim that advocating for legal reforms generated internal and public debates beyond the codification of specific articles and defining identity categories. It posed significant questions about women's bodily integrity, the public–private division, and engaged with religious discourses and different traditions of interpreting religious texts.

While I am convinced that critique of human rights as law is valuable for remaining vigilant regarding tendency to prevent engagement in non-legislative forms of activism or maintain awareness of sovereign powers' (mis)use of law, human rights as law should be perceived as neither the only culprit nor the exclusive solution to gender injustice. Nevertheless, sometimes, it is the only available instrument to use to create any form of societal change. This study reveals that the legal perspective is only one way to approach human

rights, if we want to analyze its function and role in activism on behalf of women's rights, particularly if we look at authoritarian or transitional contexts. Legal activism drawing on human rights as legal norms and principles is entangled with cultural, historical, and religious references, which all are used strategically to obtain legitimacy (Al Sharmani, 2013). Mariz Tadros' (2016) research on Egyptian activism against FGM reveals that activists carefully navigate the time, place, and current political discourse in deciding when and how international treaties work or do not work in advocacy and consciousness-raising activism. The following section explores human rights as language, through which international norms and principles are translated into local ideas of justice and rights.

Human Rights as Language

The overarching argument of this study is that to capture the multiple functions human rights had in Egyptian women's rights activism after 2011, we cannot analytically approach human rights from one perspective only but must recognize that human rights is integrated into many forms of activism and plays multiple roles. In addition to the idea of human rights as law, the second dimension in this study is human rights' function as language. Again, I am not interested in proclaiming what human rights is, but in investigating what human rights do as language.

In Article 4, human rights as language is explicit in activists' attempts to challenge and reframe concepts and language around sexual violence and thus expand the definitions of what constitutes a violation of women's rights. Framing and conceptualizing sexual violence in new ways was a practice aimed at transforming social, cultural, and legal discourses. Activism combatted the language of sexual violence on several levels. For example, activists expended considerable effort to make women themselves speak of and testify about their experiences, to demystify assaults, and remove the shame and blame from survivors. Moreover, activists' tireless debate in the national media and on their platforms further challenged the prevalent victim-blaming discourse and misconceptions around sexual violence. Legally, the activists sought to influence how sexual violence and harassment were defined in the reformed penal code, which eventually criminalized sexual harassment in 2014. A central issue was broadening the definition of rape to include fingers and sharp objects, which were common in attacks at the time. Thus, human

rights as language functioned as a resource to challenge the discursive language pertaining to sexual violence.

The function that human rights as language had in post-revolutionary Egypt conforms to previous research demonstrating that activists are the active interlocutors in framing and translating international global norms found in human rights as a strategy in their local activism (Levitt & Merry, 2009; Madsen, 2018; McNeilly, 2017; Merry, 2006; Zwingel, 2016). Scholarly work exploring how activists use translation to gain resonance in legal, social, and cultural spheres recognizes that human rights practice is complex and diverse and pursued variously according to time, place, and context. Given that particular political, historical, and cultural conjunctures condition every context, activists who seek to advance human rights must carefully navigate their surrounding landscape. Human rights as language facilitates an exploration of the process of a conversation between the global and the local with the starting point that to reach contextual legitimation and cultural resonance, human rights must be translated (e.g., An-Na'im, 2000; Lewitt & Merry, 2011; Madsen, 2018; Merry, 2006; Zwingel, 2016).

Socially and culturally, the practice of human rights as language changes attitudes, raises awareness, and challenges prevailing conceptual understandings of what should be considered and defined as a right issue. Women's movements have been engaged in this transformation for decades, not least in defining various forms of violence against women, such as rape. When women begin to speak of a problem in terms of rights, not just as a challenge of marriage or the expression of male sexual drive, they also identify themselves as subjects whose rights to bodily integrity are violated. To appreciate human rights as a driving force in changing language, norms, and discourses and its potential for creating new subject positions is to identify human rights as something other than what women have or do not have in various contexts. Human rights thus moves beyond the legal approach of static subjects' aspirations for human rights as objects, as I discussed in the previous section. Instead, human rights as language changes people's perception of themselves and the world around them.

However, these changes are complex processes, not least when the norms and discourses surrounding a concept or definition are far from the principles on which human rights rest. In these processes, women's rights activists bridge the differences between the international language of rights and local norms. In Sally Engle Merry's (2006) distinctive research, she reveals how this translation process, which she calls vernacularizatio, works:

> Instead of simply applying human rights ideas as articulated in international law and conventions to local situations, the leaders and staff in the organizations we studied redefined and adapted these ideas to easier to understand and use. They modified aspects of women's human rights so that they were comprehensible and relevant. Vernacularization on the ground is a process of creating meaning by connecting, in various ways, global discourses with local social justice ideologies within the context of a particular organizational style and ethos. (Levitt et al., 2012, p. 12)

Women's NGOs, activists, and movements are the translators of international rights language. These actors frame and inject meaning into human rights to create resonance in a specific context. Translating the language of human rights occurs around the global, but faces different challenges in different locations. Merry (2006) argues that human rights originates in Western discourse, where norms and values of individuality, secularism, and capitalism have shaped its principles. These principles mirror women's human rights concerning bodily integrity, the autonomy of choice, and gender equality. In cultures and contexts where other values, such as collectivism, family, and religion, for instance, are dominant, the translators need to equilibrate between, sometimes-conflicting norms. Finding balance is challenging since, as Merry argues, the more resonance the activists create, the less accordance their work has with the original principles. The translators must thus navigate the multiple discourses in the international arena, as well as local political, social, and cultural norms around rights.

Merry's research focuses mainly on violence against women. In translating international human rights principles used to combat violence, activists challenge and transform the ways in which women understand and speak about violence as a significant step in creating awareness around conceptualizing norms and discourses. The concept of vernacularization has been extended to describe other processes. In Lynett J. Chua's (2015) research about gender activists in Myanmar, vernacularization describes how activists build a movement. Chua uses the concept of "the vernacular mobilization of human rights" to theorize the relation between human rights, social movements, and micro-level mobilization. To attract new activists and grow their movement, activists "reframe grievances to cultivate oppositional consciousness and a sense of efficacy among potential recruits, encouraging them to take up collective action" (Chua 2015, pp. 326–327).

Furthermore, translating international norms plays a vital part in legal activism. When new rights subject-position is available, this encourages women to resist violence and persuade the criminal system to take offenses more seriously

(Merry, 2006). In contexts where the legal system does not recognize violent acts against women as criminal, or institutions fail to protect women, Merry defines the *localizing of transnational knowledge* as transplanting institutions and programs that reform laws, national strategies, and other state institutions, such as police forces and medical professionals. Local women must then learn to articulate and frame their demands into rights language that legislatures and political leaders can hear (Merry, 2006). Human rights as language thus becomes a resource for creating improved chances for women to claim rights from legal systems and institutional programs and is primarily dependent on the relationship between right-holders and duty-bearers.

Corresponding to Chua's (2015) research on framing human rights mobilization, in the streets, Cairene activists framed sexual harassment in a domestically sensitive manner. They succeeded in making the issue relevant to ordinary people and in encouraging them to take a stand against sexual harassment. For example, activists asked people to imagine that victims could be their own daughters, sisters, or mothers to create empathy among people. Beyond this, they approached young men explaining the physical and psychological harm sexual violence causes to victims (Tadros, 2016).

Many studies confirm that activism against sexual violence in Egypt post-2011, was the main factor in creating a public debate through which victim-blaming rhetoric shifted towards a discourse about the responsibility of perpetrators to refrain from committing sexual assaults (Abdelmonem & Galán, 2017; Langohr, 2015; Skalli, 2014; Tadros, 2015, 2016). While several of these studies refer to this activism as a form of human rights struggle, there has been little effort to analyze what human rights activism means beyond referring to conventional human rights ideas of gender equality, citizenship, and empowerment. My study addresses this question by approaching the phenomenon through a human rights framework, revealing that human rights were integrated and used in activism in several ways far beyond a set of objects to which women are entitled. Human rights as language facilitates a transformation of women's internal conceptions of themselves. This process, along with erasing taboos about speaking out about personal experiences and moving shame and blame from survivors to perpetrators, has created a new climate, in which women speak up and testify about sexual violence more often than that they did in the past. One of my informants told me that, as of 2019, Egyptian women are now much more aware of and conscious that these acts by men are not acceptable and that women have the right to restitution.

Combatting sexual violence through demystifying it and challenging dominant definitions and women's internal conceptions of assaults constituted one mode

of activism. In the next section, I will develop the concept of human rights as *space-making* to analyze the contentious street activism against sexual violence within a human rights framework.

Human rights as Space-Making

In Article 4, I develop the concept of human rights as *space-making*, which is the third dimension of human rights activism in this study. Space-making analyzes street activism against sexual violence in Egypt's post-revolutionary period, which, in contrast to other activism, was devoid of verbal utterances or specific rights claims. Instead, it constitutes a bodily performative enactment of space through which activists become human rights subjects. Thus, space-making is not the same as creating a space in which a specific right is asserted (e.g., the right to protection from bodily harm). Aiming for the protection of certain rights conforms to the legal understanding of human rights activism, which requires a stable category of subjects. As I argue in Article 4, human rights as space-making is an enactment of space that people are denied and, through performative practice, challenges the preconditions to participating in politics, which allocate the boundaries of human rights subjects. This section discusses recent literature that theorizes human rights' radical and societal potential (Hoover, 2016; Lundberg & Strange, 2017; Ingram, 2008; McNeilly, 2017; Rancière, 2004; Reilly, 2011; Zivi, 2012), with which the concept of space-making aligns. Unifying this scholarship is an underpinning assumption that human rights is an activity, a practice that partly is realized among rights-bearers themselves, not primarily from above, as implementation, legal reforms, or international governance.

Anna Lundberg and Michael Strange (2017) write of a "critical turn" or "post-legalistic" reading of human rights that moves beyond the formal institutional practice or the use of law as a tool for advancing human rights. They investigate the complex relationship between human rights law and critical readings of human rights as a contestation that plays out in the everyday through rights-claiming. They draw in part on Karen Zivi's (2012) work on rights-claiming as a performative practice. All three scholars situate their theorizations of rights-claiming in understanding human rights as law simultaneously as rights-claiming is a contestatory political force. In the section on human rights as law, I noted that Zivi's contribution to the theorization of human rights-claiming stands in contrast to the view of law as only reinforcing state power or (re)creating static subject categories. Zivi (2012) argues that a performative approach to human rights moves us beyond

focusing on what rights are to focusing on what rights do, recognizing that human rights are not just an instrument to create certain legal outcomes, but also social and political practices. Zivi argues that the linguistic performativity of rights-claiming unleashes processes that change the status quo by opposing the very meaning and possibility of personhood. Rights-claiming is a claim to being rights-bearing individual, as a person:

> In calling myself human when human is premised upon my exclusion, I highlight that exclusion and suggest that the term can be understood in more inclusive ways. I challenge traditional understandings of the intelligible, helping shape and expand possible ways of thinking and being. (Zivi, 2012, p. 84)

Zivi recognizes that human rights provides an opportunity for the creation of new forms of political subjectivity. When people with restricted or no voices in a political community act as if they have a voice, their actions change the basic understandings and boundaries of that community. Change, then, is not primarily allocated from above, but also emerges from rights-bearers' activation of rights through linguistic performative utterances such as "I have a right to…"

In Andrea Karlsson's (2017) research on liberal intellectuals in Turkey and what she calls the infrastructure of human rights, she defines human rights-claiming as public speech and action. Karlsson's approach to human rights allows for an understanding of human rights as action that widen discursive spaces to permit new rights and identities to occur without engaging the state. Zivi and Karlsson's approaches resonate with James Ingram's (Ingram, 2008, p. 412) argument that human rights is only activated through rights-bearers' practice of them when they make efforts to expand conditions for participating in political life. In his insightful interpretation and development of Hannah Arendt's (1973) famous thinking around "the right to have rights," Ingram (2008, p. 411) concludes that human rights is a right to politics and thus always an available resource for rights-bearers:

> A rights claim can potentially be made by anyone, anywhere, anytime. Human rights have thus become a central site of the emancipatory logic of modern politics, an expression of how the principle of equal freedom cannot be contained with existing institutions or conceptions of right but rather invites its extension to new domains, settings, and scales.

