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## Women in the public sphere in Egypt

2011–2014

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An abstract painting of a woman's face, rendered in a style reminiscent of Egyptian art. The face is composed of bold, expressive brushstrokes in shades of red, pink, and black. The eyes are large and dark, with a hint of gold in the irises. The nose and lips are also defined with thick, dark lines. The overall composition is a close-up, focusing on the facial features.

# Women in the public sphere in Egypt 2011–2014

IMAD RASAN

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY | LUND UNIVERSITY



# Women in the public sphere in Egypt 2011–2014

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Women's participation in the public sphere brings to the fore several issues concerning women's collectivity and visibility as part of the public and counter-publics, structural constraints and enablements, and individual and group agency. In their efforts, the women activists apply strategies for resolving these constraints and enablements.

Based on 54 interviews, documents and secondary data, this dissertation tells the stories of women activists who increased their visibility through collective participation in the public sphere in Egypt between 2011–2014 by using both individual and group strategies. They participated in social movements, opposition political parties, and civic engagement in ways that expanded their roles and pushed gender boundaries in the public sphere.

# Women in the public sphere in Egypt

2011–2014

Doctoral dissertation

By

Imad Rasan



**LUND**  
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**MADE IN SWEDEN** 

*For the courageous women I met in Cairo*

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## Abbreviations

|           |   |
|-----------|---|
| 6AYM      | 6 April Youth Movement  |
| ACPSS     | Al-Ahram Centre for Political and Strategic Studies                               |
| ACT       | Appropriate Communication Techniques for Development                              |
| CAPMS     | Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics                             |
| CEDAW     | The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination<br>Against Women |
| CP        | Constitution Party  |
| CU        | Cairo University  |
| ECWR      | Egyptian Center for Women's Rights  |
| ESDP      | Egyptian Social Democratic Party  |
| FJP       | Freedom and Justice Party   |
| HarassMap | Harassment Map  |
| HRW       | Human Rights Watch  |
| ISH       | I Saw Harassment  |
| MB        | Muslim Brotherhood  |
| MENA      | Middle East and North Africa  |
| NAC       | National Association for Change   |
| NCW       | National Council for Women  |
| NDP       | National Democratic Party   |
| NWF       | New Women Foundation  |
| OPP       | opposition political party  |
| PSL       | Personal Status Laws  |
| SCAF      | Supreme Council of the Armed Forces   |
| SEP       | Strong Egypt Party  |
| SH        | sexual harassment   |
| WMF       | Women and Memory Forum  |
| WOW       | Women On Walls  |

## Acknowledgements

The incredible presence of women in the 2011 uprising ignited my personal academic curiosity to understand how these courageous women shook the regime and patriarchal structure in Egypt.

Prior to the uprising, I had wondered about the deterioration of women's rights, gender-based violence and sexual harassment of women, and the obvious gender inequality in Egypt and many other Arab countries that were overwhelmed with the lack of basic civil rights and freedoms, democracy, and social justice. The situation of women in Egypt did not harmonise with my knowledge of the prominent position of women in the history of ancient and modern Egypt and many other Middle Eastern countries. I knew then that the women's movement in Egypt was one of the pioneering women's movements in the world, especially the tremendous role of women in the 1919 Revolution. Women often encounter prejudice and political, cultural and social restrictions. I believed at the time that the general situation in Egypt, and also other Arab countries, could never be reformed without reforming the situation of women because women were and still are an integral part of society.

The trigger of the 2011 uprising in Egypt and the active role of women in the overthrow of Mubarak were an incentive to write this dissertation, especially after women were excluded from decision-making after the first eighteen days of the uprising. I was full of curiosity about not only the motives and the situation that prompted these women to revolt against the regime but also the actions they took against the patriarchal society in the family and in the community. The question was, what constituted the decisive moment of revolt for these women to take to the streets and demand their rights as citizens? Then, I made the plan to write my dissertation on women in the public sphere in Egypt. The decision to write this dissertation was not easy for me because of the turbulent time of political unrest during the uprising; therefore, the decision to visit Egypt in 2014 came later.

Today, more than ten years after the uprising and the return of the new authoritarian regime, I still believe that women's participation in the uprising has an impact on political, social, and public affairs in general. I also still believe that there is no progress in the general situation in Egypt, and Arab countries, without improving the situation of women in the different fields of public life, particularly gender equality.

After many years, I have discussed the ideas of this dissertation with many people to develop different concepts and insight into theories. This dissertation is the result of the contributions of many people who helped me, supported me, and assisted me in its completion.

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‘When the Government cut off the internet, I decided to join the street demonstrations. Since then, I have not returned home.’

(Neven, an interviewee)

# Introduction

After the 25 January uprising in Egypt broke out in 2011, many women and men from across society participated in demonstrations in Cairo's Tahrir Square and other public squares throughout the country. The most notable feature of the first eighteen days of the uprising was the high visibility of ordinary women who had little or no prior experience of participating in demonstrations, strikes and sit-ins, or joining a political party (Singerman, 2013a; Muhanna-Matar, 2014). Women participated as citizens with an awareness of being women who are challenging the powerful and dominant structures of public society – political, social and cultural.

Since the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) took over the country's government after the fall of Mubarak on 11 February 2011, women have been excluded from the process of defining the new political system. SCAF gendered political objectives by politicising women's bodies (Al-Ali, 2012; Hafez, 2014). For example, women activists were sexually harassed (SH) by being subjected to virginity tests and gender-based violence (FIDH et al. 2013), and many activists reacted to these types of attacks on women's bodies by protesting against gender-based violence and SH (Morsy, 2014, p. 219). Women activists fought against their exclusion and marginalisation in the political process by participating in both mass demonstrations and through the workings of political parties and social movement organisations. In doing so, they challenged and negotiated the patriarchy and masculine norms of the state, society and their families.

This dissertation examines women activists' participation in the public sphere from the outbreak of the 2011 uprising until the re-emergence of the authoritarian regime in 2014 under El-Sisi. The dissertation explores how women's participation in the uprising as part of various counter-publics sought to affect the overall political scene; how they developed a new vision of agency by acting as citizens together with men, with an overtone of feminist consciousness; and how they placed their demands in the broad context of the national revolutionary discourse. The dissertation investigates how the participants consciously resisted acting and being portrayed as agents of a liberal/secular Western discourse or submitting to cultural nationalists and Islamists who treat them as victims of an anti-colonial nationalist discourse. They emphasised their culture, historical heritage and identity as the driving forces for their activism,

albeit critically. In their activism, they did not break with their culture, religion and ancient Egyptian roots but were nevertheless critical of them.

The dissertation seeks to understand how women activists used different strategies to challenge the constraints in their families, communities and public space as a way of being collective and visible in the public sphere. The investigation includes understanding the process through which these women used various opportunities to overcome their exclusion and marginalisation after gaining access to the public sphere. The investigation also emphasises the role of opposition organisations/groups and the opportunities that certain social structures provide to facilitate women's participation.

Using qualitative methodology and a critical realist epistemology, in this dissertation, I aim to reveal the heterogeneous aspects of the interviewees' personal stories and their unique experiences of accessing the public sphere and becoming visible in it. In addition, I trace women's participation in different forms of public activism – not only as unaffiliated participants and as part of a mass collective but also as members of specific groups – in a sociological, systematic and structural way to find the similarities and differences in their stories of activism. I investigate this through the interviewees' perceptions and their experiences of family life, the organisations they participate in, and the public sphere. Moreover, I gain an understanding of how interviewees have pushed gender boundaries to varying degrees, in the time and contexts under study, in order to bring about change in gender relations and expand the space of expression in their families, communities, organisations/groups and the public sphere. As a result, the dissertation reveals how they made meaningful progress in redefining gender roles, norms, sexuality, female leadership, women's representation and presentation, and public perceptions of women's issues.

By interviewing women activists from a range of activist forms and forums, this dissertation aims to capture women's participation as part of various counter-publics that challenged the dominant public and mainstream politics. The women describe their experiences of why, when, where, and how they participated in the public sphere, telling us about their unique experience and voicing their hope and despair, success and frustration, pain and joy, fear and courage.

## The public sphere in Egypt between 2011–2014

The public sphere in Egypt has evolved in several phases between the outbreak of the 2011 uprising and the rise of the new authoritarian regime in 2014.

In the first eighteen days of the uprising, starting on 25 January 2011, revolutionaries defeated the security forces and occupied Tahrir Square – the epicentre of the clashes –

which symbolises the public sphere and many other public spaces throughout the country. According to a report from the Al-Ahram Centre for Political and Strategic Studies (ACPSS) (2012), the public sphere became more inclusionary and pluralistic with the emergence of opposition groups such as the 6 April and Kifaya movements, with various youth, Islamists and labour movements pursuing the common goal of removing Mubarak from power. Moreover, there was a religious presence in the uprising which took many forms, including both the symbolic and the political, mobilising many people to participate.

The counter-publics opposed the Mubarak regime before the uprising moved from the periphery to the centre to form a unified counter-public whose goal was to overthrow Mubarak (ACPSS, 2012).

After Mubarak was overthrown on 11 February 2011, various forms of contestations occurred between the opposition groups and SCAF, which ruled the country after Mubarak. While the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) (and other Islamist groups [ACPSS, 2012]) decided to abandon the street and act as a stabilising force through lending democratic legitimacy to the SCAF-led political process (Badr, 2016), many opposition groups distanced from the new SCAF rulers to continue to participate in the street. Hafez, K. (2016) argues that 'many social movements in Egypt developed a radically polarized political culture. Movements like the Revolutionary Socialists or the 6th of April Movement were mere examples of an uncompromising trend in politics'. For its part, SCAF sought to bring opposition groups into the political process either through force – various liberal, leftist and labour groups – or through persuasion to legitimise the new political system (Gamal, 2015; Halawa, 2019).

In addition to divisions within social movements, such as the 6 April Youth Movement (6AYM) (Hafez, K., 2016), MB (al-Anani, 2012), and Salafists (ACPSS, 2012), another ideological contestation escalated between Islamists and secular opposition groups. al-Anani (2012) notes that the quiet religious presence during the first eighteen days became loud in various forms, causing concern among other political actors. Many religious groups started TV channels and various forms of mass media to address their political discourse and agenda (ACPSS, 2012). This led to political polarisation and mutual exclusion between secular and Islamist groups over Egypt's future identity, among other reasons, according to al-Anani (2012, p. 19). In the midst of all the polarisation, many individuals and groups, such as independent (from the state) feminists, religious minorities, and social categories, such as youth and women, were excluded and marginalised in the public sphere.

With the election of Morsi as president in June 2012, plurality and contestation continued to escalate in the public sphere, with religious discourse dominating to Islamise part of the political domain. Badr (2016) points out that 'the Muslim Brotherhood worked on a slow Islamization of legal bodies'. In addition to the ongoing



attacks on women's bodies, many women felt threatened by the Islamists' increasing anti-women discourse (Adly, 2017; Goes, 2015). Therefore, women participated massively with the demonstrators mobilised by the military to oust Morsi on 30 June 2013 (Morsy, 2014).

With the military coup of 3 July 2013, the public sphere entered a new phase of restrictions and violence. The new military-backed interim government restricted the mass media and public spaces (Goes, 2015). The use of force continued after the military attacked pro-Morsi demonstrators in the *Rab'a* and *al-Nahdah* sit-ins, killing hundreds of protesters in addition to those who were injured and arrested, as Human Rights Watch (HRW) (HRW, 2014a) reported. On 24 November 2013, interim President Adly Mansour issued a law on public gatherings that banned peaceful protests and certain political organisations such as MB and 6AYM and threatened thousands of independent organisations by drafting a law regulating the activities of NGOs (HRW, 2014b).

Lynch (2015, p. 331) assesses the public sphere in Egypt in the period between 2011–2013 accordingly,

The first was an unprecedented mass mobilization rooted in an empowered public sphere, pressing novel demands on an arbitrary and unaccountable state. The second represented the public sphere's co-optation by a state that was able to manipulate the street into cheering its exercise of arbitrary power.

Between these two periods, Lynch (2015, p. 331) describes the public sphere as rather divided and systematically degraded. Despite its relative openness, freedom, and pluralism, the public sphere has not produced a new political culture through which political actors could establish a democratic process with egalitarian dialogue and participation. Badr (2016, p. 43) describes the situation as follows, 'Because argumentative capacities were never enhanced, public deliberations continued to reproduce the established radical polarized positions instead of increasing potential consensus'. Goes (2015) also argues that despite this empowerment, the public sphere was not strong enough and lacked sufficient cohesion to effectively influence the political situation. Hafez, K. (2016, p. 32) notes that the competing political actors did not compromise enough to create a sustainable environment for healthy deliberation in order to build a democratic system.

Later, with the election of El-Sisi as president on 8 June 2014, and the rise of the new authoritarian regime, the public sphere entered a new phase of institutional restrictions, with high repressive measures directed against not only opposition activists and groups but also entire groups, such as youth, students, and independent labour

movements that refused to conform to the official will expressed by the state (Hamzawy, 2017).

Therefore, we cannot claim that the public sphere was consistently stable enough to produce a healthy environment for deliberation. In different periods between 2011–2014, the public sphere was simultaneously open to some counter-publics and restrictive to others. While some counter-publics could participate on a platform alongside the dominant one, other counter-publics were simply suppressed, moving into the alternative public space.

As a result of this background, my analysis of the understanding of the public sphere (between 2011–2014) is dependent on the context of time and place. I consider the public sphere as being neither completely inclusionary nor exclusionary of the diversity of marginalised groups.

## Women's participation in the public sphere in the post-uprising period

In terms of formal participation (such as joining a political party, participating in electoral processes or being active in professional institutions whose roles are defined by laws and regulations), women's participation (as trade union members, voters, candidates in elections, representatives in parliament, members in political parties and decision-making processes) was still relatively low before and after the uprising compared to men, although it had increased relatively before and after the uprising in different aspects of participation (as shown later).

Statistics collected by the Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics (CAPMS, 2014, p. 63) show that women members in various trade unions rose from 19% in 2000 to 38.2% in 2012, but the percentage was still low, compared to men members, which decreased from 81% to 61.8% during the same period. The number of women who registered to vote in the elections also rose from 35% in 2000 to 48.3% in 2012, but this percentage was still less than men's percentage, which decreased from 65% to 51.7% during the same period (CAPMS, 2014, p. 60). Benstead and Lust-Okar (2015, p. 1) report in their survey that 58% of the women surveyed voted during the 2011–2012 parliamentary elections compared to 77% of men. Therefore, their participation was also still lower than men in terms of percentage even after the increase in women's participation.

As candidates in elections, there has been a gradual improvement in women's candidacy for parliament since before the 2011 uprising – 133 in the 2005 elections,

404 in 2010, and 984 (351 ran as independent candidates) in 2011, according to the Egyptian Center for Women's Rights (ECWR) (2012). However, the percentage of women's representation in parliament was reduced from 12.7% in 2010 (after the reintroduction of the women's quota) to only 2% in 2011 (after the abolition of the quota), although political parties were required to include at least one woman in their party list (CAPMS, 2014, p. 60). In the 2011–2012 elections (conducted in three phases from 28 November 2011 to 11 January 2012), only nine women won seats in parliament (including three who were appointed by SCAF). Of the 396 female candidates who ran for Egypt's Shura Council<sup>1</sup> in 2012, only 5 women (2.7%) won out of 180 seats (ECWR, 2012).

As members of political parties, women's participation in all the parties was weak (ECWR, 2012, p. 6), although women's representation in the newly formed political parties after the uprising was significantly higher than in the older political parties (OECD, 2018). According to Benstead and Lust-Okar (2015, p. 3), in the 2011–2012 elections, only 2% of the survey samples of women were members of political parties compared to 5% of men. Moreover, women's representation in the decision-making hierarchy in all political parties (with differences) was low (Ezzat, 2017), as was representation in popular national politicians or leadership roles in the legislature (Singerman, 2013a, p. 22), although many women sought to take leadership roles.

As participants in the process of building a new political system after the uprising, only 6 out of 100 members were women in the committee on constitutional amendments established by SCAF in 2011 to rewrite the constitution, although human rights organisations had called for at least 30% representation for women (ECWR, 2012). The statistics that women were relatively underrepresented in formal politics is not surprising and does not mean that women in Egypt were not politically minded.

In terms of informal participation (such as joining demonstrations, sitting-in or becoming part of a social movement that offers a channel of expression), civic engagement (such as joining a volunteer group or initiatives) and the use of the internet increased compared to before the 2011 uprising. Without mentioning actual numbers or percentages, Hafez (2012, p. 37) mentions that women protesters made up 20% to 50% of the protesters in Tahrir. Women participated in greater numbers than ever before, as scholars and reports suggest (Al-Ali, 2012; Hatem, 2011; Abouelnaga, 2016; OECD, 2018). In addition to protesting in the streets during the uprising, women also massively participated in the sit-ins in Rab'a and al-Nahdah Squares in 2013 (Hatem, 2013; Farag, 2012) and on 30 June 2013, when Morsi was overthrown, according to Morsy (2014).

---

<sup>1</sup> The Shura Council is the upper house of the bicameral Parliament of Egypt.

In terms of civic engagement, women effectively participated in various NGOs, and volunteered in new forms of action-oriented groups, initiatives, projects and campaigns, such as anti-harassment groups, women's organisations, advocacy groups, human rights groups, and Muslim youth organisations (OECD, 2018; Skalli, 2014; Ibrahim & Hunt-Hendrix, 2011; Shehata et al. 2012).

Regarding the internet, Al-Ali (2012, p. 27) – and El-Nawawy and Khamis (2013, p. 39), who mention Esraa Abdel Fattah as an example of a woman activist who used the internet, especially new media, in the last three years before the uprising – points out that women actively participated in the virtual community of bloggers and on social media platforms such as Facebook or as citizen journalists to discuss and debate both general and women-specific issues.

In summary, while women's formal participation was relatively low, their informal participation increased. The differences between women's formal and informal political participation is not a focal point of this dissertation; however, noting these differences sheds light on the role of women in informal politics and civic engagement which underpinned the formation of various forms of counter-publics in the post-uprising period.

## Why does the question of women in the public sphere matter?

Fraser (1990), and other scholars such as Rayan (1992; Walsh, 2011), points out that women face various structural constraints that exclude them from participating in the public sphere. In her critique of the bourgeois public's claim to full accessibility in Haberman's theory of the public sphere, Fraser (1990, p. 63) states, 'Women of all classes and ethnicities were excluded from official political participation precisely on the basis of ascribed gender status'. Rayan (1992, pp. 259–60) also confirms Fraser's view when she explains that women were excluded from the bourgeois public sphere because they were poorly represented among those in power in both the state and capitalist/private sectors.

The exclusionary structural constraints also apply to many other non-liberal public spheres. In her study of a range of contexts around the world, Walsh (2011, p.13) describes various structural constraints that women face in the public sphere:

Common obstacles to women's access, voice, and capacity for contestation include the sexist attitudes of individual men and women, racial and class prejudices, women's lack of skills and confidence [...] Institutional norms that ignore the sexual division of labor

[...] represent an informal obstacle that limits women's ability to enter and remain in the public sphere. Violence, sexual harassment, and gender norms that expect women to be compliant, reserved, or an audience to men also limit debate conditions.

Asen (2002, pp. 345–7) distinguishes between direct and indirect exclusion from the public sphere. While the former 'expressly prevent[s] the participation of particular individuals and groups in discussions and debates', the latter 'function[s] tacitly through discourse norms and practices that prescribe particular ways of interacting in public forums'.

Based on Asen's understanding, two central issues that are not mutually exclusive are essential to highlight in the Egyptian context: the *exclusion* of women from the public sphere in Egypt, which relates to Asen's direct form of exclusion, and the *marginalisation* of women within the public sphere after they enter it, which relates to Asen's indirect form of exclusion.

Regarding marginalisation of women, in terms of socio-legal factors, the Personal Status Laws (PSL), in successive constitutions since 1971, still discriminates against women by associating them with the family and domestic labour and labelling them as dependents (FIDH et al. 2013). According to Hafez (2014, p. 179), 'Women's subjection to laws that denied them the full freedom that men enjoyed in marriage and divorce and life security placed them permanently under patriarchal control'.

In terms of socio-political factors, the patriarchal and masculine political domain has historically been a contributing factor in excluding women from formal politics (Amar, 2011; El-Sharnouby, 2015). According to Hafez (2014, p. 179), 'The increased masculinisation of the state's public institutions alienated women from access and privilege to government and leadership positions'.

In terms of socio-cultural factors before and after the uprising, there was a perception in society that women and politics were incompatible, and politics was only for men (Adly, 2017), which contributed to excluding women from access to the public sphere. This perception has to do with gender norms and the division of roles between public and private life, as women are confined to taking care of the family first and foremost before taking on a public role (El-Tawil, 2009; Abdu el-Ghafar, 2009). Moreover, Hafez (2015), and other scholars (Singerman, 2005; Kandiyoti, 2013; Badran, 2016) who take a similar viewpoint, points to the patriarchal culture in the family, community, public space, society, and state institutions that also constrain women's access to the public sphere.

However, the exclusion of women did not mean that women were absent from the public sphere. Rayan (1990) argues that despite exclusion, women always find a way to access the public sphere.

Regarding exclusion of women, the following paragraphs outline the four main ways in which women were marginalised during the transition period.

First, as was the case before the 2011 uprising, some women activists in Egypt were subjected to gender-based violence and SH by regime-hired thugs, conservative groups, protesters, and people on the ground during the uprising (Rizzo, Price & Meyer, 2012; FIDH et al. 2013). Hafez (2014, p. 173) points out that ‘virginity tests, sexual assaults, fatwas or religious decrees validating the rape of unveiled activists were violent measures targeting the female body to structure women’s marginalisation from politics’.

Second, Adly (2017) and Goes (2015) also argue that women have been subjected to widespread anti-women rhetoric that has adherents everywhere, including among policymakers. This anti-women rhetoric was far-reaching and excluded women’s issues from the political agenda in the public sphere, for example, SH as a topic.

Third, El-Sharnouby (2015), and other scholars such as Amar (2011; Miles, 2013; Tadros, 2016) who take a similar view, argues that during the uprising, for example, in Tahrir Square, both the regime and the revolutionaries exhibited masculine characteristics that de facto contributed to marginalising women in the public sphere. Al-Ali (2012, p. 26) states that ‘the relationship between militarization and a militarized masculinity [...] privileges authoritarianism, social hierarchies and tries to marginalize and control not only women but also non-normative men’.

And fourth, new laws and procedures were enacted that contributed to marginalising women in the public sphere. In July 2011, SCAF passed amendments to two laws regulating parliamentary elections that abolished the women’s quota that had been reinstated in the 2010 elections (Abul Komsan, 2012). Regarding the constitutional declaration of 18 March 2011, Khattab (2016) argues that the new rulers abrogated the 1971 constitution and removed the prohibition on gender-based discrimination from the non-discrimination article. In addition, during Morsi’s tenure (2012–2013), FJP (Freedom and Justice Party, the political wing of MB) called for the abolition of the National Council for Women (NCW) and replaced the women’s rights agenda with a family agenda (McLarney, 2016).

However, despite their exclusion and marginalisation, women continue to find ways to participate in the public sphere. According to Asen (2002, p. 347), ‘Exclusion also is never total because the dynamic of inclusion and exclusion operate on multiple levels’. By this, Asen means that ‘public discussions do not proceed only through voice and body; inclusions and exclusions also occur in the perception of others – the imagining of others’. Asen (2002, p. 245), and Fraser (1990) who has a similar view, points out that overcoming these historical exclusions occurs through the ‘developing alternative mode of publicity’ or by ‘retaining commitment to critical publicity’; it manifests itself in the formation of oppositional counter-publics that challenge the dominant public, mainstream politics, or power structure.

## The aims, research questions and design of the dissertation

There are many scholars who have written about women's participation in the public sphere in Egypt. Wahba (2016, p. 66) devoted a large section of an entire chapter to describe how women as counter-public posed a threat to the patriarchy of the state, to society, and within the family. Elsadda (2010) wrote about literary counter-publics before the uprising. Many women, who were both writers and readers, challenged the distinction between the public space and public sphere to raise their voices in literary circles with the emergence of new styles of writing and new audiences to disturb the dominance of the mainstream.

Elsheikh and Lilleker (2019) emphasise feminist women as social activists and part of the counter-public on the internet. They challenged gender norms in a way that would not provoke the state and its security apparatuses, choosing not to be part of the polarised political environment to carry out their activism. Hirschkind (2001) emphasises the Islamic [sic] counter-public of MB, both in terms of ethics and anti-government sentiment. Bardhan (2018) also emphasises the Islamic [sic] counter-public of MB on the internet, where MB publishes its ideology, agenda and electoral platforms on the website called [*Ikhwanweb*].

This dissertation intends to produce and add new knowledge regarding the participation of women in the public sphere, addressing the process and content of their participation at different levels. By *process*, I mean accessibility to the public sphere, where inclusion and exclusion happen, and the constraints women face in the family, community, society, or other private spheres that exclude women from accessing the public sphere. By *content*, I mean the quality of participation and what happens after they access the public sphere, for example, expression, representation, or marginalisation within the public sphere. The overarching goal of this dissertation is to overcome the limitations in understanding women's role as counter-publics when shaping public communication and policy in the public sphere.

The dissertation examines women's participation as revolutionaries in Egypt from 2011 to 2014 through social movements, opposition political parties and volunteer activism that formed the core of many counter-publics against the dominant public, mainstream politics and power structure. The dissertation raises two central research questions:

The first research question is, how did women activists come to participate in the public sphere in Cairo as counter-publics during the period from 25 January 2011 to November 2014 (more specifically, from the 2011 uprising to the time when new authoritarian regime ruled the country)?

The question investigates the process of participation in what I call 'collectivity of participation', that is, being part of the collective action, interests, concerns, and

publicity of the public sphere. The question addresses how the interviewees constructed their subjectivity as counter-publics by tracking when and where they participated in politics, how they thought, felt, and understood their situation as women activists. It also considers the role that their personal situation, opposition groups and the regime's repression played in their participation.

In addition, the research follows how the interviewees developed their individual agency, their limited and irregular participation, and subsequently became part of their group's agency. It outlines when and where they came into contact with the group, under what circumstances, and what issues involving the group they were most compatible with. The research explores how interviewees resolved various constraints and the strategies they used to access the public sphere.

The second research question is, how did women activists experience their participation in the public sphere in the same period?

This question investigates the content of interviewees' participation by tracing what happened to them after they gained access to the public sphere – what I call 'visibility of participation'. The question also investigates how they experienced the expansion and constraints of their visibility to overcome their marginalisation in the public sphere, and how they describe their experience of speaking up to make their voices heard, in other words, what strategies they used to maintain their visibility in the public sphere.

The question also aims to understand visibility through their groups, as in, what role the groups played in expanding or constraining the visibility of the interviewees, and what strategies these groups used to protect or control their visibility. The focus will also be on the context of visibility by understanding how groups negotiated the social structure to give women more visibility while at the same time avoiding repression.

## The limitations of the empirical material

By using qualitative research methodology, fifty-four interviews were conducted, and many documents and secondary data were used. I intentionally avoided interviewing women activists who were celebrated as public figures by local and international media. Instead, I brought to light the stories of ordinary women activists who made their voices heard but participated little or not at all in public activism before the uprising.

The selection is based on the interviewees' self-definition as a regular and voluntary participant through membership in a particular group. Passy (2003, p. 30) identifies three types of activists: 'subscribers (passive members who contribute financially to the organisation), adherents (irregularly active members), and activists (regularly active members)'. Based on the third type, the chosen interviewees had spent at least one year



as members in their groups. In addition, I interviewed professional activists, experts in the field, and scholars. Secondary empirical material was also used extensively. The analysis covers the period between the outbreak of the uprising on 25 January 2011 to November 2014 (at which time I completed my fieldwork), when El-Sisi's authoritarian regime severely restricted the public sphere.