Zivi and Ingram's contention that human rights are realized through rights-bearers' practice of them motivated me to develop a human rights framework

to investigate activism against sexual violence in post-revolutionary Egypt. Human rights as law or language falls short of exploring the function of human rights in activism that does not make explicit demands or contain verbal utterances. Therefore, I want to examine what alternative analyses a human rights framework might generate in contrast to, let us say, gender or feminist perspectives, which dominates the literature about this particular type of activism. In Article 4, I reveal that contentious street activism, in which activists secured public space for protesting and demonstrating women and physically rescued women from attacks with their own bodies, is not just activism for women's conventional rights to bodily integrity, but also activism that questions the boundaries of who is eligible to be an equal political subjects. I believe that the vigilant street activism against sexual violence precisely illustrates the activation of human rights that Ingram (2008) and others discuss.

In addition to Arendt, Ingram uses work by the French philosopher Jacques Rancière to develop his thesis on the political potential of human rights. Rancière (2004) considers human rights as a form of dissensus politics. In the article "The Rights of Man", he discusses how human rights subjects come into being through subjectivization, which is a process of disrupting the police. The police are for Rancière (1999, p. 29) more than the formal political organization of communities, but rather:

> an order of bodies that defines the allocation of ways of doing, ways of being and ways of saying, and sees that those bodies are assigned by named to a particular, place and task; it is an order of the visible and the sayable that sees that a particular activity is visible and another is not, that this speech is understood as discourse and another as noise.

According to the police, then, all parts of a particular community have assigned places and distribution of resources takes place between parts with already-assigned functions and identities. However, inherent in the police is always a wrongdoing. There will always be people who do not have qualifications, a voice or a place, or are allocated a place outside where they are. When people are not counted as part of the sum, do not have an assigned place (or are wrongly placed), or a recognized voice, act from the principle of equality, as if they possess it, new subjectivities occur. Rancière argues it is in the meeting between the police and the principle of equality – in processes of subjectivization – dissensus politics occur. My reading of Rancière is that his work resonates with Zivi's understanding of rights-claiming as a performative practice. When marginalized people who are not eligible for space or a voice, act as if they were, they become the subject of rights, which they are denied.

The approach to human rights as a performative practice challenges and reconfigures the boundaries of politics speaks to the argument of legal theorist Kathryn McNeilly's (2017). Her main one is that the political potential in human rights lies in their future. McNeilly builds her theory by moving away from human rights as objects towards the performative practice of human rights to come. McNeilly's take on performative actions is that they reveal and critique the limitations and restrictions of the everyday present and subsequently work towards a better future. Thus, performative actions connect the present to the future. Because the future is unpredictable and uncertain, it contains for radical potentials of human rights. In this sense, McNeilly's asserts that we will never reach the conclusion of human rights. Human rights emerged out of crisis and conflicts and will keep developing along with new crises. Since we do not know how human rights will be practiced or thought of in the future, McNeilly argues for human rights' non-conclusive character and finds an opportunity for radical politics that contest regimes of powers. However, McNeilly does not suggest that human rights to come can be anything, but their non-conclusive character leaves room for sustained critique of their current form and articulation within law and legal structures. She states that:

> activists can, and must, engage in an ongoing politics of human rights which does not use rights to advance the claims of those on the margins merely once, but in a continual and never-ending way, always attentive to the limits of current articulations of rights. (McNeilly, 2017, p. 158)

The scholarship above provides a background for understanding the various functions of human rights in different modes of activism that occurred in post-revolutionary Egypt. When a political context permits and when activists take advantages of that opportunity, human rights has the potential to have a contentious function. Through space-making, we can analyze activism within a human rights framework that elucidates alternative ways of understanding the relation between rights, subjectivity, and the conditions and boundaries of political communities.

Women's Movements and Human Rights

The second disciplinary field to which this study connects is research on women's movements and how they intersect with human rights. In the introduction, I called the collective striving for improving women's conditions in Egypt post-2011 a *women's rights movement*. The starting point for

exploring the women's rights movements in post-2011 Egypt is to recognize that in order to transform gender relations and advance women's conditions in the new state, activists were forced to engage with society on many different levels, approaching these with various strategies and modes of actions. For example, activism to stop sexual violence against women illustrates the difficulties of differentiating between street activism, improving legislation, and combatting oppressive discourse. In addition, groups differed in their analysis of the reasons behind sexual violence and why it was essential to combat it. However, underpinning all initiatives was their articulation of a commitment to a woman's right to safety and dignity in public space (Langohr, 2015). Working at another level, several initiatives emerged to integrate gender into the constitution and reformed official institutions to ensure women's rights. While these efforts did not mobilize the same number of activists as anti-sexual harassment activism, multiple groups and NGOs united in the common cause to work towards gendering the new state. While these initiatives differed significantly from streets activism against sexual violence, many activists and groups engaged on all levels.

Another crucial factor to emphasize is the collaboration between NGOs – traditionally not categorized as part of movements – and informal organized groups after 2011. While I do not intend to trivialize the tensions and differences between groups and NGOs, the conditions for collaboration were radically different from what they had been before 2011, which enabled many joint initiatives. While some youth-based groups actively distanced themselves from NGOs, many others worked together or in parallel with NGO actors (Tadros, 2016).

The NGOs in this study engaged in different activities after 2011 from what they had before. They switched from traditional NGO office work and began engaging in street-oriented strategies, including collecting information, testimonies from and conducting surveys with ordinary women to map experiences, visions, and hopes, and more importantly, create a narrative from women's perspectives. Nazra, a prevalent actor in my research, identifies itself as one that builds Egypt's feminist movement. However, Nazra carefully navigates the obstacles that its organizational structure and dependence on funding construct. For Nazra, the precondition for building a movement is public space. After 2011, Egypt experienced an improvement in the availability of public space, of which NGOs like Nazra took advantage. The Egyptian revolution thus demonstrates the non-static relation between NGOs, informal groups, the state, and collective action. While NGOs operate under certain organizational conditions that hinder large mobilizations and collective

actions, the political restrictions created by each context are a crucial factor in their ability to promote and work for social change.

This section explores and discusses the complex relation between human rights and women's movements. Just as local and transnational women's movements have used human rights within their causes, women's movements have influenced and shaped human rights. Human rights is a powerful instrument and rhetorical tool that can work to further women's movements, but it also can create domestic frictions and suspicions of women's movements grounded in discourses regarding authenticity, culture, religion, and the legitimation of human rights, especially in postcolonial states. The Western legacy of human rights is a constant factor delimiting activists' use of and references to human rights. These conflicting realities follow currents of globalization, international feminism, and domestic sociopolitical contexts.

The Role of Women's Movements in Human Rights Activism

A vital contribution of women's movements activists to the human rights regime is the insertion of gender analysis into the UN's human rights system. Friedman (2003) argues that, through intense debates, the transnational women's movement has advanced shared new understandings of global issues from a gender perspective. An explicit example is the endeavor to publicize the political aspects of seemingly intimate questions, such as sexual relations and autonomy, domestic abuse, and household labor. While conservative and religious leaders and people often dismissed these equality issues as private concerns, "women's rights advocates have found it both necessary and expedient to find allies across national borders, and develop common languages through which to promote their demands" (Friedman 2003, p. 316). Research indicates that transnational women's rights movements forge an understanding of how women's lives are shaped in contexts where the global and the local are integrated but nonetheless stratified (McLaughlin, 2004).

While gender activism in the UN system and in UN declarations traces back to its beginning in 1948, the following decades witnessed slow progress in changes to the status of women. It was not until the second wave of feminism and the International Women's Year in 1975 that a turning point for taking seriously the issue of women's rights emerged (Adami & Plesch, 2021), culminating in "women's rights as human rights" in the 1990s (McLaren, 2017). Since then, women's movements have advanced their work by demanding and integrating a gender perspective into new emerging global

questions regarding neoliberal politics, the environment, and sustainable development at UN conferences and other forums.

No one can discount women's rights advocates' advances in terms of allowing women to enter previously male-dominated realms and challenging the masculine field of international relations through theory and practice. Nor can we neglect the benefits that women's rights networking has provided local women's groups. At the same time, we must keep a critical eye on the ways in which transnational women's rights movements are used as analytical or practical tools. Arguably, the transnational women's rights movements stand for the myriad various definitions of women's rights throughout the world, which, in different forms, take their respective demands beyond communities and borders. The movement can also refer to the mobilization against the downsides of capitalism and globalization and studies on how macro-level economics impact women's lives on the micro-level (Mendoza, 2002; Moghadam, 2005; Mohanty, 2003).

However, a postcolonial perspective can be helpful for shedding light on the power structures within the movements themselves, elucidating how members of local women's movements distinctively analyzes the sources of women's oppression. Local women's movements have grown and developed under particular conditions and as a result of the different challenges women confront in various settings. In many postcolonial contexts, feminists and women's rights activists make complex analyses in regards to sources to discrimination against women, such as inequality and dependency between nations and Northern exploitations of and use of military interventions in countries in the Global South. Their focus on how to overcome gender oppression can therefore differ from local women's movement in countries without a history of colonization. Amrita Basu (2016) argues that by illuminating the different hardship women confront in different locales, we can question the myth that women's rights movement are more active in the Global North than in the Global South and the misconception that activists in the Global South draw their ideas and conceptions of women's rights from women in the Global North.

In confronting gender oppression, local women's movements draw from a range of frameworks and sources of knowledge. As Said, Meari, and Pratt (2015) argues, activists engaging in political processes after the Arab Spring who draw on the CEDAW likewise draw on national heritage and identities to make their claims and hence do not necessarily view local culture and global norms as an oxymoron. It is essential to study local women's movements' various uses and understanding of concepts such as culture, individualism, and

postcolonial exploitations as sites of contestation. However, I want to emphasize that it is necessary to recognize more nuances between different perspectives and critiques than a neatly line between North/South women's rights would suggest. Reproducing strict lines often backfires against local activists in the Global South for reproducing Northern powers and postcolonial hierarchies.

In addition to diverse analyses of gender oppression, research that examines the political culture at the large UN conferences and forums conveys the unjust power relation and conditions through which the international treaties have developed. For instance, Sally Engle Merry's (2006) anthropological study of several UN conferences on women's rights reveals that the Global North has far more resources for undertaking innovative programs, research, and attending meetings than the Global South does. These inequalities affect countries' abilities to prepare for meetings, send delegates, and thus make their voices heard. Dianne Otto's (1996) analysis of the Fourth World Conference for Women reveals that the meeting outcomes were defined as much by who was not attending as who was there. Some countries were not invited, and others chose not to attend, of which most were countries in the Global South. The results, she argues, rested on a formal equality model deriving from a male perspective that failed to promote fundamental change regarding questions, such as literacy and education, and downplayed the effects the free market and neoliberal currents have on women.

In the present study, these inequalities in power and resources are vital for understanding the role human rights play for activists in Egypt. This particularly requires addressing how activists are trapped in a dichotomous discourse of local versus Western and how they navigate between their domestic heritage and adherence to universal ideals. The human rights regime has certain imperialist imperatives that reproduce Western embedded racial, colonial, religious, and cultural prejudices and come short in struggles for economic and social rights (Cobbah, 1987; Massad, 2008; Mohanty, 2003; Mutua, 2001). To recognize this is not the same as rejecting that human rights also is a site for contestation (An-Na'im et al., 1995; Goodale, 2008; Goodale & Merry, 2007; Grewal & Kaplan, 2005; Orford, 2003; Slyomovics, 2005). As I have argued, in order to see how human rights may be reconfigured and rearticulated, without ignoring domestic and historical conjunctures, there is a need to contextualize the practice of women's human rights. The following section will explore the promise and perils of women's human rights in particular postcolonial contexts.

The Promise and Perils of Women's Human Rights in Postcolonial Contexts

Women's rights movements' endeavor to integrate gender into the human rights system has obvious implications for local projects. I have already explained the process of integrating international norms into domestic politics as a form of translation. In postcolonial societies, this translation often navigates several conflicting narratives and identity projects deriving from nation-building, state politics, and religious and cultural heritage. Women did not become conscious of the subordination and discrimination from which they suffer and begin engaging in efforts to improve their conditions with the arrival of international human rights norms. Women's movements against colonial powers and nation-building and the framing of citizenship throughout the postcolonial world have been vivid, diverse, and often successful. With the emerging international human rights, local women's rights projects integrated these ideas into their activism and new issues were placed on their agendas. However, the promise and perils of women's human rights practice cannot be correctly analyzed without considering the legacy of colonialism and prevalent Western power, imperialism, and economic domination. These powerful currents condition women's rights practice as much as they frame local activists' understanding of which struggles to pursue.

Much of the scholarly debate around women's human rights in postcolonial contexts circles around the legitimacy of human rights in the first place. Within these discussions, we can find arguments for human rights' promises as much as its perils. After the Egyptian revolution in 2011, advocates engaged in intensive debates regarding the legitimacy of women's human rights in scholarly circles. One event that attracted particular attention was a small gathering of women's rights activists on International Women's Day on March 8, 2011, only weeks after President Mubarak resigned. Cairo was a vibrant and contentious political scene, and on that day, there were thousands of people demonstrating there. Two large demonstrations were planned to deepen the revolutionary goals and visions, and to protest against military force and violence. A small group of feminist activists, professors, and gender studies students (some of whom I knew personally from my own Master's studies at the American University in Cairo (AUC)) arranged their own demonstration away from the larger ones to remind Egyptians not to forget women's rights. Hania Sholkamy (2011), an anthropology professor at AUC who was among the feminists in Tahrir recalls this day in an article on Open Democracy:

But despite this effervescence of protest and the openness with which Cairo has been blessed since the 11th of February when Hosny Mubarak resigned, the demonstrations by women commemorating the 8th of March, standing peacefully in Tahrir square, is the only demonstration that was attacked, harassed, ridiculed, shouted down and ultimately chased out of the square. No other demonstrators were heckled, told that their demands are unjustified, unnecessary, a threat to the gains of the revolution, out of time, out of place and/or the product of a 'foreign agenda'! No other demonstrators were told to 'go back home and to the kitchen'! No others were heckled for how they looked and what they were wearing.

Scholars analyzing the events point to several explanations for the severe attacks on the feminist group. Paul Amar (2011) believes the feminist identity of the protestors failed to frame and integrate their cause into the other political causes in Cairo at the moment. Tadros (2016) highlights the miscommunication between the feminists and passersby. For example, they used slogans such as "Down with Patriarchy," which, in Arabic, can be understood as a protest against the authority of their parents (Tadros, 2016, p. 161). Feminists' rhetoric and how they framed women's rights were thus alien to local narratives, which made them stand out. In a conversation between anthropologist Lila Abu-Lughod and Professor Rabab El-Mahdi, a leftist activist, El-Mahdi argues that the organizations and individuals who went to Tahrir Square that day were completely distanced from society. This is partly because International Women's Day has no resonance in Egyptian society, but also because the demands for nonspecific women's rights presume a set of rights that can be demanded without reference to context. She traces the protestors' alienation from society to organizations' traditional focus on legal rights without concerning themselves with the fact that most Egyptian women face other hardships that have nothing to do with legal texts or amendments (Abu-Lughod & El-Mahdi, 2011).

According to Hoda Elsadda, an English literature professor, dedicated feminist, founder of the organization, Women, Memory Forum, and deputy head of the leftist political party, Egyptian Democratic Party:

> They were accused of following western agendas, and of going against cultural values. These accusations are not new, and hark back to some entrenched perceptions that have roots in the colonial period when feminist activism was associated with western interventionist policies in the region. More significantly, they were insulted for being "the followers of Suzanne", Mubarak's wife, or in other words, accomplices of the decadent and corrupt Mubarak regime that the revolution forced out of power. (Elsadda 2011, p. 85)

My aim in bringing up this event and scholarly analysis of it is to demonstrate what it reveals about who are the presumed actors legitimizing women's human rights. The underlying assumption revealed here is that if these feminists could just have framed their cause in local understandings and argued for a change relevant to ordinary people, they would not have endured sexual assaults or been chased out of the square. This environment and debates speak to the relevance of my research's main argument that, to investigate the legitimacy of human rights, we need to look at local activism and the functions and role human rights play as activists seek to advance adherence to the norms and values of equality, justice, and dignity in political communities. The legitimacy of human rights does not lie in governments' ability or will to implement or protect human rights, but in the potential for being a constant resource for human rights-bearers to reconfigure the condition for politics and subjectivities. As Elsadda clearly conveys, in Egypt, women's human rights are closely tied to both colonial powers' civilizing mission and a corrupt, authoritarian regime's ambition to be a recognized global actor. Thus, there is a heavy burden on women's rights activists to show that human rights fulfill functions other than maintaining colonialism or the authoritarian regime. Of the activists I have met over the years, none is a supporter of either colonialism or authoritarianism, but they constantly endure accusations that they are.

The events that occurred on March 8 indicate at least three strands of debates around the legitimacy of women's human rights: the historical roots of human rights, postcolonialism, and the legacy of the old regime's top-down women's rights work. Further, all these strands intersect with prevalent dichotomies of Western vs. authentic and elitist vs. popular attributed to the struggle to achieve women's human rights, which pertain not only to Egyptian political settings, but also, in certain ways, to other postcolonial societies. Some scholars argue that in using a human rights framework, activists do not address the actual needs of ordinary women, since they focus their efforts on implementing international donors' wishes and according to Western ideals of human suffering and emancipation (Abu-Lughod, 2010; Cornwall & Molyneux, 2006; Grewal, 1999, 2005; Hodgson, 2011; Mutua, 2001). Dorothy Hodgson (2011) reveals, in her study of FGM in Tanzania among Maasai women, that international organizations and local feminist activists framed FGM as a cultural problem that violates women's human rights (in contrast to earlier framings of FGM mainly as a health issue) and measured Maasai women's progress toward modernization by the extent to which they had eradicated the practice. However, the Maasai women's activists did not view FGM as a cultural problem, but one of lack of power and voice in relation to international regimes of activism and donorship, as well as local elites.

Abu-Lughod (2010) spent several years studying "Muslim women's rights" from an anthropological perspective, arguing that activists and NGOs become caught up in international donor circuits, which caused them to become obsessed with legal rights convinced they are the only path to gender justice. Since women's lives are shaped and framed by global economic currents, a lack of resources, and occupation powers, they are not only oppressed legal subjects who can be freed through domestic legal reforms. Abu-Lughod argues that improved family laws do not affect the assumed receivers of activists' legal activism – the poor, uneducated women in villages and Bedouin communities. Indira Grewal (2005) is concerned that the focus on laws in women's rights activism is used to punish women on the margins instead of ensuring justice to women, which resonates with Abu-Lughod's argument. Grewal and Abu-Lughod's criticism further intersects in their contention that activists see themselves as superior and ethical, free people who speak on behalf of an imagined less free subject and are thus profoundly implicated in a spurious politics of "saving brown women from brown men" (Spivak, 1988).

These critical voices raise valid concerns from a solid foundation in both the theory and practice of human rights. I hold that in viewing human rights as those rights realized by the rights-bearers themselves, we need to be aware of who speaks on behalf of whom, and how. However, there is an underlying ontological assumption that human rights is always an arm extended by the West, imperialism, and universal ideals that reproduce the very colonial gestures they claim to disavow. More significantly, the criticism assumes local activists are incapable of analyzing their own contexts' structural reasons for gender oppression.

At the same time, a growing body of research problematizes the constant critique of local activists as imperialists with a Western agenda that excludes imagining an authentic path to empowerment and the emancipation of women (Amar, 2011; Elsadda, 2018; Lama Abu-Odeh, 2015; Reilly, 2011). This scholarship pays attention to how activists rearticulate and reconfigure international norms and values in postcolonial contexts, while under extreme pressure from state politics, domestic conservative actors, and academic scholars, which actors all use the same argument that human rights projects are alienated from society and imperialist. In an article on Open Democracy, Lama Abu-Odeh (2015) argues that this critique, mainly originating among diasporic US-based scholars, misses:

the rich history in the Arab world of public intellectuals interacting with western discourses, accepting them, modifying them, challenging them, reproducing them, strategically deploying them not merely as an intellectual exercise but in the course of acting as social agents engaged in their own local struggles.

In addition, she highlights the complicated lives and struggles of local activists in navigating families and their extended families before engaging in activism, as well as the Islamic-framed gender and sexuality phobia that influence social antagonism to the activists' cause. Furthermore, Abu-Odeh and Elsadda indicate which local powers benefit from the binary discourses produced by these academics. They agree that these advantage conservative religious actors and nationalist authoritarian regimes. There is an undeniable affinity between the anti-imperialist line, "made in the USA," and the local political Islamist and nationalist positions that are antagonistic to the politics of gender and sexuality (Abu-Odeh, 2015).

My experience from studying feminist NGOs in Egypt is that local activists are deeply aware of the above complexities of and the ambiguities in human rights activism. During interviews, I asked activists what they think about the criticism of, for instance, the projects to stop FGM. They often expressed frustration. One of my interviewees turned the criticism around, arguing that, if anything is colonial, it is presuming the acceptance of this practice among women from the Global South. "You in the West would never ever accept this for your own women, so how come we should? The criticism of us is, if anything, a sign of colonialism." Moreover, many NGOs, although investing significant effort in legal advocacy for various and often, sensible reasons, work on several fronts besides law, including increasing political consciousness among women. For these NGOs, consciousness is an end in itself and not just a means to legal empowerment. The increase in political consciousness is explicit in post-revolutionary Egypt, in which feminist voices have become louder than they were before the revolution and are actually heard, not least when they dare to speak up against sexual violence (Elsadda, 2018).

Several studies from postcolonial contexts confirm that local NGOs and organizations, while drawing on international human rights norms and values, may collaborate with local religious leaders and scholars in attempts to imbricate different and sometimes conflicting norm systems (Farag, 2021; Merry, 2006; Ong, 1996; Sundkvist, 2020), or to perform a fundamental analysis of class, gender, and state politics (Amar, 2011). Other scholars make visible projects and movements that illustrate that women's human rights is a

powerful resource, producing "a gendered local vernacular of rights talk" accessible to both men and women (Stephen, 2011, p. 161) and that rights discourses can be redefined and adapted "as a tactic for subaltern self-actualization" (Vargas, 2012, p. 3). In Nicole Nickersson's (2020) study of the One Million Signature Campaign in Iran, she argues that the campaign was neither an imperialist project forcing Western ideas on a society completely distanced from these nor an entirely indigenous movement with no connection to international human rights. International women's rights are supported in Iran because they correspond to people's everyday values. Human rights provided local activists a vocabulary and tool for fighting for something that already had resonance in their local context.

My take on these discussions is that women's rights activism is not one way or the other. I am not interested in evaluating different forms of activism as more or less successful, elitist or authentic, or exterior to or grounded in society. The post-revolutionary context is an excellent example of the need to approach women's rights on several fronts, and I believe the many different forms of activism can complement each other. While some of these initiatives may seem distanced from society, the activists' ambition may not be to achieve immediate resonance among people. This study offers an opportunity to debunk the dichotomies so often reproduced in analyses of women's human rights practices in postcolonial settings, without downplaying the necessary inquiries into the fault lines between the aspirations of these practices and their diverse realities. So far, I have argued that a precondition for such endeavor is to move beyond a focus on human rights as a legal project and to recognize the political potential of human rights as a powerful resource to human rights-bearers in questioning the boundaries regarding who is constituted as the subject of human rights, both inside and outside of state policies. Further, indispensable to my project is to think deeply about what forms of mobilization and action for change are possible in authoritarian and transitional contexts. The revolution in Egypt opened up many opportunities, which promoted new vibrant and multiple forms of activism.

In the next section, I engage in the third research field to which this study connects – social movements in authoritarian and transitional contexts. Given the fluctuation in Egypt's political landscape since 2011, social movement theory is necessary for understanding activists' strategic choices, reasoning through their modes of action, and examining their sources of motivation for sustaining activism during different political periods.