Between 2011 and 2014, men and women had different avenues for participating in the public sphere (Abdalla, 2016), and the investigation involved three avenues of participation. The first avenue is informal political participation through social movements. Here, I selected two prominent social movement organisations: *Ḥārākat al-Ikḥwan al-Muslmin* (Muslim Brotherhood, MB) and *Ḥārākat Shābab 6 April* (6 April Youth Movement, 6AYM). The second avenue is formal political participation through membership in an opposition political party (OPP), of which there are three: a liberal party, *Ḥizb al-Distur* (Constitution Party, CP); *Ḥizb Miṣr al-Qawiyah* (Strong Egypt Party, SEP), which is in the centre between Islamic and liberal and social ideologies); and a social democratic party, *al-Ḥizb al-Maṣri al-Dimuqrāṭi al-Ijtmā'i* (Egyptian Social Democratic Party, ESDP). The third avenue is participation through civic engagement in social and cultural issues (two initiatives and one project): the first is called *Shuft Taḥarūsh* (or Shoft Ta7rosh, as they refer to themselves, which means 'I Saw Harassment', or ISH for short), founded in 2012 after the 2011 uprising. The second is called *Kharitat al-Taḥarūsh* (HarassMap), founded in 2010 before the 2011 uprising. The third group is a project called *Sit al-Ḥiyṭah* (Women On Walls, WOW), which works with graffiti art and proposes to change society by using an esthetic element.

## The outline of the dissertation

In addition to an introduction and an overall conclusion, this dissertation is divided into four parts, and each part is divided into one or two chapters.

The introduction provides a brief background for formulating the research questions, and the first part consists of three chapters. The first chapter discusses different models of publics and the use of the empirical model through which counter-publics are included. The chapter addresses the collectivity and visibility of participation. The second chapter addresses the comprehensive background of the public sphere in Egypt in the decade leading up to the 2011 uprising, the emergence of counter-publics, and the situation of women as part of these counter-publics. The third chapter deals with the methodological approach to present the data sets and how these data are processed in a qualitative method.

The second part deals with participation through social movements, and it consists of two chapters: the fourth chapter examines participation through 6AYM, and the fifth chapter examines participation through MB. The third part and the sixth chapter looks at the avenue of participation through OPPs. It is the only chapter in this part where interviewees from three OPPs exemplify women's formal political participation. The final part looks at participation through civic engagement, and it consists of two chapters: chapter seven examines participation through anti-harassment initiatives in which the interviewees urged the mainstream to address SH as an issue, and chapter eight examines participation through a graffiti project to raise awareness of women's issues in the public space. The dissertation also includes a section for discussion and a conclusion as well as a bibliography and an appendix.



# Part I: Theories, background and methodological approach



## *Chapter 1:*

# Theoretical framework for participation in the public sphere

This chapter consists of five sections. The first deals with the theories and two models of the public sphere. The second is about counter-public(s) and how they appear in the public sphere. The third is about the concept of participation and its two features: collectivity and visibility. The fourth is about critical realism as an epistemology of research, and the final section is concerned with subjectivity, agency and structure.

## Theories and models of the public sphere

The public sphere is a deliberative space (or spaces) where private individuals assemble to discuss their concerns and interests to achieve the common good for the population of society. According to Koçan (2008), the public sphere is constituted and constructed in a particular social and historical context, and it involves many aspects such as space, agents, norms and values, structures of ideas, networks of political concepts, meanings and institutions, laws, and various forms of political practices.

In his book *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, Habermas (1989, p. 27) adopted the concept of the public sphere to promote authentic participatory democracy, but he emphasised the bourgeois public sphere,

The bourgeois public sphere may be conceived above all as the sphere of private people come together as a public; they soon claimed the public sphere regulated from above against the public authorities themselves, to engage them in a debate over the general rules governing relations in the basically privatized but publicly relevant sphere of commodity exchange and social labor.

According to Habermas, people gather in the public sphere to talk and interact about matters of public interest and concern, deliberating on and exchanging ideas and remoulding public opinion. This public sphere is located between the private realm and

the authority realm. The private realm consists of civil society. It is the realm of commodity exchange, social labour, and the conjugal family's internal space (bourgeois intellectuals). And the authority realm consists of the state (the realm of the 'police') and the court (courtly-noble society) (Habermas, 1989). According to Habermas (1989), developing from the coffee houses in Germany, France and England in the 19th century, currently, the mass media – TV and radio, newspapers and magazines, clubs and the market of culture production – are all considered part of the public sphere.

Koçan (2008, p. 1) points out that 'the concept of public sphere is not separable from particular understandings and interpretations of it'. Tilly (1992) refers to the theory of the public sphere as an unusable concept to describe the formation of the common good in the service of society, but they differ on its proper use and definition. Tilly (1992) argues that the concept of the public sphere is 'morally admirable but analytically useless' because it is a normative, not empirically grounded concept. Adut's (2012) response to Tilly argues that the public sphere is not just a concept but rather a phenomenon that enables egalitarian dialogue between people to achieve the common good.

From an ontological point of view, the public sphere is approached as an ideal normative and/or empirical model. These two models are not mutually exclusive, and there is no cut-off demarcation between them. McGuigan (2010, p. 8) argues, 'The public sphere is both ideal and actual. The actuality is a good deal less perfect than the idea of free and open debate that has policy consequences in a democratic polity'.

In the following sections, I will explain the critique of the ideal normative and Habermasian models as well as justify the use of the empirical models.

### **The normative ideal model of the public sphere**

Koçan (2008, p. 4) distinguishes between the ideal and non-ideal normative theories of the public sphere: 'Some normative public sphere theories are "ideal" – that is, they are theories about what the best public sphere would be in the world in which everything was politically possible'. On the other hand, 'Other normative public sphere theories are "nonideal" – that is, they are theories that assume a variety of constraints on the option of public sphere'.

According to Koçan (2008), the ideal normative model/theory describes how the public sphere ought to be (not how it is) best; it is an end-oriented model that excludes action from its emphasis. The model portrays the public sphere as free from constraints and political conflicts; it is distanced from the public space and civil society and sets a sharp line between the public and private spheres. Therefore, it is not applicable in understanding what is going on in the public sphere in different contexts like Egypt.

The non-ideal normative model combines descriptive and normative stances of the public sphere, such as Habermas' theory (Negt & Kluge, 1993; Fraser, 1990), which stresses the universal ideal values of accessibility, equality between peers and universal concepts of citizenship regardless of gender, religion, class, or ethnicity. According to Habermas (1989), people use their reasons for communicating in the public sphere critically and rationally to achieve consensus.

When I tried to apply Habermas' theory – as mostly used by scholars in the Egyptian context – to analyse some interviews, I faced a real problem, especially in analysing the contestations at the level of the individual. Therefore, I will make some critical remarks and explain what led to ruling out Habermas' normative model and using the empirical model instead, which suits the purpose of the study.

### *Critiques of Habermas' normative model*

First, many scholars, such as Negt and Kluge (1993), argue that Habermas' theory excludes the substantial life interests and social experiences of a non-bourgeois public (e.g. women, students and workers). Therefore, Fraser (1990) argues that the bourgeois or liberal model of the public sphere is no longer applicable in a 'social welfare state' or in a 'mass democracy'.

Second, the development of media technology tools and the expansion of communication media outlets have transformed beyond Habermas' (1989) concerns about media manipulation by politicians and experts. Kellner (2000) argues that the public sphere has shifted with the rise of a new social movements and new technologies (e.g. the internet as a new platform for participatory democracy).

Third, Habermas adopted his theory to understand socio-political action, communication, interaction, and institutions in Western contexts. Göle (2002, p. 176) argues, 'The public sphere in a non-Western context is neither identical with its counterparts in the West nor different, but manifests asymmetrical differences as it is continuously altered by a field of cultural meanings and social practices'. For example, Eickelman (2002, p. 7) argues, 'In Muslim majority societies, the boundary between public and private is often more blurred than in Western societies and rarely fixed'.

I will exclude Habermas' normative model because the requisites for the study are an inclusionary model that is capable of providing an understanding of the presence of diversity and social inequality in a context like Egypt, that examines the individual experience of participation, that pays close attention to new communication technologies, and that fits non-Western contexts. Therefore, I will use the empirical model, which might give us other insights into the public sphere in Egypt.



## The empirical model of the public sphere

The empirical model describes the public sphere as it actually exists; it takes into account dissimilarities, social inequality, and contexts of opposition to explain the factual factors behind these differences; it is an action-oriented and ‘explanatory’ model that explains why the public sphere in a way it *is*, rather than the way it *ought to be* (Koçan, 2008, pp. 4–5). The empirical model of the public sphere relates to and permeates community, polity, and people in their everyday interactions; it depends on the outcomes of what is going on in the public space, civil society, and the market (Koçan, 2008).

While the normative model reduces the meaning of political to the state administrative process and detaches it (though not completely) from civil society, the market, and public spaces, the empirical model integrates the political into the world of interaction of discussion and debate that takes place in public space.

Starting from an understanding of the public sphere based on the republican-virtue model or civic republican model, in which the public realm is seen in terms of political community and citizenship, Weintraub (1997) argues that the political means of discussion, debate, deliberation, and collective decision-making and action are concretely in the realm of public space wherever human beings go about in their everyday interactions. This is consistent with what the empirical model suggests: the political/politics is conflated with public space (Benhabib, 1992), where individual and collective experiences are accumulated (Negt & Kluge, 1993) to form political communication in the public sphere. Therefore, I do not make a distinction between the public sphere and public space, as we will see later.

Based on the empirical model, Fraser (1990) considers the public sphere as an inclusionary one that embraces multiple publics with parallel existence and segmented spheres instead of a single overarching public sphere according to Habermas. This perspective is presented in her approach to understanding egalitarian, multicultural, and stratified societies. She terms it a ‘subaltern counter-public’, an alternative discursive parallel space that encompasses different cultures and identities of subordinate groups.

Negt and Kluge (1993) argue that Habermas’ theory does not represent the whole of society because the bourgeois publics are anchored in the bourgeois patriarchal family and do not include, for example, the culture of working-class households. However, Negt and Kluge (1993) argue that individual and collective social experience is organised in the empirical realm. This horizon of individual and collective social experience represents the unity of the life context of a group or public, such as proletarians, workers, students, and women.

That does not mean the empirical model is permanently in opposition to the normative one. According to Koçan (2008), descriptive/empirical theories can serve the normative theories by providing information about the structure of the public sphere to illuminate what is the best public sphere.

In this dissertation, the use of the descriptive/empirical model is not completely at odds with normative assessments. On the other hand, in the empirical model, the boundaries between the public and private spheres, as well as the demarcation between the public sphere and public space, are not as sharply drawn as the normative model suggests.

### *The public and private spheres*

The dichotomy of public and private spheres is rooted in Western thought of liberal neoclassical economic theories and utilitarian liberalism (Weintraub, 1997). Liberals propose to distinguish between state and market in ways that distinguish between public and private sectors and between governmental and non-governmental entities. This distinction demarcates the sphere of public authority/government from the sphere of private economy, non-governmental activism, personal relations/family, individual voluntary ties in the market and social relationship in civil society (Squires, 2003). This distinction pays less attention to people's everyday interactions in the public space, family matters, personal relationships, and cultural components that are considered to belong to the private sphere.

There are critiques of this distinction, especially Habermas' theory of the public sphere, which is based on liberal ideas. I will explain the critiques in general, and the feminist criticisms in particular, to underline the use of an empirical model that challenges this distinction.

Calhoun (2005) argues that the idea of privacy in the modern era was not only associated with notions of individuality and family, as liberals claim, but with the communication of all kinds of meaning to the public. For example, religious and traditional orders have relatively comprehensive control over the private sphere to convey their messages about right and wrong. Dahlgren (2006, p. 275) points out that we need to rethink liberals' distinction between the public (associated with reason, rationality, objectivity) and the private (conversely associated with personal, emotions, intimacy, subjectivity, popular culture) because developments of civic competencies in the public sphere have many origins in the private sphere and common modes of reflection (e.g. the combination of politics and entertainment and other forms of popular culture). Criticism of liberals is based on the notion that in modern society, especially with amplifying new communication technologies (Cassegård, 2014), the meaning of public has been enlarged to include what is going on in not only public spaces but also personal, family domains.

For example, Eickelman (2002), Göle (2002), and Thompson (2003), who share a similar view, argue that in relation to Middle Eastern and Muslim societies, public/private distinction is blurred. The meaning of the term 'public' has been expanded to include what happens in the public space and in personal, family domains. Therefore, the public/private distinction should be questioned in order to understand the meaning of the political in non-liberal Western societies.

In terms of feminist critique, Felski (1989, p. 72) argues, 'The emergence of a public sphere is itself intimately related to women's containment within the private domestic realm'. Scholars criticise liberals on the distinction between public and private spheres for many reasons; among them, liberalism compromises patriarchal norms and values, so they accept liberal ideas but reject patriarchal distortion (Pateman, 1983). Squires (2003, p. 134) argues, 'The liberal social contract, therefore represents the reorganisation, but not the abolition, of patriarchy. Patriarchy was relocated into the private domain and reformulated as complementary to civil society'. Patriarchy, then, functions to reproduce sexual inequality in the private domain that is reformulated in civil society in favour of men.

Other scholars (Pateman, 1983; Squires, 2003; Felski, 1989; MacKinnon, 1989) argue that liberalism that assumes the public/private distinction is gender neutral, but in practise it works against women's interests. Felski (1989) argues that feminist theory emphasises that women's personal issues (e.g. intimate and sexual issues, domestic violence, rape, and the care of children) should be considered political and public issues. Indeed, in the context of discussing abortion, MacKinnon (1989, p. 191) argues, 'The private is public for those for whom the personal is political. In this sense, for women there is no private either normatively or empirically'.

Pateman (1983) also emphasises the importance of liberalism to individualism and the emancipatory project of feminism. However, she rejects universalising liberal doctrines that might subsequently undermine liberal thought (e.g. contrasting the public with the private sphere and not challenging the separation between the two).

Therefore, both the general and feminist critiques conclude that the public and private distinction should be challenged. Based on the empirical model of the public sphere, which challenges this distinction, the analysis will examine various forms of women's activities at home in the family, on the internet and in the public space as forms of public activism.

### *Public space and public sphere*

The public sphere and public space are very complex concepts, and the relationship between the two is ambiguous because it has not been sufficiently investigated (Parkinson, 2012; Smith & Low, 2006). According to Adut (2012, p. 244), the public space 'is an area the contents of which can be subject to publicity' and 'publicity is what

most makes the public sphere sociologically relevant'. There are two prominent perspectives when considering this relationship.

The first, which is close to the normative ideal model of the public sphere, makes a clear demarcation between the public sphere and public space (Parkinson, 2012). The public sphere is de-spatialised in a way that is relatively independent of the public space (Cassegård, 2014). Habermas (1989) was aware of the relative role of public space, but he believes that political deliberation could be mediated linguistically through critical publicity of opinion and public communication. Arendt (1958) also detaches the public sphere from everyday interaction, wherever people try to maintain their lives and survive. In her view, participants must bracket their social inequalities as private individuals (not citizens) when they enter the public sphere. On the other hand, the emergence of the new media forms of the internet has reinforced the idea of decoupling the public sphere from everyday interaction and the public space (Cassegård, 2014).

The second perspective does not make a clear demarcation between the public sphere and public space. This perspective is closest to the empirical model, which theorises the public sphere as it is conflated to other parts of public life, especially public space and its social community (Fraser, 1990). Scholars (Smith & Low, 2006; Parkinson, 2012) view the public sphere and public space as completing each other, and sometimes, they are employed interchangeably. In this view, any erosion of public space is perceived as a threat to the expansion of the public sphere.

In light of this perspective, launching collective action transforms the content of the public space (publicness) into a political form (publicity). Adut (2012, pp. 244–5) points out that 'publicity is not the serial transmission of information or something being known by a lot of people. It is also different from publicness – simply being in a public space. By publicity, I mean attention on a focus by a public'.

Transforming public space into a space of the public sphere is about making dissimilarities visible through which disadvantaged groups integrate public space into the public sphere. Mitchell (2003) argues that disadvantaged groups can make certain places, such as public squares, a site of visualisation and representation. In this way, they are empowered to overcome their exclusion as they make dissimilarities visible to oppose mainstream society. Fraser (1990) asserts that when we talk about the public sphere as if it were a normative idea, the formal historical exclusions, dissimilarities and social inequalities should be eliminated through contestation rather than being bracketed.

From the second perspective of challenging the distinction between the public space and the public sphere, the analysis investigates counter-publics in the public space, such as a disputing debate, discussion, action, or interaction that challenges mainstream politics.

## Counter-public(s)

According to Asen (2002, p. 358), 'Counter-public refers to those publics that form mutual recognition of exclusions in wider publics, set themselves against exclusionary wider publics, and resolve to overcome these exclusions'. Thus, the people of the counter-public are aware of their exclusion from the wide/dominant public of culture, discourse, style of speech and lifestyle. They are also aware of their position to challenge the dominant public in the public sphere (Warner, 2002; Asen, 2000). Historically, Hafez, K. (2016) points out that the concept of counter-publics had been introduced in the 1960s and 1970s to understand how people in the periphery can be integrated into the central political debate in the public sphere.

Counter-publics are understood from two not mutually exclusive approaches. The first associates counter-publics with marginalised groups excluded from the wider public. Fraser (1990, p. 67) rethinks Habermas' theory and has developed the concept of counter-publics:

members of subordinated social groups – women, workers, people of color and gays and lesbians – have repeatedly found it advantageous to constitute alternative publics. I propose to call these *subaltern counterpublics* in order to signal that they are parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counterdiscourses, which in turn permit them formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests and needs.

This diversity includes subaltern counter-publics that are discursively constructed as alternatives to the public-at-large (the dominant public). Fraser suggests that social differences and inequality among peers should not be bracketed, as Habermas suggests, but should be brought to light by counter-publics, so that they can be seen in the public sphere.

The second approach associates counter-public with one or a combination of elements such as persons (e.g. public figures), places (e.g. public squares), and issues (e.g. those highlighted in the public sphere) that produce 'alternative discourse practices and norms' (Asen, 2000, p. 427). Warner (2002), for example, defines counter-public in accordance with an addressed discourse that brings into play alternative discursive norms to challenge the dominant discourse. However, the extent to which this challenge is hostile, frivolous or friendly is an empirical question that depends on the nature of the public sphere and the form of the state (Asen, 2000). Within these two approaches, different counter-publics formed in response to the action and reaction of dominant public.

To understand the differences between black publics in the United States, Squires (2002, p. 448) describes three types of marginal publics (counter-publics) that emerge

as political responses to the oppressive and exclusionary politics of the state and the dominant public on the one hand, and the internal politics within a particular public sphere on the other. The author distinguishes between an ‘enclave’ that needs safe spaces, a ‘counter-public’ that has increased public communication with the dominant public, and ‘satellite’ publics that are distanced from the dominant publics.

## Participation in the public sphere

Mathbor (2008, p. 8) claims that understanding participation as a term can cope with its use. The term *participation* can be restricted to mean the decision-making process in a democratic system (Verba, Nie & Kim, 1978), formal/conventional and informal/unconventional political participation (Kasse & Marsh, 1979), civic participation (Ekman & Amnå, 2012), or, broadly, as collective efforts by groups and movements to exercise control over resources (Westergaard, 1986). In figuring out different public/private distinctions forms, Weintraub (1997, p. 5) and other scholars (Arendt, 1958; Warner, 2002; Adut, 2012) signify the situation of being collective (collectivity) and visible (visibility) as two fundamental and analytically quite different features associated with the meaning of participation and being public and achieving publicity in the public sphere.

### Collectivity of participation

According to Weintraub (1997, p. 5), collectivity relates to ‘what is individual, or pertains only to an individual, versus what is collective, or affects the interests of a collectivity of individuals’; it involves being self-conscious of the collective interests and concerns of the public. Weintraub (1997, p. 17) points out that ‘the citizens who “rush” to the public space of the assembly do so to engage in self-conscious collective action, deliberation, and decision concerning – that is, “public” – affairs’. On the other hand, collectivity is about transforming the participant’s subjectivity – e.g. feeling excluded or marginalised – into a part of the public spirit that enables participants to undertake a collective action together by adopting/developing agency. Fraser (1990, p. 72) claims that ‘in the process of their deliberations, participants are transformed from a collection of self-seeking, private individuals into a public-spirited collectivity, capable of acting together in the common interest’.

In analysing the empirical material, the collectivity of participation is used to understand the factors that exclude women from accessing the public sphere. Collectivity sets to understand participation as an individual (subjectivity/agency) and

as a formal member of a group (group agency). Moreover, participation in a collective action requires a process of mobilisation.

### *Mobilisation process to collective action*

Melucci (1996, p. 20) defines *collective action* as

a set of social practices (i) involving simultaneously a number of individuals or groups, (ii) exhibiting similar morphological characteristics in contiguity of time and space, (iii) implying a social field of relationships and (iv) the capacity of the people involved of making sense of what they are doing.

A mobilisation process is required for collective action to be sustained. Tilly (1978, p. 69) states his definition of mobilisation: 'The word "mobilization" conveniently identifies the process by which a group goes from being a passive collection of individuals to an active participant in public life. Demobilization is the reverse process'. Klandermans (1997) considers mobilisation through the establishment of compatibility between two parties: activist/participant and organiser/organisation (group). This compatibility places the two parties in a framing alignment that bridges the gap between the participants' understanding of the situation and the movement's interpretation of the same situation. The two parties can redefine what is perceived as an unjust and immoral status quo (Tarrow, 2011). Snow et al. (1986, p. 446) define that

by frame alignment, we refer to the linkage of individual and SMO (social movement organizations) interpretive orientations, such that some set of individual interests, values and beliefs and SMO activities, goals, and ideology are congruent and complementary.

Through framing alignment, the organisation provides a collective action frame that facilitates participation in collective action. The frame finds problems and categorises them as social, political or cultural and can suggest solutions (Snow et al. 1986).

In this dissertation, mobilisation focuses on society-driven participation, for example, social movements rather than state-driven participation, so mobilisation of potential is considered independent of state control (Albrecht, 2008).

In summary, the collectivity of participation consists of two steps: becoming part of a counter-public and participating as a formal member through a group. Depending on the context, the temporal difference between the first and second steps can disappear or expand. When an interviewee becomes collective, she immediately becomes visible in the public sphere.

## Visibility of participation

Visibility of participation is about being visible, being observed, seeing and being seen, hearing and being heard in the public sphere. The concept of visibility sets to understand the marginalisation of women within the public sphere after they have gained access to it. Weintraub (1997, p. 5) points out that visibility is 'what is hidden or withdrawn, versus what is open, revealed, or accessible'. Thompson (1995, p. 123) asserts, 'What is public, in this sense is what is visible or observable, what is performed in front of spectators, what is open for all or many to see or hear or hear about'.

Visibility of participation is based on contestation rather than on the bracketed notion of publicity, that is, on making dissimilarities and social inequalities visible (Fraser, 1990). In this way, subordinated and disadvantaged groups can openly contest their exclusion and marginalisation. Visibility is not an abstract quantity detached from reality but rather something embedded in social relations and their social structure. According to Brighenti (2010), and Adut (2012; Iveson, 2007), who hold a similar view, visibility is a dynamic relational occurrence formed between the performance of the participants, the spectators and the scene. There is no clear-cut boundary between visibility and invisibility, but rather it is more a case of a degree and extent.

Visibility involves, first, the mediation of a voice, an 'immaterial' public (Barnett, 2008, p. 26) that can be seen as subjects, sites, rhythms, and effects, for example, graffiti or discourse. The second is an unmediated form of physical 'appearance' in public space, in terms of bodily affection, expression, and experience.

The measure of the interviewee's visibility is based on her subjective experience of being expanded or constrained. The expansion is achieved through the recognition of the movements of the body, performances, dress, speech and other cultural codes embodied in the practices of daily life and political activism (Brighenti, 2010). Recognition is achieved when a participant feels empowered because they are accepted, respected, valued, and have an impact on others. Recognition comes from people or colleagues in the group/organisation, from ordinary people in the public sphere, or from official and unofficial institutions, such as the regime or the dominant discourse.

However, visibility is constrained when the interviewee is subject to control by regulators, participants/activists, spectators or ordinary people in the public space, or colleagues within their groups. Control constrains women's (and men's) visibility in terms of body, voice, role, performance, and the like. The result of this control is the marginalisation of participants in the public sphere, both within their groups and in the public space.



### *Visibility in the public space*

Public space is where visibility plays out and shapes the essence of publicity (Adut, 2012). The public space can be transformed to be part of the public sphere as long as publicity is realised. Adut (2012, p. 245) explains, 'The more publicity a public space is expected to receive, the more central that space within the general public sphere will be'. This publicity has either a generative or restrictive effect on visibility, depending on who controls the publicity in the public space. Then, visibility functions as a source of empowerment when it receives recognition or as a source of disempowerment when it is subject to control. Between recognition and control, Brighenti (2010, p. 148) points out that 'in practice as well as in theory, these two poles should not be regarded in simply dichotomic terms'. The de facto public space can be illustrated between a space of appearance and a space of surveillance. The two illustrations are used as ideal types in the analysis.

According to Arendt (1958, p. 199), 'The space of appearance comes into being wherever men are together in the manner of speech and action'; it is an environment in which individuals appear as visible subjects with self-revelation among equals. The space of appearance includes discussion, political communication and interaction in the public sphere. It could be in the virtual or actual public space for a particular counter-public, yet not for others, or to address particular issues, yet not others. The space of appearance may be offered by those in power, for example, the regime, for a particular opposition group, discourse or topic to reduce political gridlock or to measure the power of opposition groups when they become visible. However, opposition groups can provide a space of appearance to express their demands, aspirations, and identity when they successfully resist repression by those in power.

As for surveillance, a specific technique of surveillance and punishment/discipline can produce the identity and individuality of the individual in public space; it is a kind of control through which visibility is disempowered when it is subject to control (Marquez, 2012, p. 7). The notion of disciplining, according to Foucault, aims for the human body to be obedient, as Foucault (1995, p. 138) asserts, 'Thus discipline produces subjected and practiced bodies "docile" bodies'. As long as the space of appearance increases, visibility becomes subject to the form of surveillance/control and vice versa (Marquez, 2012, p. 8). Control can take different forms and levels, for example, to expel the participant or regulate the visibility of the participant to cope with the setting of visibility. In practice, the space of appearance and monitoring should not simply be considered as a dichotomy, as they have a complex relationship.

In summary, collectivity of participation is used to understand the process of participation and the possibilities of accessibility, and to fathom how to solve the constraints in overcoming exclusion. Visibility is used to understand the content of participation between constraints (control) and expansion (recognition); it is used to

understand how women are marginalised in the public sphere and how they solve the constraints to overcome this marginalisation.

## Critical realism

To understand participation in the public sphere and its relationship to other operational concepts, one must understand the subjectivity of activists, how they adopt/develop their agency, and their relationship to the social structure. The search for these three elements should avoid reducing the analysis to the individual (agent/action-centred) or structural levels (structure-centred). Different epistemologies exist for this purpose, but they emphasise the role of the agent-centred or structure-centred perspective (Archer, 2000).

However, Ingen, Grohmann and Gunnarsson (2020) claim that scholars have recently focus attention on critical realism as an inherently critical, emancipatory–epistemological perspective in the public sphere and in gender and feminist studies. Parpora (2019) argues that unlike those who understand deliberative democracy as built through consensus argumentation, critical realism understands deliberative democracy as built through factual contestation.