Social Movement Theory in Authoritarian and Transitional Contexts

In this study, social movement theory (SMT) is necessary for comprehending and analyzing the different modes of practices and factors that motivated activists during specific periods. Specifically, in Article 2, I apply SMT to activists' balancing of costs and benefits in their choices of forms of activism in order to nuance discussions of legal activism as reproducing state power and excluding alternative actions for social change. In Article 3, I use Jane Mansbridge's (2001) concept of oppositional consciousness to analyze the different stages of feminists' decisions, despite an oppressive political climate and fragmented movement, to sustain their activism against sexual violence. Here, I bring this theoretical framework to bear on social movements in authoritarian contexts and the growing body of literature using this framework in the Egyptian context.

From Consciousness to Action

SMT is a broad, comprehensive theoretical framework consisting of multiple analytical tools that explain the roots, causes, and modes of collective actions. While some theories explain the process of *how* collective action and social movements emerge, develop, and sustain themselves in political contexts, others focus on *why* such movements occur. In relation to the Egyptian revolution, including Egyptian activism against sexual violence, the main focus in the literature has been on the *how*. In contrast, I explore the *why* by investigating young feminists' development of an oppositional consciousness with relation to Mansbridge conceptualization of the same.

In exploring how collective action and social movements emerge, develop, and sustain themselves, Tarrow (2011) argues that contentious action is a response to changes in political opportunities and threats. When collectives of people succeed in basing action on dense social networks and effective structures and cultural frames, they can sustain themselves, even with powerful opponents. However, as Tarrow argues, the most vital aspect of collective action is how people are triggered by the ebb and flow of political struggle. Tarrow's framework thus combines resource mobilization and political process approaches. Resource mobilization theory focuses on the resource capacity of states and their challengers and assumes that social movements are rational responses to conflicting interests and injustices (Tilly, 2017). This approach

looks at the question of participation based on cost-benefit calculations. The political process approach includes political opportunity structures, mobilizing structures, and framing processes. These explain how movements pursue strategies according to a particular set of variables, informal, and formal collective instruments, through which people mobilize and engage in collective action, and the framing process through which collective actions negotiate the meaning of mobilization.

In Jumet's (2017) research on the Egyptian revolution, he mainly uses the political opportunity structure to explore how Egyptians became revolutionaries. Although he provides as a background peoples' disappointment and grievances with the Mubarak regime's corrupt economic and security politics leading up to the events of 2011, he focuses less on *why* individual internal processes of constituting political consciousness sparking the decision to act out against defined injustices. The background of grievance and disappointment does little to explain the why because even in those instances when resources are present and where appropriate structural conditions exist, many oppressed groups do not coalesce social movements or uprisings. Rather, Jumet's work "explored how the interplay of political opportunity structures, mobilizing structures, and framing processes affected decisions to protest or not protest. It also examined the role of emotions in ordering preferences in the decision-making process" (2017, p. 215). Beinin and Vairel (2013) illustrate through their edited volume on mobilization and contestation in the Middle East that SMT has little to offer in terms of understanding various movements in the region before 2011. In analyzing the history of the Egyptian labor movement and its participation in the uprising 2011, Beinin and Duboc (2013) argue that its development contradicts the traditional SMT approach to threats and opportunities, resources and network structures, which are used to explain how movements emerge and mobilize. Tadros (2016) uses the political opportunity model and "spin-off" approach to explore the dynamics and motives propelling activism against sexual violence, explaining, for example, men's engagement in the emerging youth-based activism.

Concluding, the focus on *why* has gained little attention in the research on Egypt. While I do not consider the question of *how* unimportant, my focus here is on *why* young feminists came to define their situation as unjust and *why* they decided to act out against particular injustices. To me, the question of *why* precede the *how*, which I believe is significant to understanding potential future political mobilizations in Egypt's repressive context. In order to explore the *why*, I draw on Jane Mansbridge's (2001) four stages of what she argues are the subjective roots of collective actions: identifying with other members of an oppressed group; identifying injustices which that group suffers; resisting

those injustices; and recognizing that the group would benefit from ending the identified injustices. Oppositional consciousness is not static, and its elements do not develop in a particular order. It draws from a mix of cognitive and emotive processes that are informed by our social world, particular moments in history, political opportunities (Tarrow, 2011), mobilizing structures (McAdam et al., 1996), and self-understanding (Mansbridge, 2001).

In Article 4, I use Mansbridge's four elements to explore young feminists' motivations for sustaining activism against sexual violence seven years after the revolution. At that particular moment, identifying as a young feminist with experiences of sexual harassment became vital to their internal development of an oppositional consciousness against a defined issue. However, this identity was not the basis for the earlier activism against sexual violence. As Tadros (2016) suggests, the motive for acting out against sexual violence was instead based on the common idea of a just society for all and women's rights to bodily integrity and to public space free from assaults. To explain the four elements of young feminists' oppositional consciousness, I argue that two factors primarily facilitated the process: collective memory of revolutionary achievements and shared emotions of disappointment. The first is analyzed using Timothy Gongaware's (2011) concept of keying the past to the present to explain how movements maintain continuity, despite radically new circumstances and structures. He argues that groups may use collective memory associations by keying (i.e., transcribing) newly developed notions of collective identity elements into ones that are continuous with previously shared notions (Gongaware, 2011, p. 45).

The second factor – emotions – has gained significant focus in studies of the Egyptian revolution, mainly in terms of explaining how collective actions developed and sustained themselves over the years. Pearlman (2013) investigates emotions as microfoundations for activists' choice to rebel or resign, arguing that different sets of emotions can shift individuals toward one or the other action. Jumet (2017) calls the emotion that motivated people to protest a *post-revolutionary emboldening effect*, founded on the belief that the power of the people can be greater than the people in power. Like Pearlman, who argues that emotions that make people choose to participate in protests include anger, joy, and pride, Jumet asserts that emotions of success, power, and anger empowered people to continue their opposition in the periods after Mubarak resigned. In contrast, Allam (2018) argues that negative post-revolutionary emotions of like disappointment can also spur mobilization and do not necessarily result in inaction. In her research on disappointment among female activists, she claims that "female activists maintained their activism and the

memory of resistance through participation in creative social and artistic initiatives, engagement in critical debates over long-standing taboos, and reformulation of their vocabulary and forms of activism" (Allam, 2018, p. 144). In my own research, disappointment over intra-movement fragmentation and senses of betrayal was a motivating force among young feminists for sustaining activism against sexual violence. However, following Mansbridge, regardless of the factor upon which oppositional consciousness draws, for developing into action, activists require further motivation and incentives so that the material, social, and self-enhancing rewards of such action are high and the costs low (Mansbridge, 2001, p. 244). Activists' balancing of rewards and costs is thus more in line with SMT's *how*-approach than with the question of *why*. In this study, this balancing circles around questions of opportunities and constraints.

Opportunities and Constraints

From 2011 to the end of 2013, people continued to protest and contest the ruling powers in Egypt. This period is understood as cycles of contention during which the Egyptian people's earlier success (removing Mubarak from power) maintained their motivations to engage in further contestation against the regime. Both the protestors themselves and the regime created opportunities for continuing these protests. Charles Tilly (2010) argues that the outcome of any struggles alters the positions of the protestors, which creates new opportunities for contestation. Jumet (2017) suggests that the emotions that spread among protestors, as a result of successfully removing Mubarak, acted as a *post-revolutionary emboldening effect*. The power balance between protestors and the military was disrupted and people felt strengthened by their achievements. However, as Tilly (2010) also states, regimes create political opportunities and threats, and any change in the environment produces alterations in contention. Social movements' repertoires of disputes are thus shaped by the regime they confront, and when these repertoires change, so do the regimes' responses (McAdam et al., 2001).

When el-Sisi was elected president in 2014, the regime's strategy shifted radically, and control of the public space, political activism, and dissidents became stricter than it had been. While the regimes' shifting surveillance politics is not the only explanation for the reduction in contentious action, it certainly influenced the opportunities for continuing protests. When I visited Cairo in 2015, there was a clear shift in how women's rights activists operated. My interviewees expressed great frustration over the new restrictions on public space and complained that their work, again, was traditional NGO work. The

hope and vision that the future would look different were not gone. However, to be unable to mobilize in the streets and to be forced to pay constant attention to the security apparatus was somewhat depressing.

Johnston (2006) points out that, in authoritarian regimes, the state plays a more pronounced role in influencing movement strategy and tactics than it does democratic contexts. Activists who mobilize under oppressive conditions avoid, for example, strategies such as marches and open, structured associations. However, as Johnston suggests, during periods when repression and state surveillance are intense, activism can still exist but has to "get small" to be under the radar of the state. He calls these periods *resistant episodes* that are, in contrast to open contentious periods, filled with small actions of little contentious nature, such as book clubs, activities at universities, and study groups. Lynette J. Chua (2012) explores how the gay movement in Singapore used pragmatic resistance as strategic adaptation in their activism. Their approach was to closely read the signs of the environment of social control of public protest and then adapt and change their strategies accordingly to a "strategic dance," which they cautiously refined and adapted. Chua (2012, p. 722) reveals that the gay movement "has an eye on survival, and avoids direct confrontation with the state, or being seen as a threat to existing arrangements of power." One of the strategic, even if it was rare, was to reform the law related to civil and political rights.

The theoretical framework of pragmatic resistance is helpful for understanding the conditions for human rights activism and, in particular, the various meanings of legal activism in women's rights activism in Egypt. It provides a nuanced perspective of the function of human rights as law in authoritarian contexts because it draws attention to legal activism as a strategy for avoiding state repression. The three-dimensional human rights framework I outlined above must be situated in the specific context of opportunities and constraints to fully comprehend when and why various approaches to human rights are available and pursued.

Article 2 explores the shifts in how activists pursued women's rights after 2013, compared to beforehand, which conform to the "getting small" strategy in order to ensure survival. The social control of activists was extreme and hundreds of dissidents were detained, prosecuted, tortured, and even killed during the regime's frequent raids on potential threats. The rewards of confronting the regime under such circumstances were not enough, comparing to the risks. However, while the post-2013 political context imposed significant restraints on earlier activism, it opened up opportunities for other forms of activism. Some of the youth-led activist groups working to stop sexual

violence against women moved their activities to university settings. Others recognized that certain Egyptian governorates had less strict control over street activities, of which they took advantage (Tadros, 2016). During my fieldwork in 2015, activists revealed that book clubs and informal meetings were still running and traditional NGOs returned to office work, one aspect of which was legal activism. Another focus among activists during this time period was evaluating earlier collaborations and modes of activism. Turning to law was, according to my interviewees, partly a strategic move, since the regime perceived this form of activism as less threatening than others. Other activists considered legal activism to always be part of women's rights work. However, they acknowledged that during certain periods, it is the only way of moving towards change. The activists' legal work consisted mostly of monitoring national policies and authorities to ascertain that they followed the new constitution and that the law on sexual harassment was correctly used and enforced. Thus, in this study, SMT contextualizes the use of legal activism in an authoritarian setting, since it facilitates a theorization of the condition for opportunities and constraints made possible during different post-revolutionary periods.

In this chapter, I have developed a three-dimensional framework for exploring human rights activism in the transitional context of Egypt. To perceive human rights as law, language, and space-making, I argue, is necessary to understand the ways in which human rights activism is practiced in unstable political settings. As I have shown in this chapter, the three-dimensional framework emerges from my empirical studies. While it builds on earlier human rights theories, I expand and imbricate these theories in order to explore the complex reality of what functions and roles different modes of activism provide human rights. As a result, I contribute to human rights theory by providing an analytical tool for investigating activism in contexts beyond Egypt. Further, I argue that human rights activism needs to be situated in the context of opportunities and constraints, in which SMT complements the three-dimensional framework. Therefore, this chapter reveals the significance of studying ways of engaging in human rights activism in particular contexts and historical moments for developing human rights theory in general.

However, studying ways of engaging activism during political turmoil, state repression, and unstable realities is an endeavor that requires well-suited methods and ethical considerations. In the next chapter, I share my processes for conducting and processing data and producing knowledge by discussing the ways in which I navigated Egypt's changing political landscape as my research site.