Using critical realist Archer's concepts of agency and structure, we can see how the interviewees' agency functions within the family, community, organisation and public sphere in its relationship to the social structure. It provides a different understanding than the poststructuralist approach, which emphasises the circulation of discourses and opinions in the public sphere.

On the other hand, Gunnarsson, Martinez, and Ingen (2016) and New (2020), who share similar views, argue that critical realism is the most generally relevant epistemology, which has become more prominent in academia as an alternative to the poststructuralist perspective that currently dominates gender studies and feminism. Critical realism gives us an insightful understanding of subjectivity that breaks with poststructuralism's view of it as a unitary entity or as dissolved. The critical realist perspective is used to unpack women's experiences of things and events and the mechanism by which these things are connected (Clegg, 2020). Fletcher (2020, p. 205) points out that 'critical realism does allow us to attribute a reality to gendered experiences of oppression'.

Critical realism, then, corresponds to the empirical model for understanding the public sphere; it not only describes it, but implies some normative attitudes and evaluations aimed at changing it. Let us look at what critical realism is. Critical realism is a realist philosophy of science that opposes empirical realism (positivism) and

transcendental idealism (constructivism). Critical realism, a 'realist turn', tries to find its way between the two perspectives, as in, it emphasises neither the agent nor the structure but tries to avoid the use of the universal law ('general law') without simply abandoning the purpose of causal explanation (Gorski, 2013, p. 659).

At the ontological level, Bhaskar (2008) claims the critical realism approach understands the world as it is stratified and consisting of several domains. First, the *real domain* (structures and mechanisms that generate events), which is referred to as 'generative mechanisms' or 'causal mechanisms'. Events in this domain are generated independently of other domains or 'intransitive' (permanent structures of the natural world). Second, the *actual domain* (events 'observed and unobserved' generated by mechanisms when activated) consists of events and things that are transitive to humans and society. And third, the *empirical domain* (events observed and experienced) consists of events observed and experienced by a human being. These three domains overlap and diverge simultaneously.

Therefore, while our understanding of the real domain has no influence on its natural law, we are influenced by the sequences of events observed and experienced. As humans, we cannot influence the natural law in its real form, but we do try to understand, explain and interpret its causality. Our knowledge of the real world involves nothing more than a scientific effort to comprehend it. We as humans can influence and be influenced in the empirical domain by reflecting on our knowledge. Our knowledge of reality is historical, socially produced, and culturally bound, which transforms and contextualises human activities. According to Archer (2000), this type of knowledge is possible through precise research methodology, such as conducting interviews to reconstruct the meaning of the agent's reflexive experience of navigating a particular objective social structure.

In this way, we are causal agents capable of acting self-consciously, but not independently of society (Bhaskar and Archer, 1998). As subjects and agents, we have agency to reproduce, transform and elaborate social structures in a relational world of action and interaction. According to Archer (2000), the individual as subject (agent/actor) is constituted through reflexivity in relational realism with other individuals as subjects (agents/actors), other organisations and groups as collective subjects (agents/actors), and the structures of society as objects (structure). It is a never-ending world of relations between subjects that elaborate the objective structure and are elaborated anew through reflexivity. In the analysis, the three aspects of subjectivity, agency and structure must be understood through their relational realism to grasp the concept of *participation*.

## Subjectivity

Human subjectivity is the personal capacity to feel, reflect, think and maybe intend to act; it is understood from two approaches. The first is a self-referential entity, ontologically a pure idea and metaphysical essence, or a textual and discursive spectral bodily existence. In this approach, the subject is articulated in its relation to other spectral physical subjects of a structural world of texts, languages and discourses. The second approach, however, is a relational approach that attempts to go beyond the dichotomy of mind/body division predicted by the first approach. This is an anti-ontological approach articulated in the relational world of context, and other subjective and objective things where the subjects live their lives (Gill, 2008; Hollway, 1998). Adkins (2003) points out that reconfiguration of subjectivity can occur through reflexivity and mobility. For Hollway (1998), subjectivity is the meanings and incorporated values embodied in personal practices in relationships with others by and through the social structure.

In the outlines of the second approach, Archer (2000, p. 3) conceptualises human subjectivity as self-consciousness and ‘inner conversation’ of self that is articulated ‘on and in the world-natural, practical, and social’ in the relationship of interaction and power.

Based on the second approach, I will use subjectivity to understand how the interviewees felt excluded from the wide/dominant public and self-understanding of belonging to a particular counter-public. In addition, these feelings evolved how they felt as activists and as women (they do not necessarily have to advocate for women’s issues, but they have a sense of being women) and in some cases, how they have a gendered subjectivity to advocate for women’s issues. Based on reflexivity as a notion, Adkins (2003, 34) asserts, ‘Reflexivity does not concern liberal freedom from gender, but maybe tied into new arrangements of gender’. Thus, the possibility of constructing a gendered subjectivity is always present. Rebughini (2014, p. 5) explains, ‘Hence, an idea of gendered subjectivity is considered a necessary basis for the claim of rights in the public sphere’.

## Agency and structure

Calhoun (2010) connects agency to participation and the exercise of power in the public sphere. Elder-Vass (2010, 2) points out that human agency is ‘the capabilities that humans have to act in their own right’ as purposeful and autonomous agents capable of making choices. Human agency can be understood from a variety of approaches. Elder-Vass (2010) claims that some scholars are close to voluntarism when they view agency as the exercise of human reflexivity. This approach is similar to

rational choice theory and phenomenology or what Emirbayer and Mische (1998, p. 963) refer to as one-sided conceptions of agency, that is, the purposive agent acts, more likely autonomously, to seek goals in action.

Other scholars, however, are more determinists when they view agency as determined by structural forces. This approach is close to being a fixed category to mediate the elements of the structure, or Emirbayer and Mische's (1998) norm-based approach of agency used by ethnomethodologists and new institutionalists in organisational theory, among others. This approach pays close attention to nonrational actions of habitus – routinised and repetitive practices that are taken for granted as fixed.

Thus, while the former reduces agency to individual forces, the latter reduces it to structural forces. Elder-Vass (2010) argues that many other scholars reject both approaches, the binary distinction between structure and agency; they are unwilling to renounce either agency or structure and emphasise the importance of both. Under the third approach, Emirbayer and Mische (1998, p. 963) reconceptualise human agency using a relational pragmatic approach in which they view agency as a process and as flexible, providing a more dynamic understanding of the capabilities that actors have within structure:

a temporally embedded process of social engagement, informed by the past (in its habitual aspect), but also oriented toward the future (as a capacity to imagine alternative possibilities) and toward the present (as a capacity to contextualize past habits and future projects within the contingencies of the moment).

Therefore, agency is about understanding capabilities of action in light of the past and future, namely in the context between the historically embedded constraints of the past and the possibilities of the future. This understanding implies understanding social structure(s).

Social structure refers to 'normative institutions, organizations, class, gender, the capitalist system, or demographic distribution' (Elder-Vass, 2010, p. 77). While some theories emphasise social structure as independent of human behaviour (agency), other theories emphasise the intersection of the two in an embodied structure. Lopez and Scott (2000, p. 4) explain that 'embodied structures are found in the habits and skills that are inscribed in human bodies and minds and that allow them to produce, reproduce, and transform institutional structures and relational structures'. Elder-Vass (2010) argues that the ideas of embodied structure are close to Archer's understanding of conflation of structure and agency. In the analysis, I use the concept of social structure not as monolithic (not to be taken literally) but as a multiple concept implying

a nexus of several intersecting substructures, for example, socio-political and cultural structures.

### **Archer's approach of agency and structure**

Archer (2000) has denied what she calls the upward and downward conflation between the personal level (agency) and society (structure). Instead, Archer (2000, p. 44) suggests that

in structure and agency we are dealing with two irreducible strata which make for a stratified social world, and to the charter of analytical dualism, namely that we must examine the interplay of their respective properties and powers to explain the outcome for either and both.

In this sense, Archer distinguishes between individual and group agency. In individual agency, the primary agent acts alone, in a way that is 'inarticulate in their demands and unorganized for their pursuit' (Archer, 1995, p. 185). It derives from social conditions and the pre-existing social structure, or what Emirbayer and Mische (1998) call 'past'. The agent cannot transform the social structure, but reproduces it (morphostasis). The evolution to primary agent does not follow a straight line but rather different paths (in time and place), as people have different personal situations, subjectivities, circumstances and interactions within the social structure.

Later, when the interviewees moved to formally join a group, they became corporate agents (group agency): 'Those who are aware of what they want, can articulate it to themselves and others, and have organized to get it' (Archer, 1995, p. 258). Then, the agent becomes a social actor who participates in collective action and, strategically and in an organised way, elaborates/transforms (morphogenesis) the structure and corporate agency itself (Archer, 2000, p. 11). The process of becoming a corporate agent is not linear and varies from person to person; it is analogous, not strictly from stage to stage or from interviewee to interviewee.

### **The context of women's participation in the public sphere**

Based on Archer's theory, I analyse the interviewees' participation in the public sphere as a result of the interaction between the interviewee's personal situation (primary agency), the group's role (corporate agency) and structural constraints and enablement(s). The personal situation is illustrated for each interviewee, as well as personal characteristics (motives, feelings, thoughts, background, etc.) and the attitude

of the family (based on the interviewees' narratives) towards the role of the interviewee in the public sphere (rejecting, supporting, discouraging).

The role of the group is envisioned as a means between interviewees and a structure upon which compatibility can form between the two parties. The group provides a collective action frame that facilitates collectivity among interviewees. In terms of structural constraints and enablement(s), Archer (2000, p. 285) explains the interaction of agents' life interests with the social structure: 'These initial interests with which Agents are endowed, through their life chances, provide the leverage upon which reasons (otherwise known as constraints and enablements) for different courses of action operate'. In this dissertation, structural constraints are overlapping factors that reduce the opportunities to transform the structural elements and prevent the agent from creating a new situation with novel opportunities for change.

However, the structural enablement(s) open a route for a mobilisation opportunity to realise the interviewees' participation. According to Archer (2000, p. 72), 'Enablements are advantageous for allowing people to stay ahead, not to stay where they are, and the former means being ready and able to innovate with new courses and openings, which is beyond the wits of passive man'.

Structural enablement(s) are not about empowering or stimulating the agent; instead, the agent intelligently uses the power of enablement to put their project into practice. Structural enablement(s) can have a direct and indirect influence and play a supporting role. I will ignore the indirect structural enablement because it needed more empirical material to prove their effectiveness.

To summarise the chapter, the research emphasises collectivity and visibility as two features of participation in the public sphere. The former is about the process of participation to gain access the public sphere, and the latter is about the content of participation after gaining access to the public sphere. The study uses the empirical model of the public sphere, in which different forms of counter-publics are elaborated to understand the interviewees' participation in challenging the public/private and public sphere/space distinctions. The study draws on critical realism as the epistemology for understanding how the interviewees constructed their subjectivity and adopted/developed their individual and group's agency in relation to the social structure, between structural enablement(s) and constraints, to participate in the public sphere.

## *Chapter 2:*

# Background of women's participation in the public sphere in Egypt

This chapter gives the background of women's participation in the public sphere (1919–2011) and is divided into three sections: women's activism from the 1919 Revolution to 2000; how various structural factors impacted the public sphere in the 2000s, as scholars believe that many changes in that decade triggered the 2011 uprising; and women's participation as counter-publics in the decade before the uprising.

## Women's activism from the 1919 Revolution to 2000

This section provides a historical overview of women's activism before the 2000s to illuminate the background on the exclusion and marginalising; it focuses primarily on the structural factors that facilitated or constrained women's activism between 1919–2000. The section emphasises women's activism in different areas of public life, for example, women's organisations, the feminist movement and groups, women in various social movements, political organisations and volunteerism, and the role of women in the labour market and education.

Since the rise of women's feminist consciousness in the last decades of the nineteenth century (Badran, 1995, p. 3), the role of women in all aspects of public life has become more evident with an active role in the public sphere. Beginning in 1919, women actively participated in political discussions, strikes, and protests as part of the unrest against the British occupation during the 1919 Revolution (El Saadawi & Ibrahim, 1981; Badran, 1995). While the government ignored women's demands for inclusion after the revolution, the remarkable collective action of women during the 1919 Revolution led some upper-middle class women to organise in more formal ways.

After Egypt became a semi-independent state after British colonialism on 28 February 1922, women, such as Huda Sha'rawi and Nabawiyyah Musa, founded the Egyptian Feminist Union (EFU) (*al-Ittihadü al-Nisa'i al-Miṣri*), which was the first



feminist association ever established in 1923 (Badran, 1995, p. 20). Later, in April 1933, the Institute for Mothers of the Believers was founded by Hasan al-Banna in *al-Isma'iliyah*. This gave rise to the Muslim Sisters (*al-Akhwat al-Muslimat*), the official female branch of MB, to support volunteer work, charity, and social activities (Mitchell, 1969, p. 175). After leaving the EFU in 1936, Zaynab al-Ghazali, the Islamist leader, founded the Muslim Women's Society (Badran, 1995, p. 168). Therefore, the political transformation of the 1919 Revolution encouraged upper-middle class women activists to organise and act in systematic way (secular and Islamist).

Women stepped forward to make themselves more visible after independent feminists in the 1920s and 1930s encouraged women to make their choice of taking off the veil themselves (at that time, 'veil' meant covering a woman's face), despite the reservations of conservative nationalist men who saw the veil as a symbol of their Islamic culture (Badran, 1995, p. 23).

Until the 1940s, women's voluntary activism was limited mainly to upper- and middle-class women who continued to take part in secular and Muslim philanthropic activities (Badran, 1995). Egyptian women's feminism articulated its demands in a broader agenda of political, social, economic, and legal rights claims. They also made the issue of paid work for women central to their campaign for women's liberation (Badran, 1995). Kamal (2016) refers to the period before the 1919 Revolution and later in the early 1930s as the first wave of feminism in Egypt, which emphasised women's access to education and political representation.

In the early 1940s, veiled women, not only over the face but also the hair, began to disappear from the urban middle and upper classes (Badran, 2016). Working class women began to organise to voice their demands as the number of women in education and the workforce increased. Then, in the 1940s, the Association of Egyptian Working Women was established to become part of the labour movement (Badran, 1995). In 1944 Fatma Ni'mat Rashid founded the National Feminist Party (*al-Hizb al-Nisa'i al-Watani*), the first feminist political party (Badran, 1995, p. 217). And in the same decade, in 1948, Doria Shafik founded a feminist group called the Daughter of the Nile Union (*bint al-nil*), which advocated for women's political rights (Al-Ali, 2002, p. 7).

In 1951, Shafik led women in a sit-in strike in front of parliament demanding full political rights and equal pay for equal work (Badran, 1995, p. 218). In 1952, the military coup transformed the political system from a monarchy to a republic with an authoritarian regime, resulting in rigid restrictions on the public sphere. El Saadawi and Ibrahim (1981) argue that under the mottos of revolution, Arabism, and socialism – from 1952 to the early 1970s – independent feminist voices were silenced as the state forcibly removed all political competitors. But the previous feminist leaders of the

women's movement remained active behind the scenes. The struggle for suffrage continued until 1956, when women were granted the political right to vote and run for political office and candidacy (OECD, 2018).

In the meantime, there was remarkable popularity in the new feminist generation that referred to 'state feminism as a legal, economic, and ideological strategy to introduce changes to Egyptian society and its gender relations' (Hatem, 1992, p. 231), which took advantage of new state-sponsored opportunities in education and the workplace. The new military regime denied the engendered differences and mobilised women into the labour market on a large scale between 1952–1970 after the introduction of free education (Hafez, 2014).

Although women were encouraged to receive a modern education, they were still subject to laws that denied them the full rights and freedom that men enjoyed, for example, in marriage and divorce, but also the patriarchal control by the state and within the family (Hafez, 2014, p. 179). According to Kamal (2016, p. 11), the second wave (1950s–1970s) of feminist activism emphasised constitutional and legal rights within the framework of state feminism. Among feminist lawyers, journalists, academics, and social reformers, Aziza Hussein led campaigns to reform PSL to challenge, for example, women's duty of obedience (*al-ta'a*) and divorce laws.

While political change in 1952 played a fundamental role in women's activism, economic and ideological factors also played their part in contributing to change the situation of women. When military-backed President Anwar Sadat came to power in the 1970s, there were two major changes that affected both women and the public sphere: the attempt to Islamise society and implement the new open-door policy of economic liberation.

The first major change, the attempt to Islamise society, which was associated with the emergence of the phenomenon of Islamic revival or Islamic Awakening (*al-ṣaḥwa al-islamiyah*), referred not only to the activities of state-oriented political groups but also to the religious ethos that spread through society (Mahmood, 2001, p. 226). Conservative ideas, such as the notion that women needed to return home to take care of their families became part of the public discourse, were discussed in parliament (El Saadawi & Ibrahim, 1981, p. 516). Shehata et al. (2012) refers to the growing number of people who adopted Islamic dress, such as beards and veils. Women's return to wearing veils was highly visible, especially in universities (Badran, 1995, p. 160). For the first time since independence in 1922, the 1971 constitution, based on 'Sharia' as a source of legislation, devoted an article entirely to women: 'Article 11 provides that the state ensure reconciliation between the duties of a woman toward her family and her work in society' (Khattab, 2016, p. 133). This ideological factor combined with political backing contributed to limiting women's roles in public and their visibility in activism.

The second major change was the implementation of the open-door policy (*infithah*). This was the state-led liberalisation that marked a shift from Gamal Abdel Nasser's era (emphasising state-led industrialisation) to Egypt's integration into the global market economy, which influenced women's situation and activism. The new economic policy of inflation and migration served to push rural and urban women into the labour force. They gained power and strengthened their position after their income improved, but not the working conditions they complained about, especially the long hours (Hatem, 1992).

In contrast, the social and economic retreat of the state led to the decline of state feminism in the 1980s in ways that undermined the prospects of lower middle-class and working-class women. Therefore, Islamist ideology, political and economic factors played an important role in women's visibility, exclusion and activism, for example, within state feminism, even though women gained some rights by changing PSL or the women's quota for political rights before it was abolished in 1987.

During this period, reforms favouring women's rights were introduced by PSL, such as the restriction of polygamy. However, these reforms were stalled in 1985 and later overturned due to the pressure from women's organisations (OECD, 2018, p. 37). The women's quota was introduced in 1977 and granted women 30 seats in parliament – roughly 9% of the total (OECD, 2018, p. 34). However, the women's quota was repealed in 1987 under the pretext that the quota law violated the constitutional principle of equality between men and women. The 14 seats for women in parliament in 1987 then decreased to 4 seats in 2000 (OECD, 2018, p. 34).

Therefore, part of women's activism in the 1980s focused on changing the laws and legal system to improve the situation of women. According to Kamal (2016), the third wave of feminism (1980–2011) emphasised civil society for creating a platform for networks and pressure groups and to change laws to establish human rights and feminist organisations, such as the New Woman Foundation and the Centre for Egyptian Women's Legal Assistance.

In the 1990s, despite strict limitations on the public sphere (Albrecht, 2008), middle-class women sought new forms of activism through new forms of NGOs, trade unions, grassroots activism (Al-Ali, 2002), and informal political participation, such as street politics (Povey, 2015). According to Hatem (1992), 'The state's diminishing support for the political representation of women encouraged middle-class women to organize themselves into autonomous and semiautonomous formal and informal groups'. Women's activism also focused on eliminating gender discrimination (Kamal, 2016).

In summary, several structural factors played a role in improving and disapproving the situation of women, and constraining and facilitating women's activism. The women's movement struggled to overcome the exclusion of women in various fields by

organising to empower women, changing laws and using every opportunity to change their situation. All of this led up to the 2000s, when women developed new forms of activism as part of various changes.

## The decade of change (2000–2010)

The Egyptian state had severely restricted the public sphere in the decade leading up to the 2011 uprising. Mubarak's regime, with its National Democratic Party (NDP) (al-Ḥizb al-Watani al-Dimuqrati), held central power in the political scene, as it was led by the Egyptian president himself. According to Gohar (2008, p. 173), 'The National Democratic Party has at its disposal all available political, economic, financial, and publicity resources. This has deprived other parties of resources and helped the NDP to cement its status within the political system'. In addition, the Emergency Law, which has imposed a state of emergency since 1967, was amended in 2007 to serve combating terrorism to give the security apparatus more power to arrest or monitor citizens without a court order until it was repealed in 2012 (Liguori, 2012). Gohar (2008, p. 184) asserts, 'Laws governing political parties, syndicates, and associations in Egypt are designed to restrict participation'.

Meanwhile, the public sphere had taken on various forms of contentious politics and antagonistic collective action by many opposition groups, social movements and also activists in blogosphere and social media to challenge Mubarak's authoritarian regime (Lynch, 2011). In this background, new counter-publics emerged and made their voices heard in the context of contribution of various political, economic, and social structural changes.

In what follows, I identify four factors that were most strongly associated with women's participation in the public sphere, namely, transformation of the media landscape; the relaxing of control by the state; proliferation of NGOs in civil society; and the escalation of the opposition groups.

### Transformation of the media landscape

In the decade leading up to the uprising, the transformation of the media landscape influenced the public sphere in Egypt. It had begun before the 2000s and went through several phases (Khamis, 2011). The first phase began with the decline of the state monopoly on mass media production due to the dissemination of religious lessons on audiocassette to the public since the 1970s (Hirschkind, 2001), the establishment of new independent newspapers since the 1990s, with limited tolerance from the regime

(Badr, 2019); and the launch of several satellite TV channels in the transnational sphere, such as Al-Jazeera in 1996 (Salvatore, Schmidtke & Trenz, 2013; Lynch, 2011; Khamis, 2011).

The second phase began from October 1993 with the use of internet communication technology in Egypt, which influenced society and the social structure by mobilising resources (Khamis, 2011). For example, Ahmed Nazif, the Minister of Communications and Information Technology, launched an initiative called 'Computers for Every Household' in 2003. This initiative aimed to purchase computers through instalment payments to establish the Egyptian information society proclaimed by the Mubarak regime in 1999 (Minister of Communications and Information Technology, 2003). This phase began with the emergence of dissidents who founded the blogosphere and online forums (Al-Ani et al. 2012), for example, the Kifaya movement, which motivated many bloggers to write in the blogosphere and the Islamonline website, which launched in 1997 and hosted Islamist preachers such as Yusuf al-Qaradawi (Salvatore, 2004). Thereafter, a kind of offline–online hybridisation of the media space emerged between the local channels of private TV and bloggers, websites, and video-sharing technology on the internet (Badr, 2019).

The third phase began with the emergence of social media in 2008, and dissidents used it as an alternative sphere instead of the restricted mass media outlets. The paradigm of the shift from blogging to social media production and consumption was a kind of transformation from one-to-mass to mass-to-mass communication (Castells, 2007). This transformation weakened Egyptian regimes' control over media and communication. The transformation reached its peak in the 2011 uprising, when the regime was forced to shut down the internet for a short period of time and impose a virtual curfew to prevent revolutionaries from communicating and spreading the flow of information (Al-Ani et al. 2012).

Thus, the transformation of the media landscape contributed to the emergence of many counter-publics (Lynch, 2011) that expressed and challenged power structure in political, social and cultural aspects.

### **The relaxing control by the state**

In the beginning of the 2000s, the state has relaxed its control over the public sphere, especially public space to some extent, because of the government-led plan for political reformism. Dalacoura (2005, p. 969) points out that because of external and internal factors, 'Hosni Mubarak's regime has responded by initiating reforms such as creating the Human Rights Council, reforming the NDP, and introducing multiparty contestation of the presidential elections'. Regarding the external factor, after the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001, the United States put pressure on the Mubarak

regime to open the public sphere, release imprisoned dissidents, democratise political life and reform the electoral system (Dalacoura, 2005). This relaxation strengthened the regime's ability to govern, but in the meantime, it allowed many opposition groups to protest and voice their demands. However, U.S. pressure on Mubarak's regime had subsided after MB achieved gains in the 2005 elections (Freedom House, 2009).

As for internal factors, the state has tried to implement some reforms at different levels. At the legal level, the president Mubarak announced a constitutional amendment in 2005 that led to Egypt's first multiparty direct presidential elections (Hamzawy, 2005). This amendment was followed by three rounds of parliamentary elections, from which NDP emerged as the clear winner and was advanced by MB and some OPPs (Freedom House, 2009). Although the Mubarak regime attempted to burnish its democratic face, the 2005 election advanced MB, which later was exposed to the regime's crackdown on the street. In 2006, the state proposed a public referendum, which was approved in 2007, to constitutionalise aspects of the emergency law. The point is that while the state attempted to reform the political system, it kept the situation under control by suppressing opposition groups.

Regarding freedom of expression, although the Mubarak regime censored the media press, freedom of expression slightly improved after pro-reform demonstrations, particularly between 2007–2010. For example, the state relaxed some control over the news media and blogs, and opposition parties that were tolerated published their newspapers openly (Freedom House, 2010). At the economic level, despite economic growth during this decade, the unemployment rate was still high and incomes were unevenly distributed, according to the World Bank Group (WBG) (2010) and United Nation Development Programme (UNDP) (Bargawi & McKinley, 2011). This situation forced the Egyptian regime to relax the measure and gradually deregulate the state's control over public spaces (Beinin & Vairel, 2011). After this time, the state withdrew from supplying public services, which had decreased significantly with the implementation of the neoliberal project in Egyptian society during the government of Nazif, who became prime minister in July 2004 (El-Sharnouby, 2015). This situation contributed to triggering the 2011 uprising (Bayat, 2011). All in all, the regime allowed many demonstrations and newly amplified NGOs to appear on the surface, which in turn were then able to shape various counter-publics.

### **Proliferation of NGOs in civil society**

In the 2000s, civil society experienced a rapid proliferation of NGOs which relied on voluntary youth-led activism with few staff (Ibrahim & Hunt-Hendrix, 2011; Daly, 2010). Sika and Khodary (2012, p. 94) report that 'the number of civil society organizations, including women's organizations, increased exponentially for the

coming decades, from no more than 10 000 in 1998 to almost 30 000 by 2008'. This proliferation of NGOs was not without control. The state enacted Law 84 in 1999, which was passed in 2002 and restricted civil society, but nevertheless NGOs continued to operate without registration (McGann, 2008). The state used the Ministry of Social Affairs to approve domestic and foreign funds for NGOs to control women's- and human-rights NGOs (Hatem, 2011, p. 36).

Ibrahim and Hunt-Hendrix (2011) divide these organisations into two directions and forms of organisation. The first is the type of faith-based Muslim organisations that flourished among university students and inspired by famous new public preachers such as Amr Khaled, who was a very influential figure, as more than 1.4 million people – 40% of them Egyptians – participated in his projects by 2005 (Sparre & Petersen, 2007, p. 86). Although the state tolerated the work of Muslim NGOs, they were not allowed to cross the line by engaging in politics or having links to MB (Sparre & Petersen, 2007), like the Muslim organisation, *Resala* Charity Organisation (Ibrahim, Mesard & Hunt-Hendrix, 2015, p. 159).

The second direction involves NGOs based on the ideas of democracy and citizenship that had emerged from the collective discontent and consciousness of secular activists. The two directions were not antithetical. The rise of NGOs led many members of human and women's rights organisations to participate in social movements and growing numbers of opposition groups such as 6 April and Kifaya movements, and later, to participate in the 2011 uprising (Ibrahim & Hunt-Hendrix, 2011). Moreover, Fawzy (2012, cited by Hafez, 2013, p. 110) observes a strong link between the collaboration of social movements and NGOs (i.e. 6AYM and human rights institutions) to obtain legal support. Therefore, the proliferation of NGOs paved the way for many women activists to participate in politics and become part of several counter-publics that emerged during this period.

### **The escalation of the opposition groups**

With the mass mobilisation in support of the Palestinian uprising (*intifada*) in the fall of 2000 and the protests against the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003, a wave of protests emerged (Shehata, 2008, p. 4). These groups were composed of secular, Islamist, independent, and human rights activists, feminists, and journalists, especially youth and students in the universities who mobilised and formed several social movements (Shehata, 2008; Hatem, 2011). This wave of protest focused mainly on transnational issues, for example, the formation of the first popular collation called the Egyptian Popular Committee for Solidarity with the Intifada.

This wave of protest turned to raise national demands and calls for political change, which triggered another wave of protest between 2003–2005 (Shehata, 2008). In

December 2004, a coalition of activists from different ideologies, public figures, and political forces (such as opposition parties) launched Kifaya (taking on the legacy of Egyptian Popular Committee for Solidarity with the Intifada and the anti-war movement), which opposed the succession (*tawrih*) of Gamal Mubarak from his father as president and questioned the legitimacy of the regime (El-Mahdi, 2009, p. 89).

Many movements accompanied Kifaya's demands, such as the National Coalition for Change from the socialists, the (Islamist) Labour Party, the MB, the Egyptian Movement for Change, and the Movements for Change. Thereafter, the state showed little tolerance for opposition groups as part of its project to reform the electoral system (Dalacoura, 2005) and its promise to end the one-party system (Elshobaki, 2010). According to El-Mahdi (2009, p. 97), 'Kifaya was a litmus test for the regime's resilience, identifying the limits of reform and measuring its willingness to use repression'.

El-Mahdi (2009) believes that despite their relative success in mobilising people such as youth, students, and women, these movements had limited impact on change. Hamzawy (2005, p. 4) agrees with these limitations: 'Kifaya and its heirs clearly could not mobilize significant segments of the Egyptian middle class'. El-Mahdi (2009, p. 97) mentions that a convincing reason for these limitations could be the regime's repression of the demonstrations that broke out again in March 2005 after initially tolerating the pro-democracy demonstrators.

Since 2005, a new wave of social movements demanding democracy emerged after Kifaya, and their accompanying movements began to fade. Among others, the labour movement, pro-democracy movements, and MB networks became visible and more vibrant. Moreover, the regime intensified its repression with the renewal of the Emergency Law until 2010, which allowed the arrest of activists previously active in Kifaya and MB without charge or trial (El-Mahdi, 2009).

The labour movement revitalised after a long period abeyance with hundreds of strikes, particularly between 2006–2008 in *El-Mahalla El-Kubra*, the largest textile company in Egypt (Egyptian Spinning and Weaving) (Shehata, 2008, p. 2). Between 1998 and 2010, workers staged between 3400 and 4000 strikes, involving two or perhaps up to four million workers (Beinin, 2012a). Workers also began to form independent unions (Povey, 2015). El-Mahalla El-Kubra was extended to many sectors of state employees, the middle class, and intellectual activists (El-Mahdi, 2009), especially after the formation of 6AYM in 2008 to support workers.

Since the strike of El-Mahalla El-Kubra in 2008 to support the workers, 6AYM also challenged the political system because of the increase in local food prices, inflation, and the government's neoliberal project. 6AYM was composed mainly of young people who had emerged from various previous movements such as *Tādamün* (Solidarity), Revolutionary Socialists, and Kifaya (Hafez, 2013), as well as bloggers and social media



activists who created digital networks, disseminated information, and mobilised people to express their demands (Hafez, 2013; Duboc, 2013).

Regarding pro-democracy networks, less than a year before the 2011 uprising, Mohamad El-Baradei, along with a close group of supporters that included politicians, prominent figures, intellectuals, and activists, founded the National Association for Change (NAC) in February 2010. Opposition groups were represented in the assembly, with the exception of the Nasserit, the Wafd ('Delegation Party'), and *al-Tajammu'* ('National Progressive Unionist Party') political parties. The coalition's goal was to push for pro-democracy constitutional reforms. NAC collected one million signatures to set out its seven points for reforms in practice to ensure free elections in 2010 (Carnegie, 2010a).

As for MB, the movement was officially dissolved in 1956, and it remained a banned political organisation during Mubarak's tenure in the 2000s. Nevertheless, MB was active in political life, such as professional associations and dynamic networks in civil society with several charities, demonstrations, and influence on formal politics during elections. After trying to reform MB in the 2000s, MB tried to form a political party to integrate into the political system, but without results (Carnegie, 2011a). According to Povey (2015), while many activists from MB merged into other movements such as Kifaya, MB tried to remain close to Mubarak's regime, as it presented itself as a moderate political organisation. MB also participated in the 2000–2005 parliamentary elections and won seats through its independent candidates. In the 2010 elections, MB, along with the Wafd Party, announced a boycott of the second round of elections in protest of the irregularities (Dunne & Hamzawy, 2010).

Regarding opposition political parties (OPPs), according to Elshobaki (2010), in the decade leading up to the uprising, OPPs were described as failing to renew the political discourse, failing to reach out to young activists and new political forces, and unable to exert political influence. Elshobaki (2010) explains, 'There are many reasons for the weakness of Egyptian parties, including regime restrictions and the general absence of politics in public life for many years'.

NDP, which emerged in 1976, had dominated political life through a one-party system (El-Mahdi, 2009). In 2005, Mubarak's regime promised to end the one-party system with a reformist project, but levels of violence increased, which was condemned by objective observers who described the elections as having many cases of fraud and intimidation (Povey, 2015, p. 143). According to Elshobaki (2010), the 24 licensed OPPs won only nine seats in the 2005 elections compared to the MB, which won 88 seats with its independent candidates. Moreover, with the exception of the Wafd Party, OPPs suffered from reflecting the political culture of NDP, having leaders with indefinite terms of office, and lacking internal democracy. They also failed to mobilise people, especially young people, who joined social movements instead.

According to El-Mahdi (2009, p. 91), many figures and members of OPPs were integrated into social movements such as Kifaya, which attracted activists and leaders from OPPs such as the Karama Party (Nasserist), the Centre Party, and the Labour Party (Islamists), as well as the Revolutionary Socialist Organization. With the exception of the Ghad Party (Liberals), all of these parties were unlicensed.

Although the opposition groups of social movements and OPPs faced challenges of division and fragmentation (El-Mahdi & Marfleet, 2009, p. 11), they were at the same time interconnecting, influencing, generating, competing with, or reinforcing each other. Following Tarrow's (2011, p. 34) concept of 'protest cycles', they could be understood as a loop in a chain of sustained streams of protest and action that responded to the state's attitude towards them, as El-Mahdi (2009) suggests. Therefore, over time, these opposition groups were interconnected and merged into successive various counter-publics with new topics addressed against Mubarak's regime. Between 2005 and 2010, some topics revolved around demands, such as the rejection of Gamal Mubarak's succession, 'Mubarak must go' (Lynch, 2011, p. 305), and demands for an expansion of political freedom (Hirschkind, 2010). Other counter-publics emerged in connection with certain events (the El-Mahalla El-Kubra strike in 2008), accidents (the killing of Khaled Said), or influential persons such as Mohamed El-Baradei.

In summary, the four factors – the transformation of the media landscape, the relaxing of the degree of control by the state, the proliferation of NGOs in civil society, and the escalation of opposition groups, among others – contributed to the rise in collective actions by various counter-publics in the public sphere. The emergence of these counter-publics was the catalyst for the 2011 uprising.

## Women's participation as counter-publics during 2000s

While women's formal participation in politics was relatively low before the uprising (compared to men and despite increases in the percentage between 2005–2010), evidence suggests that women's informal participation has increased compared to the previous decade.

In terms of formal politics, according to CAPMS (2014), women's representation in parliament (1.8% between 2005–2010 and 12.7% in 2010 with quota) was relatively low compared to men. Women who claimed to have participated in the 2010 elections were 24% of the survey samples, compared to 47% of men (Benstead & Lust-Okar, 2015). According to the survey, women have hardly enrolled in OPPs before the uprising. For example, 77% of women described themselves as not interested in political parties compared to 66% of men. Abdu el-Ghafar (2009, p. 96) gives the

percentage of female members in different political parties in 2009 accordingly: National Democratic Party (NDP), 1%; *Wafd Party*, 9%; *Hizb al-Umma* (Umma Party), 10%; *Hizb al-Khudr* (Egyptian Green Party), 10%; *Hizb al-Gil al-Dimukrati* (Democratic Generation Party), 12%; and *Hizb Miṣr* (Egypt Party) 15.2%.

However, there have been governmental, non-governmental, and feminist efforts to mobilise women for formal politics, but these efforts have had limited results in empowering and mobilising women. In terms of the governmental efforts, according to Khodair and Hassib (2015), the Egyptian government established NCW in 2000 as a government institution – with First Lady Suzanne Mubarak at the helm – to empower women economically, socially and politically. According to Khodair and Hassib (2015), the results of the efforts and the effectiveness of NCW were limited. Abdu el-Ghafar (2009, p. 128, p. 66) reports that women's participation in formal politics did not increase in the 2000s, even after a long series of improvements. For example, women's participation did not increase more than 10% through the efforts by media, 4% through the efforts by NCW, and 9% through the efforts by NGOs. Mubarak's regime introduced a quota system for women in the 2010 parliamentary elections. However, the majority of the 64 seats reserved for women were filled by senior state figures and members of the ruling NDP and NCW (Kamal, 2016). Rizzo, Price and Meyer (2012) argue that the state was not serious enough about attracting women to political institutions because it had a dual and uncertain attitude towards women's participation.

Regarding the non-governmental efforts to mobilise women into formal politics, Abdu el-Ghafar (2009) points out that since the mid-1970s, OPPs focused on the political role of women by establishing special committees for women's issues. However, these issues were not put into practice even by the ruling NDP, as they had already been restricted by laws (Gohar, 2008). In addition, the lack of democratic structures in the OPPs' internal system negatively impacted the recruitment of women (Gohar, 2008).

The final type of effort to mobilise women into formal politics originated with feminist groups. Kamal (2016) divides the Egyptian feminist movement into four waves. Within the third wave (1980–2011), Kamal outlines three general frameworks of Egyptian feminist activism to empower women in various fields. The first was the establishment of women's committees within political parties to strengthen the role of women in formal politics but still within the agenda of political parties, which made them less effective. The second was to establish independent initiatives within human rights organisations, such as the Task Force Against Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) and the Media Watch Group. The third was to bring together independent initiatives and groups working on women's and gender issues to promote women's lives and rights by changing government attitudes toward women's issues, such as Nazra for Feminist Studies. Within these three general frameworks, the most prominent issues highlighted

by feminist groups were the elimination of discrimination against women (based on the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women, CEDAW), the integration of women into formal and institutional politics, and female body issues such as FGM.

In general, women's activism encountered several obstacles, especially when it came to mobilising large numbers of people or organising grassroots activities (Allam, 2018a). These obstacles can be understood in the context of the restriction of civil society and the public sphere in general during Mubarak's regime. Bayat (2010) points out that women in authoritarian and undemocratic states like Egypt struggle to build a sustainable social movement.

One obstacle was that the feminist movement has been accused of aligning with the state's project of women's empowerment, for example, the movement was portrayed as elitist and linked to First Lady Suzanne Mubarak (El-Tawil, 2009), or what Elsadda calls the 'First Lady Syndrome' (Elsadda, 2011). Here, we need to distinguish between state-sponsored feminism, which works within the framework of the state's vision and project to empower women, and independent feminist organisations that were subject to pressure from the regime. In an interview, Allam (2018a, p. 116) conducted with Maya Morsy (then and now president of NCW), she describes feminism during the Mubarak era: 'The regime eliminated any feminist movement that existed in opposition to the state. Where feminist organizations did exist, they often had to act in accordance with the state's political priorities'.

So, the efforts of various governmental, non-governmental and feminist activists had limited impact on mobilising women into formal politics before the uprising.

In terms of informal politics, many women joined opposition groups, social movements, and volunteerism in the same decade. Abu-Lughod and El-Mahdi (2011) argue that Egyptian women were not passive and suddenly became active in the revolution. Therefore, the role of women in the labour mobilisation since 2006 and the pro-democracy and anti-war movements since 2003 was clearly evident.

Duboc (2013, p. 29) reports that women workers were a remarkable benchmark for the labour movement in December 2006 when workers in El-Mahalla El-Kubra went on strike to improve their economic conditions. At the time, these women became a symbol of the protests when they chanted the slogan, 'Where are the men? Here are the women!' to encourage their colleagues to join the protests by shaming them. According to Beinin (2012b, p. 327), 'Women workers, who previously had participated in collective actions mainly in an auxiliary capacity, became increasingly assertive and in some cases became prominent activists and even spokespersons'. Many women such as Esraa Abdel Fattah and Asmaa Mahfouz participated to support the workers in the sit-in on 6 April 2008. Abdel-Latif (2008) points out that women from Islamist movements were also active during this period when they participated massively in

elections, demonstrations in the streets, and sit-ins organised by MB. For example, they participated in great numbers in supporting MB candidates in the 2005 elections and later in the 2010 elections (Tadros, 2017).

In summary, although women's formal political participation remained low after the uprising, the increasing role of women in informal politics may be reflected in the mass participation in the counter-public to overthrow Mubarak's regime during the uprising.

## *Chapter 3:*

# Methodological approach

This chapter presents the research design to show how the data was collected and how the sampling strategy was processed. It also shows how I used secondary material from the interviews and other texts. Thereafter, it presents how I managed the empirical material during transcription and translation, the coding process, and data analysis. Finally, I explain the challenges during fieldwork, ethical considerations, and my position as a researcher.

## Research design

The investigation is based on a qualitative method by conducting interviews, analysing documents, and using secondary sources. Bertaux and Thompson (1997, p. 17) argue that it is better to combine sources of ‘the actor’s subjectivity and the subjectivity of others in a close relationship’ through which an objective situation is understood. This combination of data increases the credibility and reliability of the results (Suter, 2006). The qualitative approach does not generalise the dissertation findings as quantitative studies do (Patton, 2002), but it does allow for an understanding of unique individual experiences and how different trajectories of women’s participation unfold.

In the following sections, I introduce the sources of the material, starting with the interviews, as well as present the interviewees and the process of conducting the interviews.

## The interviews

The dissertation is based on fifty-four semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions (Berg, 2001). Initially, I conducted interviews with women activists from the following groups: eight from 6AYM, six from MB, seventeen from three OPPs (seven from ESDP, three from CP and seven from SEP), five from HarassMap, seven from

ISH, five from WOW, and six professional feminist activists. A table of interviews is included in the appendix.

The vast majority of the interviewees (excluding staff) were between the ages of twenty and thirty. The rest were between thirty and forty years old. The age range explains why many of the interviewees believed they were part of a new generation of youth who participated before and during the uprising. While all fifty-four interviewees have completed secondary school, most of them (forty-one interviewees) also have university degrees or were studying at university during the time of the interviews. The majority of interviewees reported coming from a middle-class family. Four interviewees reported coming from upper middle-class families and twelve from working-class families, which allowed us to compare the different situations in the different classes. All interviewees practiced their activism in Cairo, although many were from other provinces in Egypt. All interviewees (with the exception of the professional activists) were ordinary activists, none were public figures, and few had a long history of prior experience in public activism.

Describing the interviewees' backgrounds provided insight into how they differed in constructing their subjectivity and developing their agency in relation to the social structure. The interviewees also talked about their personal situation and their individual experiences as women and activists, such as the feelings, intentions and the strategies they drew from when participating in the public sphere as unaffiliated and as members of their groups (Jacobsson & Åkerström, 2013).

Second, I conducted interviews with one staff member (who could be a man, e.g. 6AYM, SEP, ISH, and HarassMap) per group (three in relation to MB because they were more available). The staff spoke about their experiences as organisers, leaders, officers, those in charge, or spearheads of a group to contextualise women activists' stories. Then I asked different questions than I did for women activists; or in other words, I asked the questions that I asked women activists but from a different angle. I asked about the women's situation within the group, how they were treated, whether they were able to hold a position, the constraints they faced, and what opportunities they were given.

Third, I conducted several interviews with professional feminist activists, including from Nazra, New Women Foundation (NWF), and Women and Memory Forum (WMF). I asked them about women's situation in Egypt, women's rights, the constraints that women face in their activism, women in NGOs and politics, and issues related to women and the public sphere in general. I drew upon the interviews to put women activists' accounts into a structural perspective, with as laws, dominant discourse, media coverage, and the political situation serving as a frame.

I also used interviews from published newspapers, studies, and broadcast TV programmes as secondary sources as well as many interviews with female public figures

from mass media. For example, I included an interview with Esraa Abdel Fattah, who talked about her experiences in a newspaper and many episodes of an interview with Sally Toma, an activist and public figure. I also drew from interviews conducted by other researchers about women in MB to deepen the theme of visibility, as I have few interviewees in, for example, the MB chapter. In all these interviews, I tried to achieve reliability of the activists' stories through 'an examination of consistency in response sets' (Berg, 2001, p.75).

### **The process of conducting the interviews**

The interviewees were the primary source of my empirical material. Occasionally, asymmetry occurred between us in our conversations. Kvale (2006) asserts that the relationship between interviewer and interviewee is a hierarchical one, with an asymmetrical power distribution and power conflicts. I attempted to reduce this asymmetry by asking follow-up questions to clarify any views that were not clear.

The interviews were considered neither a 'technology of the confessional' or a type of police interrogation (Gubrium & Holstein, 2001, p. 10), nor were they a case of 'faking friendship' (Kvale, 2006, p. 482). Instead, it was an ordinary conversation, not in the form of a very close personal relationship, where emotions could be dangerously manipulative. Before I started each interview, we talked briefly about the interviewee's studies, work, or hobbies. I wanted to build a bridge of trust between us. I asked her what she knew about people in other groups and how she could help me connect with others. Many of them also started asking me about my dissertation. Ebtisam, for example, asked many questions, such as why I chose women, why in Egypt, and most importantly, what conclusions did I draw from my analysis. I did not pressure the interviewee to avoid certain topics, such as those related to the current regime.

I met the interviewees at the headquarters of their organisations, such as ISH, HarassMap and OPPs, or at coffee shops in Cairo. At the ISH headquarters, I spent two days conducting several interviews. The ISH director interviewed those who had applied for the ISH. I could observe what questions he asked, what answers they gave, and how they responded. The second day involved a long stay in the ISH situation room, as activists led several volunteers in preventing sexual harassment (SH) in the streets ahead of the upcoming Eid holiday. These activists worked and communicated with each other, giving advice on how to deal with problems, protect themselves, or rescue victims. In addition, I spent two days at the HarassMap headquarters, where I observed how women activists communicated with others and exercised their activism in dealing with SH on HarassMap's interactive website.

I also participated for a day in a graffiti event in downtown Cairo organised by the Women On Walls project (WOW). As the graffiti artists communicated with each



other and with the people on the street. I interviewed some of them and met other women and men.

I met all the interviewees from MB and 6AYM in coffee shops, given that they were banned organisations and had no headquarters. I let the interviewees decide when and where they wanted to meet. Jasmine, for example, wanted to meet in an odd place – a restaurant that was difficult for a nonlocal to find, in an area where there were no crowds of people strolling and shopping. She decided when and where we would meet, having changed the location and date multiple times for her safety. In contrast, I met all the professional feminist activists at their headquarters.

At the beginning of each interview, I gave the interviewees general information about my research and why I chose to study Egypt after the uprising. I also explained what the public sphere is in general, what types of questions would come up in the interview, how long the interview would likely be, and explained their right to end the interview if they felt uncomfortable. I also explained how they would contribute to my dissertation, which could provide insight into women's situation in Egypt. Ladkin (2004) points out that research on human subjects must be based on participatory and democratic behaviour, with open and transparent communication. I informed the interviewees about my project to enable them to participate in the construction of meanings in the interview through 'mutual co-construction of meaning' (Jacobsson & Åkerström, 2013, p. 728). The interview has to serve instrumental knowledge with shared, egalitarian interests between the interviewees and me in the search for objective knowledge (Kvale, 2006, p. 496).

I created an interview guide for each group of interviewees. These guides consisted of specific open-ended questions that were modified depending on the interviewee's affiliation with a particular group and position (the interview guides can be found in the Appendix). Therefore, rather than simply asking a set of general questions, such as when and where they started their activism, I modified the questions according to the person I was interviewing or the category they represented. For example, I asked the interviewees from MB about the role of women in an Islamist group, and I asked the interviewees of anti-harassment groups how they perceive SH as a phenomenon.

The interviews were conducted in accordance with what Kvale (2006) refers to as research with people rather than about people. I tried to speak modestly, not ask lengthy or multiple questions or get a one-word answer such as 'yes' or 'no'. I also asked follow-up questions to get more information about the topic, trying to be as non-directive as possible to let the interviewees vocalise their perceptions. My questions were based on a protocol that served as a conversational guide which included a small selection of topics. I did not move on to the second topic until I had completed the first. The themes began with me learning about the interviewee's background, for example, how they participated in politics, in order to understand how their subjectivity was

constructed and agency was developed. The interviews continued with me learning about how they joined the group, how they became visible, and how they faced repression.

Not all interviews followed the same pattern, as interviewees all have different personalities and backgrounds. Some were very open to talking about anything. However, some individuals answered the questions formally without developing the conversation and giving new information. For example, Nada from the graffiti group only answered the questions in concise sentences with few words. I tried several times to encourage her to talk more about her experience, but she was nevertheless brief with her answers. The interview lasted less than half an hour, even though she had booked a full hour. However, another interviewee, Ansam from 6AYM, was very open and talked about everything I asked. She told me her story as a detained person and how she was subjected to SH. In contrast, the interview with Ansam took more time than we had allotted.

## Sampling strategy

The purposeful sampling strategy (Patton, 2002) went in two directions that converged simultaneously: information-rich potential interviewees and groups within the boundaries of the study.

### Sampling of groups

In selecting the groups, I looked for diversity, popularity, availability, and activism. As for diversity, I selected groups based on their different political orientations. I selected MB because it is the oldest movement in Egypt and among the most effective Islamist groups in modern Egyptian history (Munson, 2001). I selected 6AYM because it was without a specific ideology and among the most influential movements that sparked the uprising and continued to be in opposition until 2014. Moreover, I selected three opposition political parties because they have different ideologies: CP is liberal, ESDP is social democratic, and SEP has a centre-left ideology. In terms of popularity, I selected samples that are well-known in the mainstream media and among voters. For example, in the first parliamentary elections in 2011–2012, ESDP won nineteen seats in the Egyptian parliament and six seats in the Consultative Council.

In terms of availability, I endeavoured to look at as many groups as possible before selecting those that were most appropriate for my topic. I did my best to find groups to study (some groups, like FJP, I could not reach due to the security situation).

Another problem was that I could only reach one or two people from a group, which forced me to exclude some groups from my list. For example, I excluded the Ghad Party because I could only reach one person from it.

As for the type of activism, I wanted to find groups with different forms of activities to show the diversity of the avenues of participation in the public sphere. In this regard, I excluded some groups from the selection because there was not enough space for many groups, such as the Muslim organisation *Sunna' al-Haiyat* (Life Makers), because the dissertation already included three groups that engage in civic engagement.

### *Sampling of interviewees*

I set the eligibility criteria for the targeted group of samples to include women activists who were knowledgeable about the phenomenon and had at least one year of experience in formal activism (Creswell & Plano, 2011). The criteria were that the potential interviewee had to be a formal member in the selected groups; practice their activism in Cairo; preferably be a non-public figure; and lastly, still be a practising participant/activist. In addition, it was important to consider the interviewee's availability, ability, and willingness to participate in my research (Bernard, 2001). I excluded one graffiti activist, two cartoonists, and those who carried out their activism in Alexandria (the research is limited to Cairo only), such as one from 6AYM and two from *al-Bahiyrah*.

I did not decide to set a sample size of how many interviews I would conduct and how many interviews for each group. The goal was to cover as many cases as possible until a point of saturation was reached. Dworkin (2012, p. 1319) points out that, especially with in-depth interviews, 'saturation is defined by many as the point at which the data collection process no longer offers any new or relevant data'.

I reached the point of saturation in two non-mutually exclusive directions. The first was by reaching information redundancy as an indication of reaching the saturation point for each group (Sandelowski, 2008). At the beginning of my fieldwork in Cairo, the most available groups were the anti-harassment groups. I interviewed a few from ISH, and the people there promised to reach out to more volunteers. Much valuable information was gathered, and a lot of repeated information came out in each new interview by the time of the fifth interview. Some of the repeated topics that emerged were strategies in dealing with their families, how they defined SH, how they used the internet for their activism, how they dealt with being exposed to SH on the streets, and so on. Therefore, I decided to interview only two more people to reach the saturation point.

I also decided to find another group to make the results more consistent, which increased the opportunity for comparison between groups. I found HarassMap to interview five interviewees. Then I was convinced to conduct five to seven interviews

for each group, which became a pattern to be generalised to other groups in other chapters, as I had a similar situation of information redundancy after the fifth interview. I searched for samples but within the limits of practical matters, such as my budget, fieldwork timeline, and availability (Charmaz, 2006).

The second direction towards the point of saturation was when no new theoretical insights or categories emerged and the theoretical conceptualisation was complete, which were signs of reaching the saturation point (Charmaz, 2006). I began to test some concepts and further developed them in light of the theoretical framework. Among the concepts developed were concepts such as collectivity and the visibility of participation. Before ending my fieldwork, I realised that there was no new development in the theoretical conceptualisation, which meant I had reached the point of saturation for the entire dissertation. The theoretical framework of concepts was then appropriate for all cases in all groups.

## **Finding samples**

I tried to avoid sampling bias by applying the snowball strategy; people from certain networks led to other members of other groups (Berg, 2001). I had several snowballs in each group to contact samples, and each of them did not know the other, which allowed me to gain access to different civic and political activism networks. However, no one from any of the groups led me to women from MB, with the exception of the key person from MB. This could be related to the secular–religious divide among activists, especially those in the urban middle class.

I used my local contacts to create a list of potential interviewees (Berg, 2001), which initially included individuals like Asmaa Mahfouz and Sally Toma, social movements like 6AYM, MB and Revolutionary Socialists, NGOs like Bassma, HarassMap, and Nazra, and political parties such as SEP, ESDP, Ghad Party, and Wasat Party. Later, I excluded those who did not match the eligible criteria of groups and samples.

In some cases, I did not succeed in contacting some individuals and organisations because of practical considerations, or else they refused or broke their promise to meet me. For example, I wanted to interview Heba Raouf, but she excused herself because she was outside Egypt. I also received a promise to meet a female public figure from 6AYM, but she did not come to our appointment.

However, I was able to contact many organisations that helped me gain access to many activists from different political and social backgrounds. For example, when I contacted ISH, people there helped me get in touch with people from WOW, ESDP and 6AYM. I interviewed one activist from 6AYM who helped me contact the other four interviewees from 6AYM and Nael, a senior member of 6AYM, at a coffee shop in Cairo. These activists helped me find many of CP's interviewees who were already

part of 6AYM. They in turn helped me find many interviewees from SEP and ESDP. I visited the SEP headquarters several times and interviewed women activists. However, I reached the ESDP interviewees in two ways: through ISH and 6AYM. I visited two ESDP headquarters and met many people and women members who I could interview. I interviewed seven women. They also led me to interview feminist activists such as Hoda Elsadda, a political activist from WMF, an academic, the women's secretary of ESDP and Nevine Ebeid a member and representative of NWF.

Among the MB interviewees, I met a student at a university who helped me find several women activists; for example, I met Fatima (a high official leader of MB and FJP) who helped me contact Amira, a high official leader of MB and FJP. However, many MB members refused to meet me.

I regularly visited the *El-Borsa* neighbourhood in downtown Cairo with some friends, where many outdoor coffee shops are found. Here, I met with civic and political activists, journalists, and academics who played a key role in introducing me to other activists relevant to my topic and provided me with phone numbers of relevant persons and organisations. As a result, I interviewed several interviewees in El-Borsa, including people from 6AYM, ISH, and WOW.