3. Producing Situated Knowledge in Rapidly Changing Times

> The speed of events and endless changes are such that you can barely catch your breath. How can we create a pretense of "normalcy" in "abnormal" times, when the prospects of a new kind of normalcy recede ever more into the future? How to write when there is a fundamental and pervasive sense of confusion, and an inability to fathom what is taking place? How to conduct "social analysis" when the contingent is what so strongly asserts itself? (Sabea, 2013)[3]

Professor Hanan Sabea's words concerning the difficulties of analyzing the events emerging in Egypt in 2011 capture many of the frustrations and feelings I felt connected with completing this study. The process of collecting and making sense of material and producing knowledge about a social and political reality in constant movement, inflected with hope, visions, tensions, violence and emotions (both in my interlocutors and myself) has been, to refer to John Law (2004), messy. There are many reasons for this. Events, issues, formal, and informal trajectories emerged and developed so fast during the years after the uprising that it was difficult to sense what was worth paying attention to or what I, as a researcher, could explore within limited inquiries and the scope of a dissertation. A question that one day seemed like the primary issue for women's rights activists and feminists could, the next day, change due to a sudden political development that, in turn, developed into several correlated struggles. In addition, the research field was, at times, too dangerous for activists and for me as a researcher, resulting in cancelled research visits and interviews. When I finally made it to the field or was able to conduct an interview, new tensions and trajectories had occurred, and what at first had seemed like a stable women's movement was torn in pieces.

Moreover, as a privileged white woman from a highly ranked Western university, I conducted research in a postcolonial context about rights that I

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[3] https://culanth.org/fieldsights/a-time-out-of-time-tahrir-the-political-and-the-imaginary-in-the-context-of-the-january-25th-revolution-in-egypt

take for granted, being deprived of which I could never imagine. My interviewees often expressed frustration with academics from the West coming to Egypt for research bearing a colonial assumption that Arab women were passive and oppressed, without any previous knowledge of or acquaintance with women's historical political activity in the country. Local researchers expressed frustration over the international academic division of labor, pointing to "academic tourists" coming to Egypt to research their revolution and treating local academics as service providers. Thus, my research site and subject are deeply rooted in tensions between the Global North and Global South. Western analysis of the revolution confirms that these tensions remain. Consequently, together with Egyptians' overarching and understandable skepticism of Western academics, my self-critique and hesitations regarding my research motives have been constant throughout the research and analysis processes and have required careful methodological consideration in order not to reproduce dichotomies and prejudices.

Unpredictability and ambiguities are an inevitable ingredient of many aspects of fieldwork. In more stable contexts, devoid of threats of violence and political turmoil, there is always a certain amount of unpredictability when meeting interviewees and study participants, given that it is difficult to predict how they will react to and respond to your intentions, focus, or questions. This requires researchers to be flexible with regards to research topics and questions (Kleinknecht et al., 2018), which has been a persistent element of this study. In a context such as post-2011 Cairo, there are, however, many more factors to navigate and circumvent as a researcher. The constant threat of repression that can cause a disruption in research (either because of participants' or my own security, or in terms of the research topic) requires continuous, careful assessments of ethical concerns and risks. Given that I was aware of the political situation, in contrast to research contexts in which political turmoil occurs suddenly, I could plan and adjust my research methods to evade potential study disruptions to some extent (Chambers, 2020). The overarching reality I had to keep in mind throughout my research was the growing political repression of and control over politically active people in Egypt and the constant threats with which they lived of being detained, tortured, or even killed. One of my informants today lives in exile in France, after being imprisoned for months in Egypt due to political activity. Another is banned from leaving the country. Central to every step of this study was therefore minimizing the potential harm my participants risked by interacting with me. In a nondemocratic society, the ethical principle of "do no harm" requires more careful navigation of the present situation than in a democratic context.

In addition to the negative effect of a context in constant flux or at risk of disruption, there are also a large number of positive dimensions of doing research in such an environment, such as emotions and visions for the future. Fieldwork in post-2011 Cairo consequently occurred in an uneven social climate, within which I became convinced that my feminist methodological approach facilitated my empirically capturing at least some part of the reality there, along with ethical deliberations and reflexivity.

In this chapter, I begin by presenting the actors and participants in this study. I then discuss the ethical and methodological considerations that confronted me in the years during which I produced the situated knowledge presented in the study.

Actors and Participants

The 16 participants in this study are a mix of NGO activists, other activists engaged in youth movements, and academics. Some are both academics, activists, as well as NGO members. Most of the activists who are middle-aged would be described as part of an elite feminist circle in Egypt, while the young activists developed their political consciousness during the revolution and have been engaged in informal groups and activities since then. Most of them are highly educated, and members of the English-speaking urban middle class. Two young feminists were at the time of our interview linked to the group Nazra. However, they also had experience with women's groups founded after the revolution. Another interviewee was at the time not tied to any particular group, but was the initiator of the groups Sawa, Bahia ya Masr, and Nefsi against sexual harassment – all youth groups established after the revolution. In addition to the participants listed below, I interviewed an Egyptian Ph.D. student living abroad, who was however involved in feminist activism in the country and I have been in email correspondence with the director of El-Nadeem.

Below, I provide a list of numbers of interviewees and their affiliated groups, followed by a description of the various groups and NGOs:

Nazra for Feminist Studies, four members, seven interviews in total, in 2013, 2015, 2019

Women and Memory Forum, two members, three interviews in total, in 2013, 2015, 2019

New Woman Foundation, two members, two interviews in total, in 2015

Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights, one member, one interview in 2015

Center for Egyptian Women Legal Assistance, one member, one interview in 2015

A Southern Women, one member, one interview in 2019

Revolutionary Socialists, two members, two interviews in 2015

Bahia Ya Masr, one former member, one interview in 2015

Ph.D. student interviewed in 2015

Nazra for Feminist Studies (Nazra) is grass-roots group Mozn Hassan founded in 2007, which aims to build a feminist movement around Egyptian women's daily issues and experiences. Nazra presents itself as "particularly interested in decentralized activism" ("Nazra for Feminist Studies", 215, p. 238). The group defend "women's human rights, combating sexual violence in male-structured spaces, supporting young women who enter formal politics, and making public spaces where women of different ideologies are safe." Further, Nazra produces research and documentation and encourages women to write their stories in their own voices. ("Nazra for Feminist Studies" 2015, p. 238)

The Women and Memory Forum (WMF), was founded in 1995 by a group of women academics, researchers, and activists concerned about the negative representations and perceptions of Arab women in the cultural sphere. On the organization's website, it states that "dominant cultural views and images of Arab women constitute a major stumbling block in the course of women's development and the attainment of their rights" (www.wmf.org.eg). Organization members have told me that they carefully monitor their activities to avoid giving the authorities reason to label the WMF a political group. The WMF initiated the WCWG, which also included lawyers and researchers from Nazra.

The New Woman Foundation (NWF) is an Egyptian feminist organization that "envisions a world free from all sorts of discrimination against human beings, women in general, and the most marginalized categories in particular with a specific focus on their economic and social rights" (www.nwrcegypt.org.eg).

 The Egyptian Initiative of Personal Rights (EIPR) is an independent human rights organization founded in 2002. The organization documents prison

conditions, police crackdowns against LGBTQ people, and state violations of the constitutionally protected freedom of religion and belief.

The Center for Egyptian Women Legal Assistance's (CEWLA) mission is to address violations of women's rights and enable women's legal, social, economic, and cultural rights (www.cewla.org). CEWLA pursues this mission through practical methods like promoting legal reforms and women's empowerment, and combating gender-based violence.

A Southern Freewomen (Ganoubia Hora Foundation) from the city Aswan is currently one of the most active young feminist groups in Upper Egypt. The group was initiated in 2012 when young women realized that they did not have equal roles and status in the revolution as their male peer activists. In addition to its gender perspective, the group fights from a marginalized community position outside the larger cities. In 2015, the group registered as a foundation at the Ministry of Social Solidarity.

El-Nadeem Center for Rehabilitation of the Victims of Violence (El-Nadeem) is the only center in Egypt to provide specialized support to the quickly increasing numbers of men and women who are victimized by torture and sexual violence in Egypt's prisons and detention centers. The organization documents the violations state actors perpetrate, publicizes the state's infringements of human rights, and provides psychological support to victims of torture.

Revolutionary Socialist has been operating in Egypt since 1990. The group was active in the emerging revolution in 2011, especially in mobilizing workers' activity in protests and strikes. Previously, the group provided active supporters to Egypt's labor movement and was critical of the IMF's neoliberal politics. It also engaged in Egypt's pro-Palestinian movement and the demonstrations against the invasion of Iraq in 2003. During the revolution, it took an active stand for the right of any group to demonstrate and strike and was the first to ally of the Islamists, traditionally its nemesis, and propagated the slogan: "with the Islamists sometimes . . . against the state all the time." (Hafez, 2013, p.105)

Bahia Ya Masr was established in 2012 to defend social justice issues and women's citizenship rights. It pursued its activism through graffiti, storytelling, and awareness-raising activities. It lobbied against the drafts of the new constitution and raised awareness of women's rights. It collaborated with other youth groups in activities to prevent sexual violence.

All the NGOs adopt the international terminology of human rights. They use the CEDAW as their main frame of reference, while also working closely with progressive religious scholars on gender issues.

The Egyptian regime intensified its crackdown on human rights and feminist groups and organizations after the revolution. In 2011, the interim government opened Case No. 173, also known as the "foreign funding case" in Mubarak's time, accusing some 40 NGOs of receiving illegal foreign funding. Many NGOs were also indicted for illegal activities. The security forces raided many organizations' offices to document their activities. Since then, the regime has detained and pressed charges against hundreds of NGO workers, of which several are banned from leaving the country and have had their assets frozen. Since 2016, Nazra and El-Nadeem have been shut down and are forbidden from engaging in any organizational work. As of this writing, EIPR was still operating, but under severe surveillance, and several of its directors had been detained or put on trial.

It is no coincidence which groups the security apparatus targets. The attacks are systematically mounted against Egyptian human rights and women's rights NGOs that have engaged in outspoken criticism of the regime and authoritarianism. Nadime Naber and Dalia Abd El-Hameed (2016), both anthropologists active in the Egyptian feminist movement, categorize feminist organizations in a way I follow. Nazra, El-Nadeem, and EIPR are defined as revolutionary feminist groups that are far more threatening to the state than, for example, the development feminist organizations and activists focusing on the less-politicized integration of gender issues into neoliberal politics in line with the regime's. As revolutionary feminist groups, they may be anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist, and anti-authoritarian, and assume that sexism, homophobia, and transphobia pervade the structures of state violence. They consciously work towards the revolutionary demands of freedom and justice and thus actively target the police and the corrupt state. Consequently, their analysis of gender issues is not isolated from the general authoritarian power sanctioned by Western powers and international political actors. In contrast, equal rights feminist organizations disaggregate gender oppression from the broader oppression operating in society and thus overlook state violence in their activism against sexism and gender violence (Naber & El-Hameed, 2016). They are hence not as threatening as the revolutionary feminists groups are. However, as Naber and El-Hameed clarify, while some organizations and groups are more severely attacked, most feminist NGOs are negatively affected by the regime's strict control of funding, which may be denied without explanation.

Ethics in a non-Democratic Context

The Egyptian regime's crackdown on and surveillance of politically active citizens have increased severely since 2013, when the military ousted elected President Mohamed Mursi and the anti-protest law was implemented. The surveillance became even stricter when el-Sisi was elected president in 2014. International organizations like Human Rights Watch estimate that around 40,000 Egyptians are imprisoned for political reasons. Moreover, since the second half of 2015, local human rights NGOs have reported an increasing number of forced disappearances. Amnesty International confirms this and reports that there were at least 17 cases of forced disappearances in 2016. Today, it is not just dangerous to be involved or active in political groups. To express criticism of the Egyptian regime can fall under the regime's definition of threatening national security and thus be a potential threat to personal security and wellbeing. In recent years, activists have been detained for posting videos on YouTube critiquing the regime. The political realities of conducting research in a highly repressive context required me to pay close attention to ethical and security considerations, to eliminate or at least minimizing the real risks of harm to research participants.