In addition, given that I came to Egypt through the Erasmus Mundus project (an exchange programme between Europe and Middle East and North Africa, MENA), I was able to contact someone from Cairo University (CU) who helped me find many organisations to explore, academics to see, and professional activists to meet. Also, while I was living on the CU campus, I contacted some women student activists who played a key role in finding samples. At that time, it was difficult to find female members of, for example, MB, as the regime was cracking down on them, especially within CU, as they regularly held demonstrations against the regime there.

## Documents and secondary sources

In addition to the actual interviews, I also collected visual and audio material, as well as published written material of texts and documents for each group. The material was obtained from their official websites, like *Ikhwanweb*, the official English website of MB, and the ESDP website, which included many texts in Arabic. The material also included official social media pages, like the Facebook page of SEP, which published the official party platform in the 2012 election, as the party's official website was out of service. For some groups, such as HarassMap, WOW and MB, the texts and official documents were written in English and Arabic. I took into consideration that these groups publish what is in accordance with their worldviews and the images they want

to project. I considered that the organisations were portrayed in the best light on their websites and did not engage with these texts without critical reading.

I gathered leaflets from the headquarters of many groups, like HarassMap and ISH and used them as sources. Also, in some cases, I used quotes from interviews conducted by other researchers as secondary sources, for example, interviews with some artists published on WOW's website. I also used quotes from published articles and reports by credible academic publishers and organisations, such as the testimonies of some women activists published by the Nazra and El-Nadeem Centre. In addition, I used many pictures obtained from the WOW website or else took photos myself to capture images of graffiti in Cairo to illustrate what the interviewees from WOW were referring to.

## Transcription and translation

The management of the collected data began with the translation of the interview content from Arabic to English. I transcribed and translated the interviews myself. The process involved that I converted the audible material from the recording device (my phone and sometimes my computer) into transcribed English texts. I made an effort to translate the texts and documents in a way that preserved the exact meaning in the interviews. This involved providing some terms with their Arabic counterpart, as some words are difficult to translate directly, for example, the word *murshid* means 'the guide' when translated directly. However, the meaning used in MB's literature refers to *murshid* as the topmost leader of MB. In this case, I could not directly translate but rather interpret. I also translated many of the published texts, leaflets and documents from Arabic to English. I also transliterated the names of the organisations and the titles of the Arabic sources using the Library of Congress Arabic Romanization (Library of Congress, 2012) to ensure that these names and titles were spelled correctly. However, I kept some Arabic proper nouns as they were officially used, like Morsi or El-Sisi. Thereafter, I began the phase of coding the data (see Appendix for coding data).

## The data analysis

The analysis was based on the emergent themes (Boyatzis, 1998) from the coding process of the interviews and theories. An abductive strategy was used, as in, it emphasised communication between theory and empirical material and did not impose one on the other or neglect one at the expense of the other (Charmaz, 2006). During

the fieldwork, I continuously switched back and forth between theories and empirical material until I found a convincing understanding of women's participation. For example, I dismissed Habermas' theory of the public sphere because it would disregard interviewees' personal experience and overlook what happened in the public space, as this theory makes an obvious demarcation between the public sphere and public space. Instead, I used the empirical model of the public sphere because 'a theory can emerge during the data collection and analysis phase' (Creswell, 1994, pp. 94–5).

First, I used the concept of collectivity to answer the first research question and disclose how the interviewees became part of various counter-publics. The empirical material showed that the interviewees shared sentiments (albeit from different motives) and feelings of exclusion. Therefore, I analysed how the interviewees participated in a process of constructing their subjectivity and developing individual agency. In doing so, I drew on theories of subjectivity, agency and the role of emotions in politics, as well as previous research from the Egyptian context. I extracted the subjective experiences of the interviewees and related them to the objective world of communication with other subjectivities and social structures, such as various political events. Bertaux and Thompson (1997, p. 17) argue 'the actor's subjectivity, and the subjectivity of others in a close relationship, are part of the objective situation'.

During the analysis, I further developed the arguments regarding historical exclusion in the Introduction. In the Background chapter, I include the historical development of events and structural changes in the decade leading up to the 2011 uprising and how these affected many women, such as the transformation of the media landscape. I used Archer's (2000) theory of agency and structure to link the personal situation of the interviewees to the role of opposition groups and structural constraints and enablement(s). Bertaux and Thompson (1997, p. 13) argue that 'in choosing particular courses of action, structural constraints such as economic needs interact with value orientations, moral obligations, self-determined goals, and the individual's perception of the situation and choices ahead'.

The analysis relied on interviewees' stories as cases, as a primary resource, by 'allowing informants full room to convey their own experience and views; and that the analysis is based on the interview text' (Bertaux & Thompson, 1997, p. 13). I disclosed the process of following different trajectories to become part of several counter-publics when they paid attention to various points of focus, such as an event or public figure (Adut, 2012). I looked for the differences and similarities between interviewees' motives based on the themes that emerged to understand when, where and why they participated in the public sphere.

This required incorporating theories of everyday politics to understand interviewee activism on the internet, at home and voluntary activism. Then I wrote a section in the theory chapter on the public/private distinction, including liberal and feminist critiques

and possibilities to challenge this distinction. I also wrote a section outlining two perspectives on the demarcation between public space and the public sphere, including critiques and possibilities to challenge this demarcation. I have expanded the Background chapter to include theories of everyday politics, such as Bayat's (2010) theory on Egypt to understand the role of the changes leading up to the 2011 uprising.

In the second section of each chapter, I analysed how the interviewees participated as activists of different groups. Since the analysis focused on the personal situation of the interviewees, their families were also included in the analysis. According to Bertaux and Thompson (1997, p. 13), social mobility is about capturing the trajectory of one's life story and the experience of being a woman, married, from a certain class, educated; it is a way 'to reveal what happened to the interviewee, how and why it happened, what he/she felt about it, and how he/she reacted to it or (proacted) to realize his/her projects'. The challenge was to capture the heterogeneity in families' attitudes towards the interviewees' roles as political and social actors.

I used several categories for families' attitudes that emerged from the themes, as in, those that rejected, discouraged or supported the activism of the interviewees. The challenge was the diversity of family members within each family and how interviewees dealt with that. Bertaux (1989) emphasises the flexible techniques for analysing heterogenous data, as in, accumulating knowledge about personal situations to figure out the subjective logic of the actors. The plurality of personal situations led to the identification of several individual trajectories through which the interviewee found her way to deal with the situation.

I created the categories according to how the interviewee described the overarching attitude in the atmosphere within the family. I also drew on previous studies describing the situation of families in MENA countries in general, and Egypt in particular. I selected cases according to the wide variety of strategies that interviewees used to deal with their families' attitudes, including challenge, negotiation, or avoidance strategies. In addition, I looked for the differences and similarities between the interviewees' personal situations to understand the factors behind these strategies. For example, those who came from political families were more supported by their families. Sometimes, a particular theme emerged from the empirical material, so I devoted a separate section to it, such as the section on married women in the OPPs chapter who employed particular strategies to deal with their situation, as in, how they managed their time and priorities between home, work, and political activism.

On the other hand, the analysis established a link between the family's attitude towards the interviewee to the community and other ties such as neighbours, relatives or friends to understand the influence of structural factors in the framework of theories about intersecting structural factors and many previous studies conducted in Egypt and elsewhere.



Thereafter, I drew from Archer's theory of agency about the transition from individual/primary agency to group/corporate agency in different historical moments, which reveals differences in the personal situations of when and where interviewees joined their groups – such as through social media, formal and informal networks or on the ground in Tahrir Square. The compatibilities between the interviewees and their groups were illustrated within the framework of mobilisation theories that propose a compatible mode between an individual and a group. The interviewees' quotations and groups' published texts served to unfold the compatibility between them. For example, the texts published by MB, like those on the official website *Ikhwanweb*, and interviewees' quotations were compatible in terms of a vision of an Islamist gender ideology. The different modes of compatibility show the pluralism in matching the interviewees and their groups, which made it necessary to include different forms of theories, previous research, and secondary sources in the analysis. I analysed the intersections between various structural constraints (e.g. repression, patriarchal family and state) and enablement(s) (e.g. the 2011 uprising). I also analysed how the interviewees and groups resolved several structural constraints to continue to access the public sphere and answer the first research question.

The final section of each chapter addresses the visibility of the interviewees after they entered the public sphere to answer the second research question as unaffiliated participants (chapter 6AYM only) and as members of their groups. I looked for emergent themes of how the interviewees felt and what they did after entering the public sphere. The main focus was on feelings of marginalisation and empowerment. The interrogating of the texts was to determine visibility between control/constraint and recognition/expansion (Brighenti, 2010). Talking about their feelings of marginalisation was an apparent theme among all interviewees. Therefore, I made an argument about women's marginalisation in the Introduction to find the link between various socio-political, cultural or legal structural constraints in the public sphere. Previous studies from this field were included in the arguments to understand the context and historical development, for example, the development of the anti-harassment debate.

I analysed how and why feelings of self-empowerment were associated with the enlargement of the role of interviewees in the public sphere. Data were also analysed to determine visibility within groups, for example, the experience of gender equality, and outside the group in the public space, where various structural constraints marginalise women, such as exposure to SH, gender-based violence or control by the group. The analysis elaborated on the strategies that the interviewees used to resolve different structural constraints and how they negotiated, avoided, and challenged them to overcome their marginalisation in the public sphere. Using Fraser's (1990) argument for making social inequality visible in the public sphere, the analysis examines how the

interviewees' visibility displayed challenged practices of contesting the dominant public and mainstream society, as well as the role of public space as the context in this contestation.

The analysis emphasised unmediated visibility – as a physical person in the public space or within their group – and mediated visibility – through incorporating a discourse or a topic. In the case of the anti-harassment group, I analysed how the anti-harassment discourse attempted to make women's bodies a private issue and SH a public issue in the public sphere. However, in the case of the graffiti group, I used the interviewees' graffiti as a vehicle to manifest their visibility in the public sphere.

In addition, the analysis included the groups' roles and strategies in transforming the interviewees' individual visibility into collective and part-of-the-group visibility. These strategies emerged as themes, not pre-established categories. The analysis also suggested how groups opened a space of appearance (Arendt, 1958) to make interviewees' visibility possible, for example, in Tahrir Square and at the Rab'a sit-in. I created different categories through which the groups' strategies negotiated the public space. For example, the anti-harassment groups transformed the crime scene into a space of appearance, and SH, as an issue, from the private to the public. This transformation was analysed using different theories about the perception of public/private in the public space and the public sphere.

In the final section of the discussion and conclusion, I compare the different patterns that emerged from the findings in all chapters to find and compare the similarities and dissimilarities in women's participation. As mentioned earlier, comparison can help identify patterns that reveal and explain how actors influence the process and create meaning across cases, which makes the findings more objective and valid (Maxwell, 2009). The comparison was based on collectivity and the visibility of participation to understand the common personal situation of interviewees, the role of groups in facilitating their participation, and structural constraints and enablement(s). I also include a section on the distinction between different counter-publics to contextualise collectivity and visibility. The conclusion ends with a particular emphasis on women's agency and how a new vision of women's agency is embodied in different situations and contexts.

## Challenges in the fieldwork

I encountered two challenges during the fieldwork: security concerns and gaining the trust and cooperation of individuals. First, violent demonstrations following the overthrow of Morsi in 2013 created an unstable security situation. While in Cairo

between January and November 2014, I witnessed dozens of demonstrations held by pro-Morsi groups. I smelled tear gas when I was on the CU campus, where I was staying in the guesthouse. I witnessed violence, brutality, and intimidation perpetrated by security forces against protesters. I also witnessed an explosion outside the university when I was inside it.

In line with this, many potential interviewees refused to meet me because they were afraid of the police and the security apparatus. Most of them belonged to 6AYM and MB, and my strategy was to contact them through people who already trusted me. Further, many other interviewees refused to meet me in the usual locations; instead, we met in much safer places. For example, some of them refused to meet me outside of the CU campus. Also, some of the interviewees refused to have the interview recorded, especially those from MB, so in this case, I wrote down the whole interview in my notebook.

Second, I received many promises from some potential activists who, at the last minute, failed to meet me and did not respond to my call. I do not know why, but I suspect it was because of the political situation.

## Ethical considerations

Two main issues were important in the fieldwork: the safety of the interviewees and the handling of sensitive issues. First, the safety of the interviewees was of concern because many of them belong to banned groups such as MB and 6AYM, which meant that I had to protect their identities from potential political sanctions. In fact, Hafez (2019) explains that many of the interviewees she met preferred not to be named or talk about participating in the uprising since El-Sisi ruled the country because the regime might retaliate.

Before the interviews were conducted, I informed each interviewee on the ethical requirement to get informed consent to the interview. Their names and personal information would be protected, kept confidential and not shared with anyone. I let them decide when and where they wanted to meet for the interviews. Macdonald (2010) argues that some adjustments to respondents' names are necessary to protect them, and I accordingly have anonymised the interviewees' names in the written texts, in addition to several other strategies to protect the interviewees from disclosure. For some interviewees from MB, I wrote the entire interviews in my notebook after changing the names and delicate political information so that only I could understand it. For example, I did not write down words like 'demonstration', 'state', or 'regime'. For the rest of the interviewees from MB and the interviewees from 6AYM, I deleted

the records only from my phone after securing the files by sending them to an email address created solely for this purpose. Before I started recording the interviews, the interviewees told me they were going to be very cautious about talking about political issues because they knew the consequences.

Second, with regard to the sensitive issues of dealing with SH, it was my job to tell the interviewees to stop during the interview if they did not want to continue. However, all the interviewees wanted to talk about SH as a public issue. They had no reservations about SH, as many told me emphatically that SH should be included in the research because it had become part of their everyday lives.

## My position as a researcher

According to Malterud (2001, pp. 483–4), ‘a researcher’s background and position will affect what they choose to investigate’. During my fieldwork in Egypt, I was aware of my role as a researcher in the creation of knowledge. Following Hammersley and Atkinson’s (2002) notion of reflexivity, I was aware of the influence that many have on this process, such as the environment of the subjects studied. I made an effort to increase my self-awareness and sensitivity by distancing my faith background, bias, and personal characteristics to influence the research process as little as possible. For example, I did not mix my background as an Iraqi who sympathised with the revolutionaries of the 2011 uprising, and accordingly, I also tried not to influence how I conducted the interviews or the conducted my analyses.

However, being an objective researcher does not mean that I did not reflect on many different data, especially those that contained an emotional component. Reflection is a very effective cognitive process, and the researcher becomes a subject who reflects on their practice in the inquiry process and object to their analysis (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2002). I was also aware that some interviewees might be more enthusiastic than others about sharing their dramatic experiences during the upheaval.



## Part II: Participation in the public sphere through social movements

One of the avenues to participate in a public sphere is through a social movement. Social movements generate and promote the democratic quality of deliberation, representation, political communication, identity formation and decision-making in the public sphere (Della Porta, 2013). There is a mutual influence between social movements and counter-publics that shape the quality of this deliberation. Palczewski and Harr-Lagin (2017) argue that counter-publics can organise to stipulate mainstream politics and critique the central power in the public sphere through social movements, especially by ‘people who lack regular access to representative institutions, who act in the name of new or unaccepted claims, and who behave in ways that fundamentally challenge others or authorities’ (Tarrow, 2011, p. 7). In addition, Warner (2002) argues that counter-publics can be a platform for building a social movement that generates oppositional discourse in the form of an argumentative claim.

In Egypt, prior to the 2011 uprising, opposition groups from the leftist, labour, Islamist, pro-democracy and anti-government social movements formed different types of counter-publics against Mubarak’s regime. These groups had later developed to trigger the 2011 uprising, including 6AYM and MB, which participated a few days after the start of the uprising. Hereafter, the abbreviations 6AYM and ‘Movement’ (with capital M) refer to the movement as an organisation, otherwise I am referring to it as a social movement in general.

6AYM was one of the main movements that triggered the spark of the uprising, and it formed a hallmark in the escalated occasions in its aftermath (Hafez, K., 2016; Hafez, 2013). MB were also among many groups that played a vital role in maintaining the mass mobilisation. MB is one of Egypt’s oldest social movement organisations and the most influential in modern Egyptian history. Munson (2001) and Hamzawy and Brown (2010), who share a similar view, consider MB as a social movement rather than just an organisation because MB performs as a social movement in its political activism; it employs the same tactics and strategies used by social movements, such as its resources and repertoires. Darrag and Brooke (2016) argue that ‘the Brotherhood is fundamentally an Islamic social movement, not just a political one, and it teaches its

members to view the value of service, first and foremost, through a religious lens'. I will also consider MB as a social movement, given that social movement embraces different groups, formal and informal networks and organisations (Tarrow, 2011; Tilly, 1978). However, this part of the study is only concerned with 6AYM and MB as two movement organisations, not as broad social movements; therefore, it is based on interviews conducted only with formal members of these two movements' organisations. Tarrow (2011, p. 123) describes the function of the movement organisations accordingly:

[It involves] the connective structures of interpersonal networks that link leaders and followers, centers and peripheries, and different parts of a movement sector with one another, permitting coordination and aggregation, and allowing movements to persist even when formal organization is lacking.

## *Chapter 4:*

# Women's participation in the public sphere through the 6 April Youth Movement (6AYM)

This chapter sets out to investigate how the 6 April Youth Movement's (6AYM) interviewees have participated in Tahrir Square since the uprising of 2011 and how they have experienced their participation.

The analysis of the chapter will show that, spurred by their political awareness as citizens and feminist consciousness as women, the 6AYM interviewees dealt with the patriarchy of the state, society, and family, through challenging the cultural Islamist and state secular discourses that sought to control women in the public sphere. They constructed their anti-neoliberal, ideological and institutional political subjectivity and developed an individual/group agency in a long process of participation in politics. They also experienced self-empowerment and the enlargement of their roles by challenging practices to the regime's repression and predominant masculine gender norms. After being subjected to SCAF's repression, as unaffiliated participants, they joined 6AYM to remain in the public sphere. They slightly pushed gender boundaries in Tahrir to expand their role in the context of revolutionary protests. They invented strategies to overcome their exclusion and marginalisation in the public sphere, but on the de facto condition that they participated through 6AYM.

As background,

'On March 23, 2008, a small group of young Egyptian activists – calling themselves the April 6 Youth Movement – launched a Facebook page in support of a planned textile workers' strike in the city of Mahalla al-Kobra to protest low wages and high food prices. The group's leaders included 27-year-old Esraa Abdel Fattah Ahmed Rashid and 27-year-old Ahmed Maher'. (*Frontline*, 2011)

6AYM was officially established through a public conference at the Journalists Syndicate by many activists mainly from the middle class (Beinin, 2012b, p. 334) and



various former social movements and opposition political parties (Sonay, 2018). The movement became part of a broad spectrum in the pro-democracy movement composed of various groups such as Kifaya and Tādamün, the Ghad Party and the Democratic Front Party (Sonay, 2018).

Later, 6AYM became one of the more energetic political forces that occupied Tahrir Square during the 2011 uprising (Hafez, K., 2016). The Movement sought to bring an alternative cross-ideological approach to activism to make its promised change through the formation of various counter-publics (Hafez, K., 2016). In 2011, like many opposition groups, 6AYM took an uncompromising stance against SCAF, which officially accused 6AYM of creating chaos in the country. Between 2012–2013, 6AYM created a counter-public against Morsi's regime and later against the military-backed regime led by El-Sisi from 2013–2014.

Therefore, 6AYM continued its activism outside the political system through informal political participation, such as holding demonstrations, strikes and sit-ins, signing petitions, boycotts, or protests. Kasse and Marsh (1979, p. 41) refer to these forms of participation as unconventional political participation that is 'behaviour that does not correspond to the norms of law custom that regulate political participation under a particular regime'.

Women from 6AYM played a vital role in politics before and after the uprising. Two famous examples of co-founders of 6AYM were prominent women: Esraa Abdel Fattah and Asmaa Mahfouz, who broadcasted the widely spread video on the internet calling on people to demonstrate against the embattled repressive regime just days before the 2011 uprising (*Frontline*, 2011).

The chapter is based on eight conducted interviews, documents, and secondary sources and is divided into four sections. The first is about how the interviewees became part of various counter-publics before joining 6AYM. The second involves the visibility of the interviewees as unaffiliated participants during the 2011 uprising. The third section sheds light on how they joined 6AYM as formal members, and the last section delves deeper into the issue of the visibility of the interviewees in Tahrir Square as members of 6AYM.

## Becoming part of several counter-publics

This section focuses on how the interviewees became part of a collective through various counter-publics before joining 6AYM as members. Understanding the collectivity of participation helps answer the first research question of how the interviewees overcame their exclusion to gain access the public sphere.

The analysis will show that, due to their differing personal situations, the interviewees took different individual trajectories to become part of three various counter-publics against Mubarak's regime: the strike in El-Mahalla El-Kubra in 2008, the murder of Khaled Said in 2010 and the 2011 uprising.

### **The counter-public of El-Mahalla El-Kubra strike**

On 6 April 2008, a general strike was held in the Nile Delta city of El-Mahalla El-Kubra by numerous pro-democracy groups, the labour movement, and dissenting intellectuals in support of workers at Egypt's largest textile company, Misr Spinning and Weaving Company (*Frontline*, 2011). The call to support the workers' demands to improve their economic conditions (Povey, 2015) mobilised many people and created a counter-public against the regime. Beinín (2009, p. 85) points out that

a broad popular mobilization against inflation in early 2008 that was closely linked to the strike movement presented opportunities for the oppositional middle-class intelligentsia to link up with the workers' movement. The second Mahalla strike served as a rallying point for all the opposition forces.

Reham and Heba, two interviewees, paid close attention to this strike and became part of its counter-public. Paying attention to a common focus of a public transforms ordinary people into collective and visible of this public (Adut, 2012).

Reham comes from a middle-class family interested in politics. She is a student at the university and is also interested in political discussions. Reham talks about her participation:

The idea came from two schoolgirls who handed out leaflets at school urging people to join the strike in Cairo on April 6, 2008, to support the workers in El-Mahalla. The head of the school got very angry because she did not know who came up with that [laughs]. Then, we also handed out leaflets in the area near our house. Some people did not take the idea seriously because we were so young, and the security apparatus (*amn al-dawlah*) was perceived like a hidden ghost and a terror to all people.

The quotation shows the political awareness of Reham and her sympathy for the workers because she was psychologically in touch with the political situation. According to Carreras (2016, p. 161), political engagement (I call it 'participation') refers to 'citizens' psychological attachment to the political system. Before supporting the workers, Reham participated in political discussions at home with her family, who sympathised with opposition groups and on the internet to understand what was going on in the country:

Honestly, when I was a little girl, my father and grandfather used to talk to me about politics. They read articles to us at home that were published in opposition newspapers and dissent journals, especially by Farouk Gouda, a poet who wrote in a slang style and in a sarcastic way against Mubarak's regime. Yes, my family had the biggest part in getting me participated in politics, but the other tool was the internet; for example, Facebook was introduced then.

Participation in politics involves cognitive and emotional preparation and action, such as discussing in politics, seeking information, attending a party meeting, or engaging in online activism (Carreras, 2016; Ekman & Amnå, 2012). Discussion in politics prompted Reham to become part of the collective concern about the strike at El-Mahalla. In his dissertation to study young activism during Mubarak's era, Onodera (2015, p. 199) notes that 'some (young activists) were socialized into oppositional culture from an early age by virtue of their families' political orientations, and were more disposed to continue with public political dissent later on'.

Reham shared with workers feelings of grief, frustration, and anger as part of a shared moral outrage that swept over large segments of the population. Tarrow (2011) explains how feeling that something is unjust or immoral triggers emotions such as anger, frustration, and grief and can motivate individuals to participate in collective action.

Thus, Reham constructed her political subjectivity of self-understanding as that of an excluded person who challenged the regime. As outlined in the theory chapter, subjectivity is a personal capacity to feel and think in a reflexive world of interaction (Adkins, 2003); it is about self-understanding and perception in relation to other subjectivities and the objective world (Gill, 2008; Hollway, 1998). Reham constructed her subjectivity through a process that occurred over time and in relation to the social structure. She sympathised with workers who were affected by the consequences of the implementation of the neoliberal project. El-Mahdi and Marfleet (2009) report that the main reason for the strike in El-Mahalla El-Kubra was the cruel economic situation that was caused by the implementation of neoliberal policy during Nazif's government between 2004–2011. Then, Reham participated in a collective action that emerged as an anti-ideological and anti-neoliberal political sentiment between large, old, leftist-backed opposition groups such as 6AYM (El-Mahdi, 2009; Sika, 2011; Singerman, 2013a).

Moreover, Reham developed her individual (primary) agency in a process as she participated in the irregular collective action during this strike and on the internet. As stated in the theory chapter, human agency is the capacity and capability to choose and act for oneself in the objective world of structural limits. Reham became a primary agent, as she lacked formal membership in a group. Archer (2000, p. 260) explains that a primary agent does not have a passive status, as they can respond to happenings; however, they cannot articulate any demands because they are not organised.

The second interviewee, Heba, was also affected by the 2008 strike. She says, 'At the 2008 event in El-Mahalla, I got my mother and father to support the strike. At that time, I was a university student, so I did not go to class as an act of supporting the strike'. Heba comes from a middle-class political family, as her father was leftist and a member of al-Tajammu' Party. Her parents sparked her interest in participating in politics, as did the internet: 'I used to read books about politics that my father brought to me. My father also was a member of al-Tajammu' Party when he was young. He participated in the 1977 Egyptian bread uprising and is still a leftist'. Like Reham, Hebas' family was a source of political experience and an incentive to participate in politics. She constructed her political subjectivity and developed her primary agency in a process that apparently emerged during the strike and led to her becoming part of the collective outrage.

Overall, Reham and Heba reported that they felt excluded from expressing themselves because of the fear of repression and how they sought to challenge the regime, as did many Egyptians, for example Esraa Abdel Fattah, who describes how she felt when she was released from prison after she called for the strike on 6 April 2008:

I found that I have the power to lead people to do something, so I should use it. In 2008, I used it for Egypt, and I noted a change happened in Egyptian people that was the first time they sent a message to the government because they always kept salient [sic]. (Front Line Defenders, 2011)

Following Archer's (2000) theory of agency and structure, becoming part of this counter-public was a result of the interaction between Reham's and Heba's personal situation/individual agency, the group's role/agency, and the structure that provided the opportunity for action.

Reham and Heba shared the situation of being educated and coming from middle-class families, as they defined themselves, who were interested in politics. Belonging to the middle class in Egypt played an essential role in increasing political awareness, which triggered the 2011 uprising, as it involved constructing cultural and political identity (Kandil, 2012). However, Reham and Heba took different trajectories to deal with their situation due to their different personal situations. As explained in the theory chapter, the personal situation is the unique circumstance that the interviewee has, for example, their feelings, background, work, and family. According to Melucci (1996), actors choose their path of action based on their situation and environment in a non-linear process that emerges through interaction, negotiation, or opposition between different orientations of action.

Regarding the role of groups, opposition groups played an important role during the strike by encouraging Reham and Heba to become part of the counter-public.

However, they were still not members of any group. Nael (a leading member of 6AYM) associates 6AYM with those who responded to the call for the strike on 6 April 2008, such as Reham and Heba:

At that time, our work in the Movement did not depend on its adherents as members, like MB. We simply adopted an idea and waited for people to react. For example, the El Mahalla strike was not organised by our members. We simply called for a strike because there was oppression and injustice, so many workers responded positively to our call.

Reham and Heba became connected to the opposition groups through the independent mass media outlets – as the two interviewees read opposition newspapers – and were on social media. Heba explains, ‘I regularly shared and discussed many things on social media like the Facebook pages of Khaled Said and April 6’. Esraa Abdel Fattah created a Facebook page that attracted thousands of social media consumers and supporters to the strike (Salvatore, Schmidtke & Trenz, 2013).

The connection to opposition groups allowed Reham and Heba to circumvent the regime’s repression through the use of social media that thrived in the framework of the transformation of the media landscape during the strike. This corresponds with the third phase of this transformation (as a structural enablement), when internet consumers started to use social media as a form of mass-to-mass communication in 2008. This transformation pushed back the state’s control over mass media as it fulfilled the function of an alternative space for Reham and Heba and opposition groups by creating digital networks far from the regime’s repression and supervision (Al-Ani et al. 2012; Lynch, 2011).

Nevertheless, structural enablement did not empower Reham and Heba to develop their agency; instead, it only assisted them by providing the opportunity to set their desire and willingness to change in practice. Archer (2000) argues that structural enablement is not about empowering or stimulating the agent, but rather the agent uses the power of enablement to put their project into practice.

Thus, Reham and Heba become part of the counter-public of El-Mahalla. They have a political awareness, which was a prerequisite for participating in the public sphere (Dahlgren, 2016) but felt excluded from expressing themselves. They became part of the collective concern about the situation and the collective action to challenge it. Weintraub (1997) argues that collectivity is about how individual efforts transform individuals to be part of a collective or a public-spirited collectivity, as Fraser (1990) puts it, to act together for common interests.

## The counter-public of the Khaled Said incident

On 6 June 2010, 28-year-old Khaled Said was dragged out of a cafe in Alexandria by two plainclothes police officers. The officers attempted to arrest him, but brutally beat him when he asked them to show an arrest warrant, which ultimately caused his death (HRW, 2010). The murder sparked a wave of public outrage across the country, and his death became a symbol of the brutality of Mubarak's regime (Sika, 2017). Ismail (2012) portrays Habib el-Adly (the interior minister who held the post for 14 years until the uprising) and his apparatus as terrifying and despised and accustomed to using violence, torture, and sexual violence against civilians in police stations.

This incident became a common focus for a particular counter-public that emerged against the brutality of the regime in 2010. The Khaled Said incident influenced Samar, Maya, Reham, Heba, Ansam, and Maha. Next, I will introduce Ansam and Maha, who demonstrated to protest the killing of Said.

Ansam comes from a middle-class political family, as her father was a leftist, and her aunt and uncle were political activists. She was a student but was expelled from the university in 2013 for her political activism. I asked Ansam, 'When and how did you participate in politics?' She replied,

I was young in 2010 when the police killed Khaled Said. I was young when Khaled Said's murder affected me deeply. I saw the video of his murder on the internet. Then I went out on the street in a black dress, along with some members of Kifaya, 6AYM, and many others. I just wanted to read the Quran to him, but I was beaten, and my clothes were torn off when the police attacked us and arrested some protesters.

During this non-violent protest, the demonstrators and peaceful worshipers were beaten and harassed by the security forces, who forcibly dispersed and arrested many demonstrators in Cairo and Alexandria (HRW, 2010). As Ansam shared her anger and sorrow with others on the internet, she became part of the collective concern. The Khaled Said incident became a turning point for many activists. Sally Toma (a member of NAC, before the uprising, and the Coalition of the Youth of the Revolution during the 2011 uprising) points out:

Personally, my real engagement in politics was the murder of Khaled Said in 2010. I was in London working on cases of torture and rape and returned to Egypt in December 2010. Many incidents led to the revolution, but the beginning was with Khaled Said's page, 'We All are Khaled Said'. (Interview with Sally Toma, Al-Jazeera, 2012, own translation)

In this context, Ansam has constructed her subjectivity against the regime in a long process. As part of a leftist family that encouraged her to be politically engaged, she was

connected to opposition groups that mobilised people to demonstrate via social media after the incident. She then developed her individual agency (primary agency) to participate in this demonstration.

Maha also took to the streets in this demonstration wearing a black outfit. Maha comes from a middle-class family that was ultimately opposed to her political activities. This incident profoundly influenced her and made her sad:

The Killing of Khaled Said came as a shock to me. After this incident, I participated in the demonstration. As I remember, my mother caught me dressing in black. She tried to stop me, but I was able to participate. I went with a male relative, and we did not know anyone there.

Maha had been interested in politics for some time before then, but she could not participate because of her young age. Her family was completely opposed to her political activism because of the regime's repression:

Everything started with a sense of frustration because of the regime's failures. At that time, I did not know how to express my feelings. I wanted to feel I was a human being in this country. I was interested in Kifaya, but I could not be a member in it because of my family and my young age.

Maha's feelings and interest in Kifaya indicate that her subjectivity went through a process of development and had a dynamic and continuous interaction with the regime's attitude towards these events and opposition groups. Her participation in the demonstration and online activism show how Maha's individual agency developed over time.

Although both interviewees came from middle-class families, Ansam was supported, while Maha was forbidden from participating by her family, so each differed in their personal situations. Regarding the role of the group, the pro-democracy movements, such as 6AYM, used the internet, the Facebook page 'We all are Khaled Said' in particular, to mobilise Ansam and Maha to protest against the brutality of the regime. This Facebook page became an epicentre for dissenters and had millions of followers, as the interviewees (except Shereen) visited the site. Ansam mentions how the page expanded: 'We were only 47 persons following Khaled Said's page before it grew to more than two million followers.'

Thus, the transformation of the media landscape allowed Ansam and Maha to meet opposition groups like 6AYM on the internet and become part of the counter-public against the regime.

## The counter-public of the uprising

Lynch (2015, p. 335) points out that ‘the Egyptian demand for the departure of Mubarak provided a singular focal point of the kind that can temporarily bring together unstable coalitions’. This counter-public was the result of a development between several previous counter-publics to take a central role in the public sphere when they occupied Tahrir Square. Among all interviewees who reported participating in the uprising, I will introduce Shereen and Maya because they provide the most unique examples.

Shereen is a journalist who lives in a working-class neighbourhood and studies at the university. She answered my question about whether she participated in the uprising:

Yes, in the first days of the revolution. On January 25, I was afraid because I did not know what was going to happen, and I had imagined something like that before. Later, I believed that something would change. So, I participated on January 29 after the Battle of the Camel.

Shereen participated in politics a long time, but until the outbreak of the uprising in 2011, she did not care about Egyptian issues: ‘I went out with other girls to lead a demonstration from my school when the Israeli army killed Mohammed al-Dura in 2000. Later, I became interested in everything related to Palestine issues’. This action was reflected in her family when a discussion about the political situation took place:

We talked about politics at home, especially my mother, who complained about the high cost of living and the lack of equal opportunities for people, which harmed our lives. She blamed Mubarak, who was living in his castle while people were poor and suffering, like me, as an unemployed person. Let me say that I followed the events but did not participate in them.

Shereen did not come from a political family, but as a journalist who was in touch with the political situation and like many Egyptian families who were dissatisfied with the economic situation, she and her family talked about politics. At the time, she was unemployed and struggling to find a job. The World Bank Group’s (2010) report shows that despite economic growth in the years leading up to the uprising, the employment rate in the fall of 2010 did not keep pace with this growth, with an unemployment rate of 9.1% – the unemployment rate for women was 22.6% compared to 4.9% for men (CAPMS, 2014). The United Nation Development Programme’s (Bargawi & McKinley, 2011, p. 17) report shows that ‘even in 2010 growth was estimated by the IMF to be about 5%. But the pattern of economic growth has not been conducive either to employment generation or poverty reduction’. Mitchell (2002) explains how the economic miracle of neoliberal development has had



a parallel effect on Egypt since the 1990s, when the government agreed to the International Monetary Fund's (IMF) reform program. While the government and the IMF celebrated the outstanding improvement in Egypt's macroeconomic fortunes, neoliberalism increased poverty and unemployment. Therefore, the whole family was profoundly economically affected, which made them discuss politics.

Meanwhile, Shereen pursued her studies, looked for a job, and participated in sports: 'I played basketball in my school, but when I got a little older, people looked at me as a boy and not a young woman, which upset me a lot'. Drawing on the notion of survival strategy by James Scott (1985) – who understands many everyday life activities as a form of covert resistance to mainstream institutional politics – Bayat (2010) considers many female activities in Egypt as a form of resistance to the power structure and formal politics. Bayat (2010, p. 45) describes the ordinary practices of everyday life in Egypt in the decade leading up to the uprising as 'quiet encroachment', which refers to 'the silent, protracted, but pervasive advancement of the ordinary people on the propertied, powerful, or the public to survive and improve their lives'. Bayat (2010) considers women studying, getting jobs, playing sports, doing 'men's work', et cetera as a way of practising everyday politics.

Shereen participated in what Bayat (2010) called everyday politics, even if the interviewees and their families perceived these actions as non-political. This form of participation prepared Shereen for regular participation in the uprising. This kind of participation is consistent with the feminist (Pateman, 1983; MacKinnon, 1989) challenge to the public/private distinction. What took place at home in the family was undoubtedly political and thus inevitably connected to publicity in the public sphere. However, practising everyday politics does not always mobilise people before they pay attention to the common focus of a particular counter-public. I asked Shereen if she was interested in another domestic political issue like the strike in El-Mahalla El-Kubra in 2008. She replied, 'Never, I was completely not interested in issues related to Egypt at all until the revolution because I focused on my studies instead'. One reason for that might be that Shereen did not have internet access before the uprising of 2011: 'My life before the revolution was different until I got the internet during the revolution. I persuaded my father to get the internet so we could talk to my sister who was living abroad, and I could also use it for my work'. She may not have had clear insight into opposition groups and the like, so the possibility of being mobilised diminished. As a result, the process of constructing Shereen's subjectivity took a long time, from 2005 to 2011, the moment of the uprising.

The second example is Maya, who comes from a middle-class background and whose family was completely against her political role. Maya talks about the situation immediately before the 2011 uprising:

At that time, I was very frustrated because I felt that something was wrong. I thought nothing would really be changed in this country because corruption seemed to be an unsolvable problem and beyond resolution; it was ruining the country, and until the January 25 Revolution, no one wanted to say anything about it.

Maya's sentiments reflected the moral outrage from much of the population against the ruling NDP, state, police, and political elites for corruption and economic deterioration. Hence, revolutionaries called 25 January the 'Day of Rage' (*yawm al-ghadab*), as protesters demanded freedom and social justice (Amnesty International, 2011a, p. 31). Sally Toma talks about corruption and the uprising:

As for the revolution on June 25, I felt that it would be triggered at least a year before its time. The revolution was an outcome of the accumulation of people's dissatisfaction in the streets as they talked about politics, especially the corruption of the regime, as they got tired of the situation. (Interview with Sally Toma, Al-Jazeera, 2012, own translation).

Before the uprising, Maya had been participating in politics since the Egyptian presidential elections in 2005, when she became interested in Ayman Nour – the first-ever political rival to Mubarak in the 2005 elections:

I started thinking about politics when I became interested in Ayman Nour in the 2005 presidential elections. You see, I wanted to participate in politics, but I remember the police attacking demonstrators at the university. I was really not willing to sacrifice myself.

Maya had constructed her subjectivity in a long process and developed her individual agency as she participated on the internet and later in the 2011 uprising.

Then, the revolutionary groups played an enormous role in prompting Shereen and Maya to participate in the uprising. The moment of the uprising was the result of what Tarrow (2011) calls a 'protest cycle' across the political system in the decade leading up to the uprising. Shahin (2012, p. 47) describes that 'the January 25 revolution was not a spontaneous act, but a cumulative process that involved numerous figures, groups, and movements over the years'. According to Shahin (2012), the mass mobilisation was not only able to overcome the security forces and NDP, but also neutralise the military to topple Mubarak from power. Accordingly, Shereen and Maya became part of the counter-public and the contestation in Tahrir to achieve change together.

## Summary

The interviewees differed in their trajectories of becoming part of various counter-publics against Mubarak's regime due to their different personal situations. They have a strong political awareness as citizens who participated irregularly in collective actions (Ansam and Maha), political discussions at home and on the internet (Reham) and practising everyday politics (all). This participation challenged the distinction between public/private and political/apolitical in a way that offered insight into the factors that were prerequisites for participation in the public sphere.

All the interviewees went through a process of constructing an anti-neoliberal, ideological, and institutional political subjectivity and developing an individual (primary) agency in the period leading up to and during the 2011 uprising. They had different motives for participating in politics at different times and on different occasions, such as frustration with the deteriorating economic situation due to neoliberalism (Shereen), anger and sadness at the brutality of the regime (Ansam and Maha), or the corruption of the regime (Maya). Coming from a political family increased the potential for participating in politics (e.g. Heba and Ansam).

The opposition groups gained the interviewees as followers, among those who were aware of their exclusion, and inspired and mobilised them to participate in politics by creating alternative platforms of activism on social media, like the '6 April Facebook page' (Reham and Heba) and 'We All are Khaled Said' (Ansam and Maha), to circumvent the regime's repression.

The transformation of the media landscape allowed Reham, Ansam, Maha and Heba to contact opposition groups. The uprising gave other interviewees the opportunity to participate and meet other revolutionaries. However, this does not preclude the possibility that there were other structural facilitators that impacted the interviewees' decision to participate in collective action.

## Participation in Tahrir Square as unaffiliated participants

This section continues to answer the first research question by investigating the collectivity of participation.

The section will show that inspired by an early participation in politics, all interviewees participated in the uprising of 2011 as unaffiliated participants before joining 6AYM. They challenged both the patriarchal family and the regime's repression. The following two sections deal with the constraints within their families (including the strategies they used to deal with these constraints) and the challenge of the regime's repression in Tahrir.

## The constraints inside the family

The family plays an important role in various aspects of people's public lives in many different societies around the world. Throughout the MENA countries, the family represents a central unit of society in political, economic, social, and religious aspects (Joseph, 2001).

The families of the interviewees had differing attitudes towards their participation in the 2011 uprising: objecting, discouraging and supporting. This classification does not represent fixed categories nor is it based on specific theories but was derived from the interviewees' perceptions of the prevailing attitudes in their families. On the other hand, the interviewees used different strategies to deal with these attitudes. I selected one or two examples for each attitude, with the selection being based on the differences in the strategies.

In terms of the objecting attitude, Maya and Maha were the ones whose families tried to prevent them from participating in the 2011 uprising altogether. They reported that their families perceived women and politics as incompatible because they viewed politics as a male-dominated domain. Of course, this is about participating in political activities, and not discussing politics or reading newspapers.

I asked Maya, 'What did you tell your family when you decided to participate in Tahrir Square?' She replied,

In the beginning, I did not tell them anything, and then when I did, they said, 'You are a woman, and we do not have women in the family who participate in politics or demonstrations or do what you are doing now or talk in this daring way'. My parents and brother tried to control me, but I told them no.

However, Maya believes in her political role and that it should be the same as men: 'I think women should be everywhere, like men, in health, poetry, the literary world and politics. What happened in our society was because of the male mentality'. Therefore, Maya had to confront the patriarchal order in the family to defend her thoughts and autonomy when she said no. She faced her situation and had the courage to force her family to accept her participation.

Maha also faced a similar situation: 'They were extremely against my political activism, and even today they tell me that we have no women participate in politics'. However, she believes in her political role and that it should be the same as for men before and during the uprising; women should be treated as citizens, not as women. Maha always fearlessly remained undaunted and steadfast in her political participation despite the restrictions imposed by the patriarchal order set by her brother and mother.

Adly (2017) argues that one of the many factors that hinder women from participating in politics in Egypt is the perception that the political world is a place for

only men. The author goes on to argue that despite women's achievements during the uprising, this perception still influences people's perceptions. Nazra's (2013a) study reports that, in the post-Mubarak period, there was a tendency to exclude women from the political process, reflecting the social culture and perception that politics is a domain for men. This view is consistent with Hafez's (2012) and other scholars' (Amar, 2011; El-Sharnouby, 2015) opinions, who describe the political domain in Egypt as a masculine one and dominated by the male elite. When I interviewed Naglaa al-Adly (the Director General of External Communications and International Relations Department at NCW), she asserts that:

There was a general tendency among politicians to reject the women's quota in 2011 because of the male mentality. This fact reflected how Egyptian men wanted to dominate in society with male thinking, put women in a subordinate position, and did not let women challenge and threaten them.

According to Maya and Maha, the prevailing view in their families was that politics was not for women because the predominant gender norms determined the division of gender roles in the family, in public life and in the political domain (although not completely and with differences between classes). This division was inevitably linked to the social structure of the predominant culture in their communities and society. The predominant culture is made up of the perceptions of gender roles and rules in society, at home, workplace, in public space, and in public life. According to Inglehart and Norris (2003, p. 8), the predominant culture is 'the social norms, beliefs, and values existing in any society, which in turn rest on levels of societal modernization and religious traditions'. In the following, I will explain many structural factors that underpin the predominant culture in Egypt.

From a socio-legal perspective, PSL has still been discriminatory against women in successive constitutions by associating them with the family and referring to them only in their capacity as 'homemakers' and dependents (FIDH et al. 2013, p. 48). One example, Article 10 of 2012 (also that of 2014) emphasises the centrality of the family and the significant role of women in the family (McLarney, 2016, p. 116). The view that the family is the proper sphere for women's labour has been included in constitutions since 1971 (Badran, 2016).

From a socio-political perspective, Hafez's (2012) study links the authoritarian political system to a patriarchal family structure in Egypt. Before and after the uprising, the Egyptian state and its institutions strived to maintain patriarchy as a control in the public and private sectors, making masculinity and femininity essential in determining the appropriate roles for women and men.

From a socio-cultural perspective, scholars (El-Tawil, 2009; Abdu el-Ghafar, 2009; Hafez, 2015) generally assert that women in Egypt are socialised from different classes (with deviations) and assigned to domestic roles in the family. This assertion corresponds with the report of UN Women and Promundo, according to which 86.8% of Egyptian men and 76.7% of women believe that the most important role of a woman is to take care of her family. In the same report, more than half of men believe that politics is best to be left to men (El Feki, Heilman & Barker, 2017). In short, based on morality, religious virtues, and patriotism, women were given the task of protecting family life and values (McLarney, 2016).

Based on these factors, it was assumed that the Egyptian family was perceived as strong, solid, and patriarchal from the various social structural perspectives. However, this assumption was challenged by scholars (Singerman, 2005; Moghadam, 2004; Al-Ali; 2012; Kandiyoti, 2013; Hafez, 2012) who reported that patriarchal family in urban areas became weak in the decade preceding the 2011 uprising, as the patriarchy underwent a transition due to economic influence and the increase of professional and educated women.

According to the CAPMS's (2014, p. 57) report, by 2013, an average of 15% of rural and urban households were headed by female workers in Egypt and 16.7% in Cairo. In addition, the number of employed women increased from 4.2 million in 2001 to 6.5 million in 2013, representing 23.4% of the labour force. Moghadam (2004, p. 140) argues that a new generation of women became less dependent on their families, although family ties remained important: 'Female-headed households – both de facto and de jure – are proliferating in parts of Morocco and Egypt'. Regarding education, CAPMS (2014, p. 19, 30, 33) reported that the number of illiterate women declined from 38.3% in 2007 to 33.5% in 2013. The percentage of women in higher education increased from 39.7% in 2001 to 50.6% in 2012. As a result, the increase in educated and professional women empowered urban women like the interviewees to challenge or negotiate the patriarchal order in their families.

That happened for many interviewees, like Maya and Maha, who have a high degree of autonomy due to their education and economic independence. While Maya was working, she lived on her father's monthly pension, so they enjoyed a degree of autonomy. Singerman (2005) highlights the economic role of neoliberalism as a reason for the weakness of the patriarchal family after education and employment rates for women increased, giving them more opportunities to decide their future. Al-Ali (2012) and also Kandiyoti (2013) describe the weakness of the family as a crisis of patriarchy in the Middle East, where patriarchal culture controlled and disciplined women's subordination.

May and Maha used different strategies to deal with the patriarchal order within their families.

Maya challenged her situation when she later forced the family to acknowledge her decision to join 6AYM: 'I decided to tell them six months later, not to get permission, but just to inform them, so they were forced to accept my decision. To this day, they think what I am doing is wrong, and we have conflicts about it often'. She challenged her early socialisation process within the family. It seems Maya was able to make some headway in her challenge because the patriarchal order was still functioning. In other words, she redefined the role of her gender within the family to include the political role. By redefining her gender role, I contend that she extended her role to domains that were perceived to be for men in the family, such as the political domain. Whether by force or persuasion, the family no longer objected her new expanded role.

Unlike Maya, Maha used the strategy of navigating when she lied to her family about her participation in Tahrir: 'I did not tell them about my participation because they would have stopped me. I told my family that I was going to visit a friend from the neighbourhood'. Maha's mother caught her participating in a demonstration to protest the Khaled Said incident a few months earlier. Maha was economically independent and lived a highly self-determined life: 'I do not work, but I could live on my father's pension separately from my mother until I get a job or an income. My brothers are married and live a life independent of us'. Unlike Maya, who worked, Maha was not under the control of her family, even though she lived off her father's pension because working meant not only economic independence but also engaging in activism in public life. Like Maya, Maha also tried to expand her role in politics by redefining the gender role; it reveals that the patriarchal order was flexible to expand or restrict women's public roles from family to family and person to person.

For both Maya and Maha, the redefinition of their gender roles occurred in 2011. The connection between redefining gender roles and the uprising confirms the close link between the patriarchal structure of the family and the authoritarian regime, as Hafez (2012) suggests. Therefore, to challenge the patriarchal order within the family means to challenge the cultural codes outside the family, in their communities and society and the patriarchal state at large. Hafez (2012) portrays what happened in the first eighteen days of the uprising as an insult to the patriarchal state: as the regime became weak, the possibility of challenging the patriarchal order within the family became more possible.

Regarding the discouraging attitude of the family, I will use Samar's family as an example because Samar and Shereen used the same strategy. Samar comes from a family from a working-class neighbourhood in Cairo. She is highly educated and has been working to support the family since her father became ill. I asked her if the family had rejected her decision to participate in Tahrir. She said, 'No, but [...]' and she continued,

[...] we live in a working-class neighbourhood (*ahia'sha'biyah*) where people believe that a woman who participates in politics is [too] bold. They dishonoured her by spreading bad rumours. But something happened that changed my father's mind. When he became ill, I was forced to depend on myself and I began to work. This gave me the confidence to make my own decisions, and it made my family believe in my abilities. Let me tell you that sometimes my father depended on me to make decisions. Then they treated me like a woman who could take care of herself and the family.

Samar reports that her father changed his mind because he initially did not believe in the role of women in politics, as did many residents in his neighbourhood. This situation coincides with what Hafez (2012) says about the weakness of the male's role as a head of the family, which disempowers the patriarchal family and gives women the opportunity to challenge the patriarchal order. Samar continues,

People in my neighbourhood perceive women who participate in politics as men, fearlessly, because women are usually constrained in different ways. People say, 'Do not do that, do not dare, do not raise your voice, you are a woman (*haram*), blemish (*'ayb*), and so on'. Women here are under the control of their fathers or brothers who want to grow up as men and improve their [masculine] personalities.

The quote suggests a reciprocal influence between the family and the community that puts pressure on the family to maintain its patriarchal role to control and discipline women, as Al-Ali (2012) argues. In an interview I conducted with Hoda Elsadda (co-founder of WMF, member of the constitution drafting committee after the 2011 uprising, and academic), she argues that,

There is a conservative environment that restricts ambitious women and stereotypes them as having a strong personality and describes them as they are bold in a negative way. All of these cultural and social things discourage many women from participating in the public sphere.

Samar thus describes how gender roles in her community and family were divided between men and women and how she negotiated this division. Gender roles in society divide responsibilities between men and women that are formed within and outside the public sphere and are deeply embedded in the culture, institutions, politics, and social relationships (West & Zimmerman, 1987). Gender roles are constructed through a process rather than already fixed, performed, or having been born with (Butler, 1993). West and Zimmerman (1987) insist that gender roles are constructed in terms of 'doing' through social interaction rather than 'being'. The division of gender role depends on the interviewee's class, community, and family. Although Samar's family



holds the same view as Maya's and Maha's families, these families responded differently to the interviewees' role in politics.

Moreover, challenging the predominant gender norms can have unpleasant consequences for women who participate in politics, such as being treated like men and stripped of their femininity. Samar continues,

Listen carefully, a woman who demonstrated in the revolution has to bear the consequences of her actions from the oppressive regime, patriarchal mentality and masculine culture. She had to give up part of her femininity in the eyes of the people in her neighbourhood and afford these consequences.

It is not easy to strip a woman's femininity because it would affect her personal and social identity and has a negative impact on her career and potential to marry. Joseph (2001) points out that 'women often pay the price for their political participation in ways that men do not. They may have to become "honorary males" to remain honourable and public'. The quote shows that Samar was aware of what she would have to fear from patriarchy and masculinity if she challenged them.

However, because of her political awareness, education and work, which allowed her a high degree of autonomy, Samar found her way into the political world: 'I am well versed with the perspective of women and politics and my role as a political actor to persuade others in my neighbourhood'. She also participated in other civic activities that pushed her into the political world: 'I have to admit that I would never participate in politics if I had not had the experience of socially volunteering and working outside my home. That raised my awareness and gave me the ability to talk and not be shy'. Ibrahim, Mesard and Hunt-Hendrix (2015) and Sparre and Petersen (2007) also argue in their studies on Egypt that participation in voluntary activities increases the potential to develop political awareness and required skills for political action. I asked Samar again how she was able to overcome such limitations, and she says, 'I was fearless, but I have a good relationship with my family and others in my neighbourhood. I am a social person in my temper, so I thank God for that'.

Samar's strategy, then, was to negotiate the patriarchal order, not to challenge or navigate it. Thus, she redefined her gender role within the family by using a different strategy than Maya and Maha, but in the context of both changes in the family situation – which seemed weak due to her father's illness – and during the time of the uprising.

Regarding the supporting attitude of the family, Ansam, Reham and Heba were all supported by their families. Ansam received full support from her father and aunt when she left her grandfather's house to live with her father:

My father always supported me even after I was exposed to violence and detained for several days. He told me that it was my right to participate in demonstrations. My aunt

also supported me even though she was afraid that I would be exposed to violence. I remember when I was released from prison, my father tried to convince my aunt that what had happened was okay and not bad at all.

The role of Ansam's family was crucial in pushing her to participate in politics even before the 2011 uprising because the predominant gender norms within the family seemed flexible enough to include her political role, as long as she did not subject herself to any kind of violence, as we will see later.

Heba's family also supported her participation in politics. Before the uprising, her parents were against her joining a social movement, but they accepted her joining a political party: 'I told my parents I would join a movement in 2009, but they refused for fear of the regime'. And what about after the uprising? She answered, 'I joined the movement in February 2011, but before, my father participated with me. After he felt I was safe, he let me participate alone'. On the other hand, the supportive attitude came during the uprising when the revolutionaries challenged the regime's repression through mass mobilisation. These interviewees did not use any strategy because they were not constrained by anyone.

In summary, with the exception of those who were supported by their families, the interviewees redefined their gender roles within the family by using strategies of challenge, navigation or negotiation to include a political role. Although there were some differences in their strategies, what all interviewees had in common was that they implemented them during the 2011 uprising.

### **Challenging the regime's repression in the uprising**

Repression is the use of physical force and the spread of fear by threatening individuals, dissent, and opposition groups with arrest, torture or harm (Goldstein, 1978, p. xxvii). In the decade leading up to the 2011 uprising, Mubarak's regime used multiple repressive measures against opposition groups and thus restricted the public sphere (Amnesty International, 2011a). The regime's repression was institutionalised in the structure of the regime and systematically used by it.