While human rights research is conducted in pursuit of a good cause, it often concerns sensitive issues and thus invariably involves groups of people whose lives are exposed to imminent risks of abuse or personal security (Ulrich, 2017). In this study, I have adhered to the ethical research principles of "do no harm," informed consent, and anonymity. The no-harm principle can analytically pertains to what one does to others, how one's actions affect others' wellbeing. The American Sociological Association (1999) urges sociologists to refrain from undertaking any activity, during which their personal circumstances may interfere with their professional work or lead to *harm* to a student, supervisee, human subject, client, colleague, or other person to whom they have a scientific, teaching, consulting, or other professional obligation. The Swedish Research Council's criteria for protecting the individual (individskyddskravet) states that research participants should be protected from harm or wrong either physical or psychological in nature.

Bryman (2008) rightfully asks what "harm" is in practice, suggesting that it entails several features: physical harm, harm to participants' development, loss of self-esteem, stress, and other forms of harm. Ulrich (2017) argues that researchers need to consider how to qualify harm and what types of obligations the no-harm principle entails in order operationalize the principle in research. Regarding the definition of harm, he argues that physical, mental or material

harm can be direct or indirect, immediate or long-term, intentional or unintentional (2017, p. 298). It has been difficult for me to forecast which harms or wrongs my research participants might risk and if these are immediate or more long-term. Therefore, it has been essential to have a broad definition of what harms entails and how and when harm might occur.

While the risk of physical harm is explicit in the Egyptian context, the physiological harm of stress resulting from participating in my study has been difficult to predict since it is highly individual. In addition, the conditions of the particular research site made me consider that my participants' situation could shift rapidly and radically. Although the security situation was perhaps less threatening when I was conducting fieldwork than it is now, repression could intensify and risks could change from one day to another. Consequently, I could not take for granted that the risk assessment I performed and the consent I received at one point in time would remain valid later on. Arne Wackenhut (2018, p. 248), who conducted research with Egyptian pro-democratic activists in the post-revolutionary period, notes that:

> Considering that it might be, given the political situation on the ground, impossible to completely eliminate such risks to research participants, it is all the more important that prospective interviewees can make an informed decision whether or not they want to volunteer their time and expertise.

In his navigation of the context of post-revolutionary Egypt, Wackenhut decided not to ask research participants to fill out a traditional informed consent form to avoid creating physical paperwork with personal details, thus minimizing the risks of harm. Instead, consent was collected through verbal agreement. The requirement to obtain voluntary, informed consent is widely conceived of as a means to empower research participants. It comprises "the right to be properly informed about research methods and aims; a right to freely determine the scope and nature of one's involvement; and, in a wider sense, a right to protect oneself against externally inflicted harm or risks of harm" (Ulrich, 2017, p. 206). However, Ulrich notes that the formal processes of consent does not always ensure that participants are fully empowered. Therefore, researchers should not see formal consent processes as a guarantee for eliminating direct or indirect elements of coercion, but should also consider other underlying ethical principles regarding respect for participants and problems that may arise in relation to communication.

The ways in which researchers chose to obtain consent must, in addition, be adjusted to the research context. Similar to Wackenhut, in this study, the standard procedure for attaining consent was verbal and asked at the beginning

of interviews. To ensure that every potential participant could make an informed decision whether or not to participate in the project, I was honest and detailed regarding my intentions and motives with the study during its recruitment stage. My previous years of living and studying in Cairo had provided me with a network of activists and at-the-time peer MA students. Hence, the recruitment process was a combination of reaching out to my established network and contacting new potential participants. My initial contact with potential interviewees who were not part of my network was usually through email. I began by identifying myself as an alumna of the AUC and referred to my familiarity with Egypt, including my experience doing fieldwork with a well-known women's rights NGO. Following this, I introduced my dissertation project and the aim of my current visit to Cairo. I informed the potential interviewees how I would use the interview material and offered to send out research questions in advance. I also included the contact details of a professor at AUC, who had been the supervisor of my MA thesis.

The reason I was transparent about my background and provided a reference was two-fold; first, I wanted to generate a sense of trust and reliability in my competence in conducting research, given the conditions and political context, and secondly, I wanted to thus increase the chance that people would feel secure and commit to participating. Important to note is that, since my potential participants included university professors, NGO activists, and activists from informal groups, these initial contact emails differed in content and style. However, information that their participation was strictly voluntary and that I would take all feasible measures to ensure their anonymity was standard. Several participants in this study were my already-established contacts. During my last fieldwork trip in 2019, I interviewed three young feminists whom I had not met nor spoken before they rang on my doorbell. The meeting was arranged by an activist whom I had interviewed each time I visited Cairo. She had provided them with information about my research. But, even so, it was essential that I stated to them the aims and motives of my research and informed them of my intention to ensure their safety and anonymity.

Another standard procedure I adopted was letting participants decide when and where interviews would take place. Consequently, interviews are conducted in cafes, NGO offices, at participants' homes, at my home, and at conferences or meetings. Before beginning the interview, I repeated the information I provided during our first contact to ascertain that they were fully aware of the meaning of participation. I asked if they would like their names or groups masked and if they would allow me to record the interview. None of the

participants asked to have their names or their affiliated groups anonymized. However, since completing fieldwork, the situation for some of the activists has changed and therefore I have followed up with these participants to ascertain that they have not changed their minds regarding their identities. Some expressed that it was important not to reveal any of the other group members' identities. In some cases, I could not reach the interviewees, and in those cases, I chose to conceal their identities.

Ethical concerns do not end when the interview ends, but continue to ensure that the goals, processes, and outcomes of research are not compromised or impeded (Wickramasinghe, 2009). Sometimes, when working with the interview material and analyzing the content, the final product turned out to be more sensitive than I had presumed. In such cases, I also chose to conceal my participants' identities. Doing so conforms to Ulrich's concern that formal consent cannot always predict the actual outcomes of participation.

Epistemology and Situated Knowledge

A vital and, at the same time, challenging objective in completing this study has been avoiding producing knowledge that emanates from a white privileged gaze. Reflecting on the political, moral and ethical responsibility that my choice of subject, material, research site, and historical moment demanded, I found that a combination of feminist and postcolonial research methodology was inevitable to this objective. In doing so, I depart from the positivist ideal of the detached, value-free scientist. I understand research and knowledge production as a political and situated process entrenched in power structures along gender, ethnical, racial, and religious lines, which I, through my research, am motivated to challenge. In this sense, my methodology can be viewed as a form of feminist and postcolonial activist research.

However, the ideals of positionality, self-reflexivity, and questioning of the existence of the value-neutral scientist have also inspired core principles in human rights methods. Given that human rights research often deals with vulnerable informants in politically sensitive settings, recent literature on human rights methods emphasizes the need for acknowledging the researcher's positionality and how this effects the research (McConnell & Smith, 2018). Accordingly, my feminist, postcolonial methodology is not in any sense detached, but rather integral to human rights research.

Central to feminist research and methodology are undermining the myth of the objective researcher who produces nothing but knowledge from the imagined rational, white, Western male perspective. Feminist research scrutinizes modernity's idealized male researcher and:

> his propensity for grand narratives that presume to provide a universally valid official history and to be able to predict the future from a supposedly culture-free perspective; his assumptions about an innocent core self which exists prior to its encounter with culture; and the various ontological, epistemological, political, and ethical theories and practices which flow from this familiar discourse. (Harding et. al., 2008, p. 11).

Arguments of objectivity marginalize knowledge production by and about people of other sexes, genders, races, classes, and cultures, or simply researched from a strict, narrow perspective. Consequently, people on the margins are exploited, and the research results are sexist and racist, reproducing the power and agenda of white males. To feminist, the solution is not to adhere to more rigorous standards of objectivity and methodology, since these are unable to fully comprehend the limitations of dominant conceptions and methods (Harding, 1992). For feminist researchers, the way out is "strong reflexivity," which requires viewing reality and society from marginalized people's perspectives. "This is because the experience and lives of marginalized peoples, as they understand them, provide particularly significant problems to be explained or research agenda" (Harding, 1992, p. 443).

Feminist methodology thus begins from women's own perspectives and experiences, since these are subordinated in scientific inquires and culture at large. It aims to outline an approach to research consistent with the feminist aims of challenging gender inequality and empowering women. Standpoint theory makes a significant contribution to feminist research methodology. Standpoint theory in its basic form is perceived as "science from below," based on the conviction that in order to produce science *for* women and not only *about* women, empirical and theoretical research must begin with women's lives. It also possesses an organic character that may be used and conceptualized in different ways. Sandra Harding identifies three recent influential developments in standpoint theory as a feminist project, including it serving as a critical theory of the relation between knowledge and power, a method or methodology that can guide research, and as a political resource that can empower oppressed groups (Harding et al., 2008, p. 115).

In addition to these three qualities standpoint theory possesses, standpoint theory is relevant to my research as an epistemology of difference. Maithree

Wickramasinghe (2009) suggests that standpoint epistemologies have seriously undermined Western feminist assumptions of the homogeneity and universality of non-Western women. Inherent in this critique is the allegation of essentialism. Over decades, Arab and Muslim women (and other women from the Global South) have been stereotyped in Western research as passive, oppressed victims of patriarchal cultures or religions, in contrast to Western, active, creative, resourceful women who combat misogyny and male chauvinism (Abu-Lughod, 2001; Jaggar & Young, 2000; Mohanty, 2003). Western academics' obsession with women's active role in the revolution, over which my interviewees expressed great frustration, is a result of the still-existing stereotype of Egyptian women as completely detached from political change in the country before 2011, which assumption could not be more untrue. In relation to human rights, gender, and feminism in postcolonial contexts, another common issue is women's assumed aspirations to ideals relevant to the Western context, that women are not completely emancipated until they achieve rights identical to those of women in the Global North possess.

As a Western scholar, I had the good fortune to complete my MA in gender studies at the AUC in 2009–2011. Moreover, I witnessed, but did not partake in the revolutionary events until the end of 2011, when I left Cairo for two years. My over two years of study and residence in Cairo contributed to me unpacking many of my assumptions about gender, agency, politics, and postcolonialism.

However, while essentialism can be defined as attributing specific characteristics or elements to construct something as fixed and static, Wickramasinghe (2009) also views essentialism as involving prioritizations and attributions of difference without taking into account commonalities. She argues that postmodernist feminist insights in relation to essentialism pose a critical problem, since it tends to dilute the political intent of feminism. Critique based on essentialism ends up critiquing the assumptions of feminist goals. Her way out of this is to follow Spivak (Spivak & Harasym, 1990) and to recognize that we will always essentialize. Since we cannot escape essentialism, we must adopt it to produce a critique of anything.

During my 12 years of research in Egypt, in my effort to not assume that my own standard of equality and rights was the ultimate goal of activists, I found myself surprised when my interviewees expressed more radical approaches to gender and rights than I did. I am well acquainted with the scholarly debate about context-specific understandings of human rights and feminism, which somehow shapes another form of essentialization of difference. Such

experiences with my interviewees made me turn to more nuanced scholarship and theories and remain attentive to potential commonalities between my Western-bounded perception of rights and those of the activists.

Wickramasinghe (2009, p. 56) defines reflexivity as both an epistemological standpoint and a method, in the sense that it includes the researcher's experiences, opinions, insecurities, and emotional perspectives, as opposed to what purports to be abstract, generalized, objective, or definitive. Reflexivity is to monitor and reflect on all aspects of a research project, from the formulation of its ideas to the publication and utilization of its findings. Strong reflexivity also requires the researcher's recognition and disclosure of her position in relation to her objects of study, which stands in stark contrast to the positivist strict dichotomy of the impersonal and neutral detached researcher. Donna Haraway (1988) and Sandra Harding (2008) argue that because all knowledge is situated and partial, ideological, political, and moral concerns fueling a research project must be brought to the fore, which requires strong reflexivity from the researcher.

I take self-reflexivity, which I define as repeatedly positioning my subjectivity in the research process, as a corrective measure to meet feminist research's goals of generating a non-exploitative, politically changing, and utilitarian production of knowledge. In addition, I adhere to Lorraine Nencel's (Nencel, 2014) suggestion of reflexivity as situated. She departs from the critical voices arguing that corrective reflexivity is void of the potential to deconstruct hierarchies and postcolonial power, since reflexivity is a tool the privileged use to mask power over the subject. The alternative to corrective reflexivity is to conduct collaborative research that makes knowledge and findings accessible to the research participants. However, as Nencel suggests, the power relationship between a researcher and those whose lives she researches cannot be ontological predefined. Reflexivity is a situated practice that should consider that representation of both actors and their relationships flow out of the particularities of the research context and process.