Since the outbreak of the 2011 uprising, the interviewees, along with thousands of revolutionaries, have challenged the regime's repression by demonstrating openly, and collectively, and turning the constraint into opportunity. Heba compared the first days of the uprising to the time before:

Before the revolution, I was active on the internet. I shared posts on the Facebook page of Khaled Said and 6 April's Facebook page. My family was worried about me because I am a woman, and they were afraid I might be arrested. My father told me that political work is exhausting and full of risks for women. He also said the police could arrest me.

However, Heba goes on to tell of how the situation began to change during the uprising:

At the beginning of the revolution, I wanted to join, but my family, who were afraid of the crackdown, were against it. They supported the revolution, but they still felt afraid. Finally, I participated on January 28 with my father, who could see how men protected the women in the Square. We saw there was no SH, so he let me go alone to participate.

This comparison shows us how revolutionaries put the counter-publics at the heart of the public sphere after successfully challenging the regime's repression to take a central role in making politics. For the interviewees who were active on the internet, like Maha, Samar, Reham, Ansam and Heba, the moment of the uprising offered them an excellent opportunity to move from the virtual space to Tahrir Square. Ghonim (2012, p. 71) describes how visitors to the Facebook page, 'We All are Khaled Said', turned to the public squares during the uprising: 'They felt strong. They had broken the fear barrier. Most importantly, they had finally transferred virtual activism into real-world action'.

Asmaa Mahfouz also talks about this moment: 'Everyone used to say there is no hope, that no one will turn up on the street, that the people are passive, but the barrier of fear was broken!' (El-Naggar, 2011). Nael from 6AYM says, 'After the revolution, there was no fear anymore, many just joined us'. Azza Kamel (the director of ACT) also describes this moment: 'What exactly happened for Egyptian people was a kind of transition into anger and the mechanism to express their opinion when they broke the fear barrier of the authorities'.

As many interviewees reported, challenging the regime's repression encouraged many families to loosen their control over women and allowed many to participate in the uprising. Shereen compares her family's attitude before and after the uprising: 'Before the revolution, my family advised me to walk along the wall far from interfering in politics because of fear of the security apparatus'. But since the uprising, her family turned a blind eye and allowed her to participate in politics: 'After the revolution, I convinced my family of my political activism, as they were afraid, like all parents. Meanwhile, I did not tell them I would participate in demonstrations, but they knew I had to be there as a journalist'. This situation sheds light on the close connection between the patriarchal order in the family and political situations and how both were embedded in the social structure. Of course, that does not mean all families had changed their minds, such as the families of Maya and Maha.

In summary, all interviewees could participate as unaffiliated participants before joining 6AYM because of the fragile structure when revolutionaries successfully challenged both the patriarchal order within the family and the repression of the regime during the uprising. As shown in the theory chapter, social structure is not a monolithic

or solid entity (Lopez & Scott, 2000), but rather it constitutes a nexus of various related substructures.

Following Archer's (2000) understanding of agency and structure, the interviewees' agency could, in multiple ways, deal with the structure(s) and to the extent that the structure enabled them. By 'multiple ways', I mean that the interviewees used different strategies in dealing with the social structure(s). Intentionally or unintentionally, consciously or unconsciously, they adapted their agency to fit with their situation as the structure changed over time, especially at the time of the 2011 uprising. As already mentioned in the theoretical framework, agency is seen as a process and is flexible in a way that it can dynamically change its place within the structure (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998). According to Hanafi (2012), revolutionaries negotiated the social structure to realise partial emancipation by altering their place in the social structure and resisting their disciplinary power. Moreover, agency interacts with structure not in a mechanical, statistical, or unilateral way, but holistically and variably. The interviewees could transform the social structure by turning the constraint to opportunity when many of them redefined gender roles within their families. In Archer's (2000) view, they moved from morphostasis (reproducing the social structural) into morphogenesis (elaborating/transforming the social structure).

## Summary

While many interviewees redefined their gender roles within their families to include the political role (e.g. Maya and Maha), some interviewees were supported by their family, especially political families (e.g. Ansam, Reham, and Heba). They have a political awareness of their role, as citizens, to participate in the prospective change and their historical role as women in such a momentous event.

The interviewees used different strategies such as challenge, navigation and negotiation to deal with the patriarchal order in their families to overcome their exclusion. Having work and expertise in public activism, like Maya, meant they were more likely to challenge the situation. Having an excellent relationship with the family, like Samar, meant they were more likely to negotiate the situation. If the woman did not work, like Maha, she was more likely to navigate the situation. In addition, using these strategies was associated with challenging the regime's repression.

For the majority, education, economic independence, and a high degree of autonomy in life seemed to be factors that contributed to facilitating their strategies in dealing with their families, but in the context of structural enablement(s) as assisting factors. For example, the weakness of the patriarchal family and the challenge of the regime's repression, which seemed to become fragile during the uprising.

## Visibility as unaffiliated participants in Tahrir Square

This section (and the section of visibility through 6AYM) answers the second research question, that is, how the interviewees experienced their participation in Tahrir Square.

The section will show that, given that their occupation of Tahrir Square, the interviewees participated as citizens – with feminist consciousness – before joining 6AYM. Through their challenging practices, they slightly pushed gender boundaries, compared to the previous period, in the context of protesters in Tahrir Square in the first eighteen days of the uprising. However, the interviewees were no longer able to participate as unaffiliated participants because SCAF's repression, particularly targeting women's bodies.

In what follows, I will first describe Tahrir Square and how the visibility of interviewees was expanded during the first eighteen days of the uprising, how this expansion was associated with subjection to various structural constraints after the eighteen days, and how interviewees employed various individual strategies to overcome their marginalisation.

### Tahrir Square as a public space

Tahrir Square (Liberation Square) or *Maydan al-Tahrir* in Arabic, has become a national symbol for all Egyptians throughout modern Egyptian history. The square has been a national public place in downtown Cairo for political, social and cultural gatherings and significant events since the 1919 Revolution (Meital, 2007). In the decade leading up to the 2011 uprising, opposition groups such as the MB and Kifaya movements preferred to demonstrate in Tahrir Square, while the ruling NDP was content to hang its slogans on billboards in the Square and broadcast its speeches on official TV (Meital, 2007). Tahrir Square was full of everyday interactions of people and onlookers crossing several streets and visitors to *mujamm' al-Tahrir*, Sadat Metro Station, the Arab League headquarters, the InterContinental Cairo Semiramis Hotel, the National Museum, the American University in Cairo and the NDP building.

Before the uprising, Mubarak's regime mostly regulated the setting of visibility in Tahrir Square and determined what was appropriate and inappropriate to say, practice and perform. Adut (2012) emphasises that the government (state/regime and political actors) plays a crucial role in regulating the national public sphere and the public space within it.

In the 2011 uprising, revolutionaries had mobilised the Square as a public space for various counter-publics and made it the epicentre for political actors to participate in politics, challenge power structures and predominant cultural norms, express identities,

and bring up demands. As Della Porta (2013) asserts, this is what social movements do in the public sphere.

### **The expansion of visibility in the first eighteen-days of the uprising**

The interviewees (with the exception of Reham and Maha, who participated later) reported they experienced an expansion of their visibility in Tahrir Square during the first eighteen days of the uprising. Although the Square was marked by violence, it became more tolerant and inclusionary to a variety of practices related to gender, class, religion, and ideology compared to the previous period. El-Sharnouby (2015, p. 182) points out that ‘the 18 days at Tahrir Square were exceptional for allowing unity with a focus on inclusionary practices’.

In this context, the interviewees reported that they challenged both the regime’s repression and predominant masculine norms in Tahrir Square. The two, not mutually exclusive, constraints were embedded in the social structure and served to marginalise the interviewees in the Square by suppressing their voices and controlling their bodies.

Regarding the regime’s repression, during the first eighteen days of the uprising, the interviewees reported they experienced self-empowerment and the enlargement of their role in Tahrir Square. With self-empowerment I mean they felt free, encouraged, powerful and proud in Tahrir Square. Feelings of self-empowerment were associated with enlargement of their roles in Tahrir. Here, I present the experiences of three interviewees.

Maya gives a picture of Tahrir Square and how she was encouraged to challenge the regime’s repression:

Then I donated blood and food to people in the midst of chaos. I was part of the only emergency team. I broke the curfew when I was on the street from seven in the morning, where the thugs were scattered. That did not stop me. It encouraged me to prove myself.

Della Porta (2013) points out that some repression of violence can turn into an opportunity to mobilise and increase collective action rather than decrease it. For the first time, Maya felt encouraged, strong, powerful, and influential because of her courageous actions. Sorbera (2014, p. 68) describes how women experienced their expansion in Tahrir Square as ‘a personal revolution’ when they felt empowered. Samar also reports,

You see, politics turned my life upside down. Do you know that? I agreed to do this interview for one reason, that is to give a documented testimony about a time and an experience I went through. This is a covenant, and I trust you to convey this to any

woman who wants to discover herself from the inside out and not to submit to any coercion.

Heba also describes what she felt: ‘There was no harassment of women, and the atmosphere was filled with the spirit of cooperation between people’. During the first eighteen-days of the uprising, not a single SH incident was reported (FIDH et al. 2013), giving the impression that the place was different at that time. Of course, that does not mean that there were no SH incidents. Bothaina Kamel (a broadcaster in TV and radio, and the first-ever female presidential candidate in Egypt after the 2011 uprising) told me, ‘Women responded to the revolution more than men; men were more hesitant than courageous women. Women have demonstrated their ability and freedom to speak up about what they believed’.

To illuminate the context, scholars describe the first eighteen days of the uprising in different, but not mutually exclusive ways. Some scholars (Allam, 2018a; Singerman, 2013b, FIDH et al. 2013; Pratt, 2020) describe the Square as an almost genderless utopia, a safe zone for women – free from SH and violence – and new norms of public respect and equality in communication and interaction regardless of gender, religion, or class. Allam (2018a, p. 94) says, ‘Tahrir Square, the epicentre of protests, was remembered as a place of solidarity and equality’. Other scholars (Miles, 2013; El-Sharnouby, 2015; Amar, 2011; Tadros, 2016) assert that despite the tolerant, inclusionary environment, the Square was marked by gender-based violence, discrimination, and the marginalisation of women. Miles (2013, p. 142) states, ‘On closer examination, gendered scripts were stark throughout the eighteen days of occupation, and the patriarchal hegemony of Egyptian society was not so easily overturned’.

All the interviewees and these scholars agreed that, despite the violence and repression, the Square incorporated different forms of challenged practices compared to the pre-uprising period. Melucci (1996) argues that the public sphere is the space where norms and cultural codes dominate and are challenged, so that a good society, according to the challengers, is actually put into place. The revolutionaries, among them the interviewees, transformed the Square into a space of appearance. According to Arendt (1958), the *space of appearance* is a space of disclosure of identity, claims, and demands. Thus, the interviewees reported they expanded their visibility in the first eighteen days in the context of the space of appearance.

Regarding the predominant masculine norms, in practice, challenging the regime’s repression was inextricably linked to the contestation of predominant masculine gender norms in Tahrir Square. Lila Abu-Lughod (1998, p. 18) emphasises that political moments and upheavals in the postcolonial world are characterised primarily by the concern and contestation of gender roles, in which the ‘authentic woman’ becomes an

important, powerful symbol and cultural marker of nations. Gender norms, roles, and orders were thus the subject of contestation between women revolutionaries and the predominant masculine norms represented by the regime and part of the revolutionaries.

Connell (1995) describes masculinity not as a natural character or fixed object but as a process through which gender relations and roles are constructed and reconstructed in favour of men. El-Sharnouby (2015) argues that masculine norms dominated the Square as a male-constructed space through the presence of police, military, male politicians, and the male protesters who exhibited strong masculine behaviours in the demonstrations. The state reinforced and legitimised the dominance of masculine norms through the performance of the police force (Amar, 2011), conservative religious power and traditional political culture that fed into the structure of the state's national discourse in the public sphere (Hafez, K. 2016; Wahab, 2016; Tadros, 2016).

However, the interviewees brought into play practices that challenged the predominant masculine gender norms in Tahrir Square. Asen (2000) and other scholars such as Fraser (1990; Cassegård, 2014; Warner, 2002), notes that marginalised counter-public groups brought in alternative norms to challenge dominant norms in the public sphere. As inexperienced individual activists – participating without the backing of a group or organisation – the interviewees challenged the curfew, camped out in the Square, stayed late into the night, led demonstrations, and performed in ways that could be perceived as gender equality in practice.

First, Maya broke curfew and donated blood and food. She felt proud to be a woman among male demonstrators, security forces, and thugs in the Square at dawn. Although none of the interviewees spent nights in Tahrir Square, Ansam says, 'I did not sleep outside my house except when I was in prison, but I camped out in Tahrir Square from 6 a.m. to midnight'. Ansam's grandfather did not accept Ansam coming home late at night as a woman: 'When I came home from the demonstration with torn and dusty clothes, they scolded me. [laughs] My grandfather yelled at me: "Go to your friends' house instead and spend the night with them!"' Pratt (2020) notes that some of her interviewees transgressed norms of female modesty when they came home late or spent night in the tents on Tahrir.

Second, Ansam led demonstrations and clashed with security forces at the front of the demonstrations, 'Together with a woman friend, we were at the front of the demonstrations. We conflicted with policemen. Male colleagues tried to push us back so we would not get hurt, but we just kept coming back again and again'. It was not uncommon for a woman to lead a demonstration, for example, Asmaa Mahfouz, but for many ordinary women who had no or little experience participating in informal politics, this was something of a challenge after the uprising. Ansam reflects on how the revolutionaries, not society, offered women the opportunity to take on leadership roles:



Our society did not allow women to lead, but the revolutionary young people gave women the opportunity to lead, not our society. People in our society get upset about women driving cars, how do you think about politics? Women's persistence forced them to accept this situation.

Amnesty International's (2011a, p. 22) report states, 'Women from all sectors of society joined the uprising, and many played a leading role in the mobilization'. In the eyes of many male revolutionaries, who were like many men in society, Ansam pretended to be a man, as they associated leadership qualities with men and masculine characteristics: [laughing] 'One male friend said to others, "I wish we only had Ansam with us, because she was like 100 men"'. Her male friend reflected the stereotype in their community that women were too emotional to lead, as in the UN Women and Promundo's report, which mentioned that two-thirds of men believed that women were too emotional to take on leadership roles (El Feki, Heilman & Barker, 2017). Sally Toma also points this out:

In the midst of the violence and gas grenades that I smelled for the first time in my life on January 25, 2011, men said to us, 'Go to the sidewalk to be safe', but we refused and answered, 'From today, there will be no difference between men and women'. People there began to shout, 'Women must go to the right side to be safe, but we replied that the difference between men and women belongs to the past'. (Interview with Sally Toma, Al-Jazeera, 2012, own translation)

Singerman (2013b) and others, such as Miles (2013; Pratt, 2020; FIDH, et al. 2013), who hold a similar view, observe the leading role of women in Tahrir Square, for example, leading demonstrations and being in the frontline of protests, and refer to these activities as transgressive gender practices that combat masculine norms. Pratt (2020, p. 174) also demonstrates that.

Many women also openly transgressed norms of female modesty and docility by being on the frontlines of protests; exposed to tear gas and police violence; mobilizing friends, family, and colleagues; leading the chants, of slogans; and even, in some cases, camping overnight in the square.

While I agree with Pratt that these women transgressed familiar gender norms, this does not mean that they transgressed modesty and docility, because Egyptian women were not passive and suddenly became active during the uprising, as Abu-Lughod and El-Mahdi (2011) have already said, but rather it is about the opportunity to take on a leadership role that became available during the uprising in a way that transgressed the masculine norms in that place. Thus, Ansam redefined the notion of female leadership, which was often limited to upper-middle class and middle-class women with long

experience of leadership from both sides, the regime and opposition groups. One explanation could be the lack of clear leadership during the uprising, when there was no established form of organisation and leadership (Allam, 2018a).

Final, many interviewees reported about their experience with gender equality practices during their time at Tahrir Square, compared to the previous period. According to Amnesty International's (2011a, p. 22) report, 'Egypt's women have not only suffered alongside men during the decades of political repression and economic hardship, they have also had to cope with discriminatory laws and deeply entrenched gender inequality'. At the moment of the uprising, the interviewees participated as citizens rather than women and felt equal to men. Samar says: 'At Tahrir, I was surprised to see men and women demonstrating together, this scene amazed me a lot'. Maha expresses her feelings about gender equality: 'We demonstrated as mixed groups, and there was no difference between men and women, but when policemen attacked us, women voluntarily withdrew to be safe'. Al-Ali (2012; and Morsy, 2014) observed that revolutionary women demonstrated as citizens rather than women, which gave them a sense of equality.

Allam (2018a, p. 97) emphasises that her female informants felt 'treated equally in roles, leadership positions, and interactions' during the uprising. Asmaa Mahfouz describes, 'All of us were there, throwing stones, moving dead bodies. We did everything. There was no difference between men and women' (*The Economist*, 2011). Pratt (2020) also emphasises that there were practices of equality that challenged the status quo of gender inequality that the state intentionally manufactured to demonstrate its sovereignty and assert its power and relevance.

With this experience of gender equality, which varies in intensity and quality, the interviewees show they have a feminist consciousness but without feminist organisation or orientation. By feminist consciousness, I mean that the interviewees behave and act in ways that could be considered defending women's rights and gender equality in practice, even though they may not call these acts 'feminist' acts. Kamal (2016, p. 5) argues that 'in spite of the fact that the women's demonstration in March 1919, as well as women's participation in the January 2011 protests, was not centred around feminist demands, the act of protest itself remains a feminist act'. Badran (2011) refers to gender equality practices as embedded feminism, which does not necessarily qualify as feminism. However, even though the interviewees participated in the uprising as citizens and not as representatives of women or with feminist demands, they were aware of their marginalisation as women and part of their struggle against the regime was directed against patriarchy of the state, society, and family.

In summary, based on their reports, the interviewees transgressed predominated masculine gender norms (in different ways, intensity and quality) by displaying challenging practices in Tahrir Square. Melucci (1996, p. 169) argues that a social

movement is a process through which collective actors challenge the dominant cultural codes to create an alternative meaning of their participation. Accordingly, the interviewees developed an alternative meaning of their participation when they challenged the status quo.

Despite these transgressive acts, the interviewees did not make ultimate changes in the predominant masculine norms altogether. Of course, they reported that they have gained self-empowerment with feeling expansion, but they also reported that they also made temporary progress by enlarging their roles during the first eighteen days of the uprising. Abouelnaga (2015) argues that new constructions of gender in the post-Mubarak regime were created through tactics of discursive confrontation with predominant gender norms. Abouelnaga (2015, p. 36) explains, 'New constructs of gender appeared as a result of the incessant violations of women's rights, where the body stood as the main protagonist'. She believes that gender came to the fore after the eighteen days of the uprising, when women transformed their agency from being victims to active roles. Wahba (2016, p. 67) uses Sabea's (2012, cited in Wahba, 2016, p. 67) word '(rupture) from the familiar that allows us to envision another possibility of being social and political' when women challenged the status quo of patriarchal political and social order, but this did not mean a complete collapse of the patriarchal nature of the state and society. Hafez (2012, p. 39) also speaks of a shift in gender norms when the presence of women changed gender roles in the uprising, and to some extent, undermined masculine norms.

I do not entirely disagree with Abouelnaga, Wahba and Hafez, but based on my data, I argue that the interviewees themselves experienced a change in gender roles and relations compared to the previous period. They reported they slightly pushed gender boundaries to open up a temporary space of appearance for women in the context of revolutionary protests and the limitation of Tahrir as a male-dominated public space. The measure of 'slightly' is based on the different experiences reported by the interviewees that took place in a particular period and context compared to the previous period and other contexts in each chapter, for example, inside and outside of the organisation or participating as an unaffiliated participant and as a member of a group. By context, I refer to the interviewees' efforts to enlarge their role and increase the feminist consciousness between men and women who strived towards and acted for gender equality in practice. In many groups, not just in 6AYM, many men were involved in promoting women's position in the uprising. As mentioned in the theory chapter, gender identity (role and norms) is about doing, not being an already fixed identity. It is about a construct in the relationships and interaction between men and women with the social structure (West & Zimmerman, 1987). Wahba (2016) refers to the reconstruction of masculine gender norms when the concept of manhood was

redefined with the call for men to be 'real men' who support women in their participation and protect them.

In addition, the context implied the political inclusionary environment of many political groups that sought relatively to improve the role of women, such as the newly formed political parties that have a new vision to include more women in decision-making (see ESDP in the chapter on OPPs). Further, many anti-harassment projects and initiatives and artistic groups facilitated a change in women's roles to make them more effective. Even Islamists, such as MB, pushed some women figures as a profile for their politically assumed inclusionary activism.

So, slightly pushing gender boundaries in favour of a more increased role for women has been a result of the dynamic interaction between many players and participants who negotiated the gender boundaries on a certain the public space. According to Hohendahl (1992, p. 107), 'The boundaries and the structure of the spaces where public debates of political and social issues take place are not stable: they are to be negotiated in accordance with the needs and values of the community'. Thus, even as women struggled to enlarge their roles, they did so within the context of other agency and structural factors, as Archer (2000) suggests.

Of course, pushing gender boundaries slightly does not mean that the interviewees were able to undermine patriarchy and masculinity in the public sphere. Patriarchal and masculine norms were still intact and used by SCAF and Islamists to control women. The findings show that this slight pushing of gender boundaries occurred in the context of the state's control and management of imagined perceptions and representations of women's status, gender norms, roles and womanhood as part of their gender policies. Thus, the state was forced to accept some change in gender roles and relations in a way not to challenge the political system. After the eighteen days of the uprising, the regime reinforced its conservative view of gender roles, which aimed to restore traditional gender norms, or as cooke (2016, p. 31) puts it, 'Squeeze the genie back into the lamp'.

These findings are consistent with what Allam (2018a, p. 143) asserts: 'The current military-backed regime of President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi seemingly advocates the agenda of women's rights while curtailing the freedom of independent women's organizations'. So, this was a kind of mixed-message gender outcome that allowed for some change in gender roles and norms, but within the confines of the structure upon which the patriarchal and masculine state produces and reproduces gender relations and the perception of women's rights.

Thus, the change in gender roles was neither revolutionary nor limited to what was considered a 'culturally acceptable feminine conduct' (Kandiyoti 1996, p. 9). Rather, they were remarkably precarious achievements, especially in the social and cultural fields, as we will see later in the anti-harassment and graffiti chapter.

On the other hand, the objective results of these slightly pushed gender boundaries were a nuisance to SCAF and the Islamists. According to Mitchell (2003), challengers in the public space upset public order by introducing provocative norms for things, people, activities, or practices that are portrayed (by the dominant public) as belonging to the hidden and private sphere. In other ways, the interviewees have, unintentionally, made gender inequality visible and observable. Fraser (1990, p. 64) argues that making gender inequalities in deliberation visible and contestable rather than bracketed would lead disadvantaged groups to challenge (though not completely) their historical exclusion and marginalisation.

By slightly pushing the boundaries, the interviewees overcame their marginalisation in the Square, to a moderate degree, and for a short time. Incidentally, the measure of moderate degree is based on the interviewees' reports of how they experienced inclusion (with differences between them) compared to the previous period. As they reported, they could not even imagine participating before the uprising because of the regime's repression. Their satisfaction with their participation was limited to the context of Tahrir Square and to a temporary period because of the constraints.

### **Constraining visibility in Tahrir Square**

After the fall of Mubarak, on 11 February 2011, SCAF sought to re-establish its control over Tahrir Square and gendering political objectives was one of the strategies used in response to the high presence of women. Al-Ali (2012, p. 31) speaks of various gendering processes in all aspects of social, political, cultural, and economic life, and it is not just a gendered lens on women, but also on the state, civil society, the military, and the economy. Kadry (2015) notes a gendered response to women's high participation in successive governments in the post-Mubarak era, for example, gender-based violence and SH – which are used as effective weapons to prevent women from participating in political activities and accessing political influence (Butler, 1993).

Before and after the 2011 uprising, Egyptian regimes were accustomed to using gendered violence and SH against female political actors (as well as men) by targeting their bodies, for example, through teasing, insults, and virginity tests (Tadros, 2016; Amar, 2011; Rizzo, Price & Meyer, 2012). Targeting women's bodies became part of the political contestation in the post-Mubarak era (Hafez, 2012; Hatem, 2011; Abouelnaga, 2016). Tilly (1978, p. 14) asserts that 'governments respond selectively to different sorts of groups and different sorts of actions'. These forms of selective repression contributed to marginalise women in the Square (Hafez, 2014; Al-Ali, 2012; Elsadda, 2011).

SCAF used and allowed gender-based violence by systematically targeting women's bodies, demoralising women activists, threatening their families, and restoring masculine norms in the Square.

First, Ansam was exposed to SH on Tahrir and in prison:

Policemen and officers harassed me when I intervened to defend a female MB activist who was harassed by other policemen. They put us in jail. Then they sexually insulted me to break me from the inside. I did not cry but felt deeply hurt and saddened, both in my body and my soul. They made two arrested men from 6AYM undress in front of me and forced me to look at them while they were completely naked. Imagine being beaten if you let your eyes wander.

Ansam spoke with pain, but also with defiant speech. Kandiyoti (2013, p. 2) argues that there is a widespread belief in Egypt that violence against women was used as a strategy to keep women from participating in the public sphere during the 2011 uprising, when generals said, 'Only young women of loose morals participate in demonstrations'. The demoralisation of activists makes their bodies vulnerable to violence and SH in a way to be used as political means and part of contestation between different political actors. Hafez, S. (2016, p. 33) argues that 'Seeing women's bodies as a means to their political ends, Islamists, liberals and pro-government groups – to name a few groups, viewed the female body as transgressive, unregulated and unruly'. They stigmatised female protests as immoral, undisciplined and out of control. Nevine Ebeid (NWF) claims that 'SH was a message to women that your place is not in the streets; it was dedicated to the idea that women activists who took to the streets were immoral and rude'.

However, that did not sway Ansam. 'Did that stop you from participating?' I asked, and she replied,

Never, it was a matter of life and death for me. You know it was a very painful experience for me. Imagine being pulled out of your cell in a see-through dress and without a veil in front of arrested men who insult you and destroy your honour. After four days of beatings, I could do nothing more than cry and scream. They were dirty monsters who viewed women in a very bad way.

However, the regime's repression backfired because it motivated Ansam to continue participating, which reflects a high level of political awareness. Other interviewees were also exposed to SH. Shereen says, 'As a woman, I could not participate in any demonstration unless I went accompanied by a man who could protect my body because SH frightened and hindered me from participating'. Samar also says, 'I was often subjected to SH, but I dared to react to the harasser'.

The interviewees reacted in different ways to SH and with encouragement to challenge it, which later evolved into a form of collective action against SH. According to Morsy (2014, p. 219), on 20 December 2011, women chanted, 'Our dignity, freedom should not be touched' and 'the daughters of Nile are a red line'. In response, 'the SCAF issued an unusually strong apology for the "violations" against women'.

Second, gender-based violence went beyond attacking women's bodies to dishonouring their families in the hope that these families would discourage their daughters from participating in Tahrir Square. Dishonouring women means hurting and insulting the whole family (Joseph, 2001). In Egypt, women are considered the sacred core because their honour represents the entire family (Badran, 1995).

All the interviewees expressed that their families were afraid and outraged when they realised there was SH in Tahrir and in the prisons for arrested women activists. Ansam, who was supported by her family at the beginning commented, 'I was told at home, "It is enough, and look what happened to you", but I said "no"'. My parents said, "You should never go to Tahrir, but I replied that they are acting like how the policemen want them to act'. Samar explains, 'SH is a powerful argument used by those who control women at home to prevent them from participating in demonstrations. They say, "We are afraid that you will be subjected to SH", and that's what happened to me'. Instilling fear in the hearts of women activists and their families was a strategy to discourage women from participating in the demonstrations (Tadros, 2013, p. 28).