Drawing upon Nencel, I view the activists in this study as the active interlocutors and producers of knowledge, who have pushed me to rethink my own initial critique of human rights as the product of postcolonial power and human rights activists as gatekeepers of Western domination. Keeping feminist research principles in mind helped me understand how interactions with activists, who are passionate about their work and convinced they are doing the right thing, placed me in an ambivalent position. I acknowledge that, despite my feminist and postcolonial methodology, I cannot escape the unequal power relation between my interviewees and me, e.g., due to the fact that I

could leave the country any time if the situation became too dangerous or choose not to come at all, and that the power of translation of their narratives was in my hands. However, the idea that my training in feminist and human rights theory and critique made me equipped to and capable of questioning women's human rights activism differently from many of its participants was seriously disrupted. My interviewees are not just aware of the limitations of human rights, but are also agents negotiating the power structures of which they are in the midst. This active agency somehow contradicts feminist research's aspiration to produce utilitarian knowledge, which assumes that a passive beneficiary needs my research to improve her life situation. Wickramasinghe (2009) raises concern over the political and ethical altruism of feminist research, arguing that researcher's vision of "paying back" may be both oppressive and disabling to women. She alerts researchers not to place women on the margins, which conceals women's options, opportunities, agency, and the courses of action open to them.

As a doctoral student from the West with years of experience in Egypt, as a student, conducting fieldwork, and simply living, my self-reflexivity during this study has circled around my evolving positionality with regard to the research context. I view this process as stages of moving in and out of ontologies, epistemologies, theories, and critiques connected to my research field. From my arrival in Egypt to pursue a Master's degree in gender studies with a somewhat-questionable positionality and a white women's burden complex, my advancing acquaintance with postcolonial publication and theory made me skeptical of everything for which the West stood. I began questioning my own actual existence in a postcolonial context with the ambition to "speak for others" (Alcoff, 1991). However, as the MA program in Gender and Women's Studies in the Middle East proceeded and I began my fieldwork with Egyptian NGO activists, two months after the revolution 2011, my positionality evolved, and I gradually became aware of the problematic ontological and theoretical dichotomies underpinning my hesitation to conduct research in Egypt and my ambivalence towards my privileged position.

The dichotomies of West/East, secular/religious, elitist/authentic, modernity/culture reproduced by domestic and international scholars motivated me to continue exploring feminist and human rights practices in Egypt. However, my motivation for conducting research that contributed to social and political change in Egypt had changed. Instead, I understood that the knowledge I had acquired in Cairo could improve things "at home." The European and Swedish media, as well as public and academic debates very much represented women in the Arab world as passive, an image, which

caused frustration among my informants. Once I returned to Sweden and for my doctoral studies, nuancing this image and revealing the problematic effects of such prevalent dichotomies became key motivations during this study.

Reflexivity During Fieldwork and Interviews

The findings presented in this dissertation are primarily based on 22 semi-structured and unstructured interviews with 16 activists during three fieldwork trips. Further, the data consist of activists' written materials such as joint statements, blog posts, published reports, and documents. I have attended conferences, workshops, movie clubs, and social gatherings activists attended, and I have "hung out" with activists in informal ways. During these events, my fieldwork notes allowed me to contextualize the interviews and deepen my analysis of the current situation.

My first fieldwork trip to Cairo was during fall 2013. I aimed primarily to find a direction for my dissertation project by investigating the questions upon which women's rights activists focused and how they perceived contemporary political developments. Consequently, I arrived in Cairo without any predefined research questions, but rather a general aim of what I term "taking the temperature." I view this initial research trip as being integrated into my methodological approach of strong reflexivity and standpoint theory. Instead of approaching my research site with established questions developed from grand social theories, I aimed to let the lives and experiences of women's rights activists, as they understood them, guide me in formulating research problems and questions (Harding et. al., 2008). This conforms to my methodological and ethical approach of considering the participants in this study knowledge producers instead of the objects of knowledge (Chesters, 2012). Letting the empirical data guide the research project and theoretical frameworks instead of testing models or theories, Simmons and Feldman argues, "more accurately reflects the nature of a radical approach to human rights, which opens spaces for the voices of Others to be central to the final product." (McConnell & Smith, 2018, p. 130).

During the interviews I conducted in 2013, I asked broad, general questions to allow the activists define the topic of our conversations. During unstructured interviews, without any predetermined questions or answer categories, a researcher is able to generate questions in response to the interviewee's narration (Wildemuth, 2016). The unstructured interviews allowed me to

approach the research from my participants' own perspectives, use of terms, and then follow up spontaneously with questions guided by the research study's general aim.

In addition to the interviews, I met with people with whom I studied, many of whom were active in different women's rights groups founded after the revolution. Although I do not count them as participants in this study, they provided me with essential knowledge and experiences from the two years that I had been away from Cairo. I was also invited to present a paper at a conference in Tunis about Arab women's political participation that was co-arranged by a Tunisian women's organization and Stockholm University. One of Egypt's most important feminist activists was also invited, and we established a strong rapport during the conference due to our mutual skepticism of the unfolding debates and discussions. We shared our frustration over the participants' hardcore rejection of Islamic feminism and the generational gap in terms of how to solve women-related issues.

In feminist research, an ongoing discussion since the 1980s is whether the relationship between the researcher and the researched subject should, or can, be friendly, reciprocal, non-hierarchal. As feminist scholars suggest (Oakley, 1981; Finch, 1984), researchers should share their personal experiences, identities, and knowledge to overcome power structures and barriers and create a non-hierarchal relationship, thus resulting in better knowing. Feminists working in postcolonial and race theory later questioned this approach by drawing attention to how class, race, ethnicity, and socio-economic settings influence power relations just as much as gender. Others contest that mutual identification provides no guarantee of "better knowing" (Reissman, 1987). If anything, I believe my choice to share my reflections on the conference created a sense of mutual recognition of the problem women in the Arab world face today in relation to political representation. After the conference, the feminist activist invited me to her NGO's office, and during our second meeting, we continued our discussion of what had taken place in Tunis. This activist became one of my key informants in this study. We met both in 2015 and 2019 and had sporadic contact in between. She put me in contact with several other feminist activists who also participated in my research.

After the conference, I continued to share my perspectives and experiences during interviews I conducted in 2013. On the initiative of the activists, the interviews circled around the postcolonial perspectives of Western scholars and the topic academic tourism, which the activists found highly problematic. Academic tourists were defined as ignorant scholars who had never before visited Egypt and would probably never return after collecting the needed

material to their Western-funded research projects. I could not identify with these scholars and was therefore transparent with my own critique of this phenomenon. Further, I would reveal that my in-laws are Egyptian and living in Cairo, and shared my experiences of my two years living and studying in Cairo.

I do not consider that investing experience and identity in the interview situation played into the insider/outsider dilemma. Feminist research has concluded that such positions are never static or fixed but are ever-shifting and permeable social locations, which are differentially experienced or expressed by community members (Naples, 2003, p. 373). Instead, I view these disclosures as a part of my "research self" and my transparency as resulting from the chemistry between the interviewees and myself. Feminist scholars have contributed to debates on the "research self," highlighting how interview topics (in this case, the postcolonial dilemma), as well as the relational dynamics occurring in the interview setting, influence how we present ourselves and the parts of our identity about which we choose to be transparent. Researchers may adopt "in-between positions" as their different identities overlap (Ghorashi, 2005). Others stress the "border-making process that occurs during the social constructionist interview," whereby "various pre-assumed roles are created by researchers and by their respondents" (Gubrium & Koro-Ljungberg, 2005, p. 690). Essential to note is that my choice to disclose different parts of my own perspective and personal experiences varied extensively among interviews. I, therefore, concur with Reinharz's (1997, p. 5) reflection that she was "approximately 20 different selves" during her interviews and fieldwork. My choice of aligning myself against academic tourism and disclosing my personal life to various degrees further correlates to what Miia Halme-Tuomisaari's (2018) calls "role-play," which she employs to generate evolution in the relationships between her and her interlocutors and to gain access to significant spaces of knowledge.

In addition to the postcolonial dilemma, other topics that arose during interviews were working on the Egyptian constitution and combatting the severe sexual violence on the streets of Cairo. The activists I met were all engaged in the WCWG, an initiative organized by the WMF. They had already been trying to influence the constitution under Mohamed Mursi's presidency in 2012, with a rather bleak outcome, and were at the time focused on potential reforms to that constitution.

I returned to Cairo for my second fieldwork trip in 2015. By then, my research questions had very much become focused on feminist activists' attempts to integrate gender equality into the constitution. However, the overarching aim

of my study had developed into exploring how women's rights activists pursued activism, given Egypt's shifting political landscape. In 2015, the political climate was radically different from what it was in 2013, and the oppressive regime under President el-Sisi had undermined most political activities in the country. The aim of my visit was to investigate how the current conditions affected women's rights activists. Since my earlier research had focused on the legal aspect of women's rights, I wanted to explore activists' take on alternative ways of fighting for women's rights. In addition, I wanted to follow up with activists engaged in the constitution-writing process, regarding how they understood gender equality in the post-revolutionary state. During two months in the spring of 2015, I conducted 14 individual interviews with activists who defined themselves as feminists, of which two were young male activists. These interviews were more structured than those I conducted in 2013 because of a few standard questions I asked during all the interviews. However, I remained open to letting the participants guiding the direction of the conversation and did not focus on immediately turning them back to the questions I had. Instead, I sometimes formulated new questions to return to a topic.

Given the diversity among my participants according to their professions, activist roles, ages, and identities, I found myself adopting different "research selves." When interviewing university professors, I adopted an academic profile, allowing myself to use academic terminology and pushed for advanced reasoning around concepts and theories. In other situations, I emphasized my young feminist identity in order to find commonality with the interviewee. As in 2013, there were situations when the interviewee felt the need to address the problematic aspects of Western academics and journalists coming to Egypt to make a career out of the revolution. One example was my one of my informant's critique of a Western journalist who was making a business for herself by publishing a book of the powerful street art that emerged during the revolution. My informant called it ridiculous that one can come to Egypt and turn something so beautiful into a personal enterprise. In these situations, my own reflexivity was vital in terms of how I corresponded to such reflections and what I did with such conversation. I do not believe it is a coincidence that the interviewee brought up a Western journalist. My choice to highlight this exposes criticism of us Western scholars in an attempt to raise awareness that a book project that, from a white privileged gaze, is seemingly harmless has an effect on community members, thus raising concern about the unequal access to resources and career opportunities.

During my second stay, I also spent time with young activists in more informal ways. My former fellow students from AUC were among those who put me in touch with several participants. Together we attended conferences, movie clubs, and other social gatherings. As stated above, important to note is that the majority of the interviewees in this study and my social network in Cairo mainly consists of members of the educated urban middle class. Mostly, we conversed in English and spent time in the upper-class areas of Cairo. The perspectives my social interaction with local activists gave me are therefore those of a rather privileged and small social sector. These perspectives were balanced by the fact that my in-laws belong to the working class, living in a small apartment in the informal area of Boulaq. The hardships they experienced in the current situation clearly differed from those of my interviewees and friends. For my in-laws, security, employment opportunities, and reasonable food prices were the highest priorities.

In contrast to 2013, several activists I interviewed in 2015 were by then known to the security apparatus. My responsibility to ensure their security in relation to participating in my research was therefore crucial. For example, I immediately uploaded interview recordings to a cloud and erased them from my smartphone. When someone recommended I contact a potential participant, I asked which communication tool the person preferred. I had contact with participants through Facebook, phones, and emails. The atmosphere during the interviews was not as hopeful and vision-oriented as it had been during 2013. Many activists expressed frustration over the political situation and the emerging polarization among activist communities and Egyptians, in general. However, many viewed the situation as a stage of the ongoing revolution and used this period to remobilize below the regime's radar. Despite the difficult political situation, I did not experience that people were hesitant to talk to me. Instead, they were keen to express their experiences, and none of my participants asked to have their names concealed. When I returned in 2019, the situation was drastically worse, which affected my ability to reach the activists I had met in 2015.

Four years passed between the second and third fieldwork trips, mainly due to the security situation. One of my participants from 2015 was detained eight months after I left Cairo for "allegations against the current government" and "provocative, inciteful slogans against the state." We had communicated through Facebook, and the security apparatus shut down the account. I feared that the security apparatus had discovered our conversation and that I was now under surveillance. During the same period, the Egyptian regime stepped up security to prevent potential celebrations of the fifth anniversary of the

revolution. Hundreds of homes were raided and activists were arrested or disappeared. In February 2016, the Italian PhD student Giulio Regeni's naked, tortured body was found in a dike on the outskirts of Cairo. He was researching Egyptian independent trade unions. The Egyptian state denied all accusations of being involved in the murder and claimed that Regeni had been robbed and killed by criminals who specialized in attacking foreigners. However, suspicions of the regime's involvement in Regeni's death remained, and in 2016, several reports and testimonies conveyed that the regime harassed and monitored foreign researchers.

In early 2017, my family and I visited Cairo for personal reasons. I did not intend to do any field research, but was still afraid to be detained during the passport control like many other researchers. When my entrance to the country and visit occurred without any difficulties, we decided to return at the end of 2018 to complete my last fieldwork stint. My family and I stayed for 10 days, and I conducted interviews with five activists, of which one interview was a combination of individual interviews and a small focus group with three young feminists. I contacted several of my earlier participants, but only two responded. One of them put me in contact with the three young feminists whom I had not met before. Again, I was interested to know how the current situation affected women's rights activism. To maximize discovery and description, I again used unstructured in-depth interviews to ensure that I received the perspectives of the activists and did not impose my own preformulated assumptions. The interviews with two of my previous participants were conducted in cafes. The young feminists visited my residence in Cairo since they were reluctant to meet with me outside where we could be observed.

From Fieldwork Material to Publishable Articles

Method in qualitative research entails more than the practical techniques of gaining data. When the material is collected, the intellectual, analytical, and interpretative stages of the data generation process opens (Mason, 2002). Parallel to the intellectual stage, the process of "wording the world into existence" (Richardson, 2000, p. 923) by means of scholarly writing begins. For me, the intellectual stage and writing process intensified when I returned from my fieldwork. Back in Sweden in 2013, I had already formulated a vague research problem regarding the constitution-writing process. I aimed to write an article about the group of feminist activists' effort to strengthen women's rights in the constitution. Since the research problem and questions developed

after my return, there was not enough fieldwork material to address this particular matter and I began searching for written materials by the activists online. I found extensive publications about the process, criticizing the various constitutional drafts, and articulating their demands.

In analyzing empirical material in order to determine analytical categories (in relation to women's rights), the starting point is an intensive and repeated reading of one's material (Flick et al., 2004). At this stage, it appeared that women's rights circled around the analytical concept of gender equality. In my attempt to see a pattern in their perception of gender equality, I moved on to carefully coding their written texts. From this coding, I could generate an understanding of the activists' ideas of the function of gender equality in the constitution. Inspired by grounded theory, I entered my data with as little theoretical framing as possible, instead using the data to "form the foundation of our theory and our analysis of these data generates the concepts we construct" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 2).

During the coding process, I found myself stuck in scholarly debates discussing gender equality from the secular/religious binary. Since there was much more than this simple dichotomy playing out in my material, I engaged in a comprehensive literature review of gender equality models. Literature reviewing is a research methodology since it undoubtedly influences the researcher (Hart, 1998). Hart finds literature reviewing an effective methodological starting point, as it gives the researcher an idea of the methodological traditions, assumptions, and research strategies related to previous research. Literature reviewing further identifies research gaps, clarifies research questions, establishes validity, provides a background, and helps contextualize particular research projects (Hart, 1998; Wickramasinghe, 2009). For me, reviewing literature was a constant throughout the research process, particularly when moving back and forth between empirical materials and expanding my theoretical frameworks.

Inspired by grounded theory, that is, that a researcher "seeks further interviewees/sources of data in order to add to the fullness of the understanding of the concept" (Cutcliffe, 2000, p. 1477), I concluded that in order to produce a rigorous exploration of gender equality, I needed to conduct more interviews with significant individuals (Baker et al., 1992). The people I interviewed should have experience and knowledge of my research inquires and the ability to articulate their reflections. They should have time to be interviewed and the willingness to participate (Morse, 1991). Therefore, in 2015, I met with three out of the eight women active in the WCWG. But before I had time to code and analyze the new material, I began writing Article 2.

During my fieldwork in 2015, I had explored activists' perspectives on legal activism and alternative routes to achieving equal rights for women during Egypt's transitional period. In formulating the abstract for an article in an edited volume with the working title "Gender, Human Rights and the Limits of Legal Frameworks: Challenging the Place of Women's Rights in Post-Transition Countries," I once again engaged in a literature review of feminist theory of legal activism, finding that many of the critiques of legal activism did not consider contexts of authoritarianism and transition. My abstract formulated a research problem for the goal of generating nuanced critique of legal activism. I spent the year completing the first draft of Article 2.

Since the interviews I conducted in 2015 concentrated more on a particular research question than those in 2013 did, the analytical process was more accessible than with Article 1. As with Article 1, I coded my transcribed interviews and revealed three different categories related to legal activism. I then analyzed these categories using the theoretical framework of social movements in authoritarian contexts, which provided a nuanced perspective on law during repressive periods. Article 2 was peer reviewed and published in the edited volume in 2017.

Article 3 is the result of my final fieldwork period in 2019. The material consists of unstructured, in-depth interviews, and the feminists I met all expressed explicitly that there was a problem with sexual violence that occupied most of our interview time. I felt ethically and methodologically accountable to formulate my research questions based on that issue. I focused on how feminist activists managed to sustain their activism against sexual violence 10 years after the revolution. In doing so, I returned to the theoretical framework used in Article 2 but concentrated on how *oppositional consciousness* develops and sustains itself, despite changing political settings. My analysis was a process of moving back and forth between my transcribed interviews and theory. Through this process, I identified two motivating forces that spurred the activists' oppositional consciousness with regards to sexual violence. After presenting the article at several research seminars, a third motivating force among the activists was identified, which added valuable depth to my analysis. I sent the article to the *Journal of North African Studies* at the end of 2020, and it was published in July 2021.

The process of writing Article 4 has been different from those associated with the other articles. Potential ideas and topics of Article 4 have been present in the research process since 2016. I earlier integrated parts of these ideas in both Articles 2 and 3, only to dismiss them later. In 2018, my research project clearly acquired the direction of exploring what we can learn about human

rights, if we study how activists navigate changing political contexts. This scope and focus further lead my main argument that human rights most be conceptualized in several ways to capture how they function in various political realities. While Articles 1 and 2 explore the law as a tool for pursuing women's rights, the transformation of language, especially in relation to sexual violence, is another mode of activism present in my analytical process. Over the years, I found that these two modes of activism lacked the potential for explaining the reason for the contentious street activism combatting sexual violence from 2011–2013. Although this topic is probably the most researched and analyzed part of gender activism in post-2011 Egypt, it has never been addressed from the perceptive of human rights. Thus, I aimed to contribute to research on contentious street activism using a human rights framework by drawing on the significant case of Egypt.

Neither human rights as law nor human rights as language could comprehensively capture and analyze street activism against sexual violence in Egypt. Thus, Article 4 presents a third mode of activism; human rights as *space-making*. In contrast to the other three articles, Article 4 is a theoretically driven piece, in which I draw on the empirical and theoretical knowledge acquired during my years of doctoral studies. However, I could not fully comprehend and analyze what I identified as happening during the intensive years of street activism against sexual violence. I then turned to theory again and began to build a theoretical framework by combining different theories of human rights subjectification, and theories of resistance, vulnerability and performativity. Since I have not empirically studied the phenomenon of street activism against sexual violence myself, I draw from other scholarly work to illustrate what I mean by human rights as *space-making* as the third dimension of the human rights framework presented in this study.

Summaries of the Articles

Article 1

This article analyzes the efforts of Egyptian feminist activists to insert gender equality in the country's post-revolutionary constitutions in 2012 and 2014. While the literature on women's political role during this period provides insights into exclusionary gender practices and conditions for bargaining power structures, this study contributes with a conceptual analysis of how feminist activists construed constitutional gender equality. The study is based on interviews with- and written statements by activists engaged in the constitutional process. The article argues that these activists viewed the constitution as a central instrument in the struggle for gender equality and demanded a gender equality model beyond the sameness/difference paradigm. Instead, they argued for a substantive notion of gender equality that reflected women's situated experiences while they, at the same time, navigated the legacies of Egypt's earlier constitutions.

Article 2

Scholarly work on feminists' use of law reveals a complex reality where social and political domains, practices, and institutions are at play. Law as an instrument for improving gender justice is also the arena where obstacles to achieving greater gender equality remain (Cornwall & Molyneux, Third World Quarterly, 27(7), 1175–1191, 2006). Feminist scholars have debated law's role within feminist activism concerning questions of identity politics, conditioned citizenships, and the state's role. In recent years, influential feminists have criticized the role of law in feminist projects and argued that feminists should shift focus from the identity project (Hekman, Feminist Theory, 1(3), 289–308, 2000; Lloyd, Beyond identity politics: Feminism, power & politics. SAGE, London, 2005; Zerilli, Feminism and the abyss of freedom. University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 2005) and legal activism (Brown, States of injury:

Power and freedom in late modernity. Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ, 1995; Brown & Halley, Left legalism/left critique. Duke University Press, Durham, 2002; Butler, Gender trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity. Routledge, New York, 2006; Halley, Split decisions: How and why to take a break from feminism. Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ, 2006) to other forms of activism outside of state institutions and the legal apparatus. Their claim is that as law is not a neutral instrument, legal activism has a cost to other projects for political change. While these ideas could be argued to be relevant only in the context of liberal democracies, theories of law, rights, and legal activism should also be applicable to the idea of human rights and human rights activism, which are pressing issues in non-democratic societies where human rights abuses are common. How, then, does this critique of feminist legal activism play out in repressive states and less-open societies where the public space is strictly regulated and controlled? Can the relationship between law and politics be asserted in the same way in all different societies or does legal activism have different outcomes depending on the political context? These questions are explored in this chapter by drawing from fieldwork and interviews with Egyptian feminist activists and their struggle for political and social change.

Article 3

Activism against sexual violence was one of the Egyptian Revolution's most significant mobilising forces, but the country's return to authoritarian rule has circumvented possibilities for organising and carrying out political resistance, including activism against sexual harassment. This article shows that despite this political oppression, young feminists continue to raise their voices and organise against the continuing problem of sexual violence. To illustrate this, the article draws on interviews considering a recent controversy surrounding allegations of sexual violence within the Egyptian political party Bread and Freedom. Interviewees describe that instead of receiving support in their criticism of the party's handling of the accusations, they were criticised by feminist and human rights activists, creating serious fragmentation among earlier united activists. The analysis shows that when young feminists saw former allies abandon the movement's previously formulated objectives against sexual violence, their collective memory of past achievements bolstered their conviction that they should compromise neither on the definition of sexual violence nor on the ways to confront it. In fact, their careful

adherence to the activism's past principles and efforts serves as a mechanism for sustaining continuity in their feminist movement even as the political climate circumscribes opportunities for activism.

Article 4

This article introduces the concept of space-making as a form of human rights activism. To develop the concept, I use the example of contentious street activism against sexual violence in post-2011 Egypt. My research with feminist activists' use of human rights has revealed that activists used human rights as a legal tool for improving legislation and policy and as a linguistic strategy to challenge derogatory discourse. Using human rights in these two ways requires activists to identify violations of rights and articulate their demands. However, since the contentious street activism against sexual violence did not contain verbal utterances, it cannot be captured by means of these two dimensions of human rights. Therefore, in this article, I explore the question of how we capture and analyze activism that sits within a human rights framework, but which is devoid of specific rights claims or clarified motives, where the focus seems rather to be on the public space? By engaging with theories of performativity, vulnerability, rights claiming, and subjectivization, I argue that through specific modes of activism against sexual violence as bodily performative enactments of space, people convert themselves into the human rights subjects they are told they cannot be.

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