In addition, Tadros (2013, p. 16) also mentions SH shaming women, their families and the entire community 'in a context where men's, families' and indeed whole communities' sense of honour is intrinsically linked to women's bodies, sexual assault is an act of shaming opponents'. On 8 March, International Women's Day, eighteen women activists were arrested and taken to the Egyptian Museum by military force. They were severely beaten, tortured and sexually harassed and also subjected to the 'virginity test' justified by SCAF (FIDH et al. 2013). Amnesty International (2011b) reported the comment of an Egyptian general who told CNN,

The girls who were detained were not like your daughter or mine. These were girls who had camped out in tents with male protestors in Tahrir Square [...]. We did not want them to say we had sexually assaulted or raped them, so we wanted to prove that they were not virgins in the first place. None of them were.

While the general attempted to justify SCAF's deed, activists had a different narrative. In an interview (Collins, 2012) about the virginity test, Esraa Abdel Fattah claimed, 'These actions were an attempt to break women's spirits and dignity so that they don't go out and protest'.

Third, many interviewees reported that SCAF allowed harassers who were ordinary people to do so without intervening to protect the women. Maya says, 'The SH was used politically by certain groups when some people in the Square harassed us'. Another example is Reham, who says.

During the SCAF period, I was exposed to SH. Many harassers formed a circle around the victim of a women activist to push her out of the Square and harass her collectively without getting help. This kind of harassment was to prevent me from participating in Tahrir.

Reham speaks of the circle of hell aimed at excluding women activists from the Square (FIDH et al. 2013). Tadros (2016) points out that SCAF willingly allowed or turned a blind eye to the harassment of activists by passers-by who happened to be in the Square. Allowing ordinary people to do this could be a way of maintaining control over women activists by upholding masculine gender norms. Hafez (2014, p. 178) states, 'Once in the public sphere, women's bodies are regulated and disciplined by the "male gaze", which ensures that the masculinity of the public domain remains protected from the potential of chaos introduced by non-masculine, transgressive bodies'. I agree with Hafez about protecting masculinity in the Square, but I disagree with her description of non-masculine bodies, because female activists did not completely abandon masculine connotations in their protests. For example, many of the interviewees protested in the company of men to protect themselves, like Asmaa Mahfouz in her call to protest Mubarak.

In addition, some male revolutionaries also harassed women (El-Sharnouby, 2015; Miles, 2013). Selma El-Nakash (a researcher and feminist activist from Nazra) recounts,

We protested on March 8, 2011, and then we were subjected to violence from ordinary people of bystanders. They claimed, 'You are against our tradition and convention. Egyptian society is religious and you would ruin it with your Western ideas'.

At the 8 March demonstration, 'men told those marching to go home and feed their babies. The police too, as they broke up the March, told the women that this was no time for such rallies' (*The Economist*, 2011).

Accordingly, gender-based violence and SH by SCAF served as a tool to control women's bodies to fit with the setting of visibility in the Square; otherwise, they would be punished and excluded from the Square. Connell (1995) asserts that the use of violence is a strategy to restore gender order and assert the system domination.

In general, SCAF's strategy of gendering the political objectives could be understood in the context of subjecting activists to the state's modernising gender policies and



vision of womanhood. Al-Ali (2012, p. 30) argues that women's rights activists have historically challenged the authoritarian state's attempt to co-opt them to its largely secular modernising gender policies and state feminism. Like Egypt, the authoritarian regime often implements its gender equality measures, but only as long as they are seen as harmless to the regime and the status quo. So, between women activists, the interviewees challenged the state's secular discourse in Tahrir and its vision of gender policies, which marginalised women in its institutional political project, as Al-Ali (2012) suggests.

As a result of the gendering political objectives, the interviewees, between women, began to lose the space of appearance. Abaouelnaga (2016, p. 4) describes the result of constraining women during the reign of SCAF accordingly: 'Unfortunately, in the toxic crossroads of culture, religion and politics, women lost their "space of appearance", and the female body was turned into a site of different ideologies'. The counter-public that overthrew Mubarak dispersed, and other counter-publics emerged with different aims. Shereen describes this situation during SCAF's reign beginning in 2011: 'Immediately after the revolution, there was a free space to participate in politics, but that space gradually began to shrink. I knew many women who wanted to participate in politics, but their families refused to let them do so for fear of the regime'. Amnesty International's (2012, p. 12) report describes this situation:

The SCAF maintained the state of emergency continuously in force since 1981 and in September confirmed that it would enforce in full the draconian Emergency Law (Law 162 of 1958) and extend it to criminalise acts such as blocking roads, broadcasting rumours and committing (assault on freedom to work).

Although demonstrations continued on Fridays, counter-publics gradually lost their momentum. According to Asad (2012, p. 5), many people began to support military rule with the slogan 'The army and the people are one hand'. Thus, SCAF gendered political objectives to strengthen its position and '(re) establish not only particular gender norms but also political order and authority in a context of upheaval and instability' (Pratt, 2020, p. 191). To continue their participation, the interviewees used several individual strategies before joining 6AYM in 2011.

#### *Strategies to overcome structural constraints*

The interviewees reported they used several individual strategies to deal with gender-based violence and SH, during SCAF's rule: negotiating, avoiding and challenging. Sometimes these tactics were mixed between two or switched from one to the other.

Heba, Shereen, Maha and Reham used the negotiation strategy when participating in a venture with a man to feel safe in the Square. As mentioned earlier, Heba initially

participated with her father for that reason. Shereen participated with a man who was a relative. Maha and Reham never participated alone. Maha says, 'I always participated with people I knew, not alone. That was after the eighteen days of the revolution'.

The negotiation strategy was used to circumvent the setting of visibility in Tahrir Square by enlisting the help of third parties. The price was that women had to give up some of their autonomy and accept the control of third-party intervention. Allam (2018a, p. 55) argues that 'the literal and figurative presence of a male figure accompanying women in the uprising contributes to undermining the image of an independent, active woman expressing political agency'. The problem was that the man who took on the role of protector was not always available or strong enough to prevent the violence. In practice, this strategy did not work for everyone; therefore, Heba, for example, changed this strategy and instead participated on the internet.

Regarding the avoidance strategy, Heba preferred to change her strategy to participate in social media after being exposed to SH: 'My family felt frightened and advised me not to go to the Square after hearing about SH during the SCAF period. The internet became my safe place to voice my opinion'. Social media sites were operated as a safe backstage for counter-publics to prepare before returning to Tahrir. Fraser (1990, p. 68) describes such a situation:

in stratified societies, subaltern counterpublics have a dual character. On the one hand, they function as spaces of withdrawal and regroupment; on the other hand, they also function as bases and training grounds for agitational activities directed toward wider publics.

Salvatore, Schmidtke and Trenz (2013) notes that during the uprising, the mutual influence and collaboration between online and offline activism provided a safe strategy to avoid clashing with the regime. By participating online, interviewees sought to maintain their presence in the political scene even after being exposed to SH and violence. Hafaz, K. (2016, p. 14) argues, 'The link between social media, the mass media, and political institutions seem of utmost importance for the integration of counter-public voices into the democratic political system'.

However, participation through social media did not work well. Samar explains, 'The real participation in demonstrations was much better than just sitting lazily at home checking Facebook. I do not think the internet was the primary tool to make a difference, but it influenced my knowledge and personality'. Therefore, Samar preferred to use the challenging strategy instead.

Regarding the challenging strategy, Samar and Ansam decided to continue participating despite the high risk of being exposed to SCAF's repression. Samar explains, 'When I was exposed to SH, I clashed with harassers and fought back with

my hand. I never forced myself to change my manner'. Ansam insisted on challenging the regime's crackdown, 'My family said, "enough is enough", but I insisted because my father supported me [*laughs*]. I was released on the Wednesday and returned to the streets that Friday'. However, the strategy of challenging the regime did not work, as she began to notice opposition in her home. Therefore, Ansam and Samar were among those who joined 6AYM immediately after the eighteen days of the uprising.

Thus, the interviewees could not deal with gender-based violence and SH, they could not solve the structural constraints as unaffiliated participants because SCAF used repression at different levels to subject women activists to its gender policies. The interviewees tried to redefine their position and role in the new situation, which was difficult without the protection of a group that might deal with structural constraints.

For this reason, the interviewees began to contact groups such as 6AYM. They began to interact with the opposition group in what Archer (2000, p. 264) called 'The morphogenetic cycle', when the primary agent moves from reproducing to transforming/elaborating the social structure at a particular historical moment.

## Summary

In the first eighteen days, the interviewees reported they challenged both the regime's repression and predominant masculine gender norms by bringing challenging practices into play, such as transgressing gender norms (Maya and Ansam), redefining the perception of female leadership (Ansam), and experiencing gender equality in practice (all interviewees). They challenged gender inequality by practising gender equality with some awareness of a feminist consciousness, which became *de facto* visible and part of the contestation in the public sphere. As they reported, they slightly pushed gender boundaries in Tahrir to increase the space of appearance and overcame, to a moderate degree, their marginalisation in the public sphere, compared to the previous period.

After the eighteen days, SCAF gendered the political objectives in the Square through targeting women's bodies, demoralising and dishonouring them and their families. SCAF sought to limit women's influential role in making politics and subjugated them to the state's secular vision of gender policies. The interviewees countered the gender-based violence and SH with various individual strategies such as challenging, negotiating, or avoiding, but they could not be that effective as unaffiliated participants. The interviewees thus tried to join a group to continue their participation.

## Participation through 6AYM

This section continues to answer the first research question by following the process of accessing the public sphere through joining a group.

The section will show that the interviewees overcame their exclusion due to a condition to join a group that was 6AYM. They reported that they have chosen 6AYM: to carry out political activism in the streets; because they perceived 6AYM as representative of their aspirations as youth; and the movement has no specific ideology but basic universal values. These three themes are not mutually exclusive. Structural enablement also played an assisting role in this affiliation.

### Participation in the streets

Shereen, Reham, Heba, Maha, and Samar joined the movement because they wanted to stay in the Square after Mubarak was ousted from power on 11 February 2011. They perceived SCAF as part of the old and corrupt regime, and the OPPs served to embellish and legitimise the new political system. This stance corresponds with El-Sharnouby's (2017) and Bayat's (2017) description of many youths in Egypt who distanced from the traditional and institutional forms of politics, including OPPs, because they lost trust the entire political system at the time.

However, based on their experience, these interviewees perceived 6AYM as a saviour because it carried out its collective action outside the political system through informal political participation. Beinin (2012a) refers to 6AYM as engaging in a bottom-up mobilisation process and collective action based on informal and subterranean networks. Then, 6AYM used a combination of traditional means of mobilisation and new techniques of mobilisation such as the use of social media. According to 6AYM's website, 'Our activism combines new media outlets, social networking sites and online social media with traditional means such as demonstrations, strikes, and sit-ins' (Shabab 6 April, 2018a, own translation).

Regarding traditional means of protest, all interviewees were aware of, believed in, and responded to the movement's strategy of holding demonstrations. Shereen says,

The first time I saw an organised demonstration was in front of the Israeli Embassy in Cairo. I asked, 'Who are you?' Then I met three times a person who was in charge of the leadership in *al-M'adi* neighbourhood, and we talked about many things, so I joined them.

Reham also says, 'I trusted 6AYM because I participated with them in many demonstrations during SCAF's period'. Both interviewees joined 6AYM during SCAF's

rule in 2011. Then, 6AYM became part of a broad movement called the Coalition of the Youth of the Revolution. The two interviewees used 6AYM's collective action frame to continue to participate in the streets. According to Snow et al. (1986), the collective action frame underlines subjective and symbolic characteristics of the social movement by defining motives, grievances, and identities of members.

Regarding new social media, aforementioned opposition groups, like 6AYM, make extensive use of social media sites to mobilise their adherents and create digital networks. The Movement was founded after creating a Facebook page on 23 March 2008 to support workers in the El-Mahalla strike (Frontline, 2011). After this call, 75 000 members followed the page, which became the most popular Arab Facebook page at that time (Lysenko et al. 2012). The creation of a Facebook page does not mean that these activists operated from within a vacuum. Many activists, like Ahmad Maher (the co-founder of 6AYM), were members of Kifaya. All the interviewees were connected to 6AYM through social media pages. Maha said,

I knew 6AYM since their activities related to the murder of Khaled Said and January 25, mainly through Facebook. For example, the amazing video of Asmaa Mahfouz calling for January 25. I remember her saying, 'If you are a man, get out and participate in protecting me as a woman'.

In her daring YouTube video, Mahfouz, a 25-year-old veiled woman and 6AYM activist, called on men and women to take to the streets to protest against the oppressive regime and return their dignity. The video was posted on her blog a few days before the uprising on 25 January 2011 (Miles, 2013). Maha, and many other interviewees, spoke of how Mahfouz encouraged them as women facing a brutal regime that was perceived as invincible.

Melucci (1996) points out that sustaining collective action requires organisation or a form of affiliation. Klandermans (1997) argues that the affiliation process relies on compatibility between organisations and individuals. While the organisation offers an opportunity for mobilisation, for example, by motivating individuals, forming networks, and removing barriers to participation, the individual responds to this offer through motives, ideology, identity, social or cultural proximity.

Compatibility between the two parties was not simply adapted but intentionally appropriate to serve these two parties. While interviewees distanced from traditional and institutional forms of politics, they would remain on the streets with 6AYM and continue to demonstrate after ousting Mubarak from power.

## Movement of the new generation

All interviewees reported they felt a sense of belonging to 6AYM, which represents their aspirations as young people of a new generation. These feelings were not adopted or demanded by the Movement but matched with young people who felt similarly before joining the Movement. They mostly were educated youths from the 'middle-class poor' of white-collar families (with significant political implications) who emerged 'at the expense of the decline of the more traditional classes and their movements', in Bayat's (2011) words. They were used to using the internet, especially social media. The interviewees were all between nineteen and thirty years old, except for Maya, who was over thirty.

Unlike how Mannheim (1952), used the term 'generation' as a fixed category and explanatory concept, Bourdieu (1993) used the term as representative of a group of people who share common experiences and have a collective interest in articulating the 'us'. They are not relatively unproblematic, ready-made groups but rather a reflective articulation of their generational experience and consciousness. Here, the term 'generation' is used not as an explanatory concept but as a descriptive one that identifies some youths in a particular context who perceive themselves differently from the previous group due to shared common experiences. Purhonen (2016) refers to this generational interpretation in the relationship between a generation and a social movement that labels itself as a generational movement.

Unlike her father, who was a member of a leftist political party, Heba felt she belonged to a generation of youth who looked for informal channels to do politics: 'I did not find that any political party represented my ideas or was close to young activist groups like 6AYM'. In distinguishing from the old generation, El-Sharnouby (2017, p. 84), Bayat (2017) also holds a similar view, emphasising the new generation of young Egyptians who were born in the 1980s and grew up 'in a decidedly different historical moment than their parents', as they grew up in the midst of and were influenced by the neoliberal world. Therefore, Heba, distances herself from any formal/institutional form of politics. I asked Heba why she has not joined other movements? she replied,

My uncle gave me a phone number to call someone in MB to join them if I wanted, but I thought they were conservative like my uncle's daughters and women in the movement who had less freedom. I felt they did not represent me. But 6AYM, which was founded by young people like me, has the same ideas as me and what I dreamed of the civil state, so there was a rapprochement between me and 6AYM.

Omaima Abou Bakr (an academic and activist in WMF) says that 'before the revolution, we had a new generation of youth who participated in public activism and politics more fearlessly than the old one'. Expressions such as 'our generation' or 'my

generation' came up frequently in the interviews to describe the period of political change. Reham points out, 'I chose 6AYM because people there were close to my thoughts as a young woman'. Maha explains, 'Look, we felt we were similar in our views and habits, do you understand me? Really, I found myself more in the Movement than being with my family'. Shereen also says, 'I found that they spoke like me, like my language, so we understood each other'. Of course, not everyone who had commonalities felt they belonged to this supposed generation, but some of them did, including the interviewees.

The Movement portrays its profile as representative of the frustrated generation of young people looking for a future perspective, starting with the choice of the name 'Youth Movement'. On its website, 6AYM explains that the Movement relies on the activism of youth and precisely the new generation: 'The right of our generation is to try [...] either to succeed or to provide an experience that will bring improvement to future generations' (Shabab 6 April, 2018a, own translation). According to Purhonen (2016), the generational interpretation could promote the value of the own group in the question of presenting a certain social category as a generation.

Accordingly, the Movement promised to turn the generation of problem, portrayed by Mubarak's regime (El-Sharnouby, 2015), into a generation of hope through problematising the current situation and challenging the power centre of the politicians of the old generation. Lynch (2011, p. 303) describes it accordingly: 'The rising generation simply communicates differently, interacts differently, and has different expectations of the public sphere compared to previous generations'. That does not mean there was a clear-cut dividing line between the old and new generations, if we use Bourdieu's (1993, p. 99) understanding of generation: 'many clashes between generations are clashes systems of aspirations formed in different periods'. Thus, it is not a clash between two age categories but rather an interpretation of two generations. The new generation has simply continued its struggle against the regime, in what Bourdieu (1993, p. 101) calls the 'transmission of power and privileges between the generations'. This dynamic can be observed in some interviewees from political families between parents and their daughters, like Heba, Reham and Ansam.

Thus, there was compatibility between the interviewees and 6AYM, which perceived a representative to the interviewees' aspirations.

### **No specific ideology but shared universal values**

Reham, Ansam, Maha, and Shereen joined 6AYM because the Movement did not adopt a specific ideology. These interviewees distanced themselves from any symbolic frame of collective action, and the political system of the regime and political parties

reminded them of NDP or the political parties, including OPPs. They simply thought these ideologies were foolish.

However, the interviewees agreed with the Movement on common goals based on universal values such as belief in the civil state, human rights and equality among citizens. I asked Reham why 6AYM? She explained, 'They do not have a fixed ideology. If you ask me to present 6AYM, I would say it is a gathering of young people with different ideologies and backgrounds who share the same goals'. Ansam emphasises the same thing: 'The most interesting thing that attracted me to 6AYM was that there was no ideology at all; it was neither socialist nor liberal but called for a civil state, so, it looked like a lobby exerting political pressure'.

This agreement coincides with what Sonay (2018, p. 81) finds in his study on 6AYM. Many member informants told Sonay they believed 'there is no politics at all in Egypt' or describe the political process as a 'dirty game where you have to change colours, lie and play with your enemy'. The interviewees and Sonay's informants shared, along with a range of revolutionaries, a similar view about the political process. Bayat (2017, p. 2) and El-Sharnouby (2017) also describe how revolutionaries in Egypt lacked an ideological framework because there were no intellectual guidelines or leaders. This view is also consistent with the understanding of scholars (Sika, 2011; Singerman, 2013a) who emphasise the anti-ideological subjectivity of many revolutionaries in Tahrir Square.

The Movement's statements reject any form of ideology as a basis for its formation, stating, 'The Movement neither adopts political ideas or ideologies nor does it follow any party, person, or any hidden goals or personal interests' (Shabab 6 April, 2018a, own translation). According to Sonay (2018), 6AYM tried to bring an alternative approach to ideological organisation by emphasising key concepts such as democracy and civil society. Hafez (2013) also argues that, among social movements, 6AYM transcended the ideological, gender and class barriers that the state used against opposition groups. So, 6AYM did not use specific ideology as rhetoric to deprive the state of its tool against dissent; however, that failed the Movement and reduced its chance of integrating into political system with a clear future perspective.

The Movement declared its basic goals for the state to be 'a civil and democratic state [...] built on justice for all people' and 'the emphasis on citizenship and human rights to be achieved in universities as part of the educational system' (Shabab 6 April, 2018b, own translation). The Movement called for interviewing newcomers to ensure they share the movement's goals. Reham says, 'They interviewed me to know my ideas, tendency, style and political thoughts. Shereen met with newcomer admissions officers three times to see if her political leanings were in line with the movement's principles. In fact, a condition for joining the Movement organisation was to accept the Movement's politics: 'If you want to become a member, you must agree with the



movement's ideas' (Shabab 6 April, 2018a, own translation). Thus, 6AYM embraced a broad spectrum of activists who espoused liberalist, leftist, and middle-class Islamist ideologies (Beinin & Vairel, 2011; Hafez, 2013).

On the other hand, many interviewees did not join the Movement to feel loyal to it because of its ideology. They were eager to have their space of freedom within the Movement. Ansam says, 'I tend to be close to the pro-democracy movement in general. So, I joined 6AYM, but I had my independent opinion at the time, and they respected that'. Although Ansam was a member of 6AYM, she has participated in demonstrations by other movements, such as the sit-in in Rab'a in 2013. Shereen also says, 'My participation in the movement is not based on political loyalty. If there are disagreements between us, I will not follow them'. This stance indicates that the interviewees were very aware of their position and what they wanted from their political participation, in general, and from 6AYM, in particular.

That does not mean the members would never follow a particular instruction. On its website, the Movement mentions that all members must 'abide by the decisions made by the majority and support the activities carried out by the movement, even if the members did not agree with them at the beginning of the discussion' (Shabab 6 April, 2018a, own translation). However, in practice, and in contrast to the interviewees from MB and OPPs (as we will see later), it seems that interviewees within the Movement have ample space of freedom to choose, decide or do what they think is right.

This point sheds light on the relationship between individual and group's agency and how the malleable connection between the two parties gives more power to the interviewees' individual agency. As Archer (2000) explains, primary (individual) agents can have a space to act and reshape the corporate (group) agency.

In summary, and based on the three subsections, the compatibility between the interviewees and 6AYM is understood in the light of Snow's et al. (1986) framing alignment theory, which allows the mobilisation process to occur when the individual's definition of the situation and reality matches the group's interpretation of the same situation and reality. The two parties shared an understanding of what Tarrow (2011) calls an unjust and immoral interpretation of a situation. These three compatibilities facilitated the interviewees accessibility and sustained participation through 6AYM, but in the context of the assisting role of structural enablement.

### **The assisting role of structural enablement**

SCAF, which was allied with MB, suppressed many opposition groups such as the liberal forces and the revolutionary labour movements such as 6AYM (Gamal, 2015;

Halawa, 2019). Of course, that does not mean the repression went so far as to completely restrict public sphere.

Samar and Ansam joined 6AYM with help from their friends. This sheds light on the vital role of informal social networks in recruiting newcomers to the movement, as they provide trustworthy channels of communication (Melucci, 1996). Samar says, 'I asked a neighbour, a woman who was a member of the Movement, to let me get in touch with the Movement, and she then welcomed me'. The Movement has actors in informal networks, like Samar's neighbour, which feeds visible action to mobilise people like Samar.

However, other interviewees such as Maha, Heba, Shereen, and Reham joined directly after contacting the Movement at a protest in one location. Maha says, 'I found their phone number on Facebook, so I called them and asked if I could join. I knew they were going to hold a sit-in, which eventually led to the trial of Mubarak, so I participated with them'. Heba also says, 'We were many, and they welcomed us into an open meeting and then gave us contact information'.

In the months following Mubarak's fall, the mass mobilisation of revolutionaries, like 6AYM, continued their demonstrations every Friday (Asad, 2012). Political groups carried out their activism more than individuals who were more at risk to be subjected to gender-based violence for women (FIDH et al. 2013). Indeed, Selma El-Nakash (Nazra) describes how people tried to join groups to continue their participation and how Nazra supported women of 6AYM,

After January 25, people needed some form of organization in groups or networks to access the public sphere because they could not continuously participate as unaffiliated participants in a 'velvet' [fragile] public sphere. From that point on, we played a tremendous role in getting women to participate in the public sphere. Then, we launched many initiatives to train those who joined social movements, like 6AYM.

Although the regime's repression became more durable during SCAF's reign to restrict unaffiliated participants, it was nevertheless less effective in restricting groups because structural emblem still functioned. According to Archer (2000, p. 260), 'Corporate Agents act together and interact with other Agents and they do so strategically, that is in a manner which cannot be construed as the summation of individuals' self-interest'. Indeed, the group's agency is more likely to strategically solve structural constraints and make better use of structural enablement(s). 6AYM acted as a facilitator by adapting the interviewees' different personal situations (motives and primary agency). Scholars studying social movements (Melucci, 1996; Tarrow, 2011; McAdam, 1982) argue that social movements provide a collective action frame through which diverse members and followers with different backgrounds are incorporated as a group that agrees on one or more goals to achieve.

Thus, 6AYM solved the constraints and took advantage of the enablement(s), for example, through information networks and the relatively inclusionary political environment during SCAF's reign. These factors provided opportunities for interviewees and 6AYM to meet and underpin the compatibility between them. In this way, the interviewees overcame their exclusion on the condition for joining a group. By condition, I mean that no one imposed this condition, but rather it became *de facto* that they had less of a chance to access the public sphere unless they joined a group.

## Summary

The interviewees were aware of the political situation and knew what they wanted from the political system when they rejected the new rulers of SCAF and its formal politics. They joined 6AYM as they were compatible with the Movement for three reasons: participation in the street, a sense of belonging to the movement as representative of youth of a new generation, and a movement without a specific ideology. They have sufficient political awareness to maintain an autonomous space for action, as they were loyal members without ideological ties. The role of 6AYM was enormous, providing a collective action frame with a mix of traditional and new means of activism.

While some interviewees, like Ansam and Samar, already had friends in 6AYM, others, such as Shereen, Maha, and Heba, were able to contact the Movement on the ground. 6AYM adapted the different personal situations of interviewees to deal with the structure in a systematic and in multiple ways. At this moment, they overcame their exclusion by accessing the public sphere, but on the condition of joining 6AYM.

## Visibility through 6AYM

This section focuses on further answering the second research question. After the interviewees became members of 6AYM, they became part of its visibility in the public sphere. Alcoff (2006) argues that affiliation with a group or organisation means associating with its visibility, which lays bare its claim and political identity in the public sphere.

The section will show how the interviewees reported an expansion of their visibility to overcome their marginalisation in Tahrir Square compared to their visibility as unaffiliated participants. With 6AYM's protection strategy and feminist consciousness of their role as women, they enlarged their role in a male-dominated space when 6AYM negotiated the masculine norms to keep the space of appearance intact. In what follows,

the first subsection emphasises visibility within the Movement, and the second is about visibility in Tahrir Square.

## Visibility inside 6AYM

Women's leadership and gender equality were the most frequently mentioned topics during the interviews. The interviewees reported an experienced expansion of their visibility through both topics in a way that enlarged their role in the male-dominated space of 6AYM, but with constraints.

### *Women's leadership in 6AYM*

According to Melucci (1996), leadership in such contemporary movements had the power to influence; it is not concentrated but diffused and has specific functions to perform. There is no traditional hierarchy but rather a distribution of power between leaders.

Heba spoke positively and confidently about her experience of holding a position (the positions the interviewees held had power to influence and impact other of men and women), 'There are many women who hold positions in the Movement like me, and there is no discrimination between men and women. We do what men do'. Heba expressed pride in the role of women. Ansam was satisfied to have a position, 'I had a position to receive newcomers to complete their enrolment in the Movement. I can make sure there is no discrimination against women who hold positions'. Leading demonstrations before joining 6AYM still had an impact on her when she held a position in the Movement. Although Ansam was critical of some male colleagues with their male mentality, she was satisfied with the situation of women in the Movement.

The interviewees believed they deserved to hold positions due to their leadership qualifications. Samar points that: 'In my experience, the situation of women is excellent. There are many women who hold positions, not because they are women, but because they have the ability to hold positions'. Maya also says, referring to herself,

Do you see Maya who is sitting right in front of you now? She leads people to take public action because of their qualifications. Ansam and I have high positions in the Movement, and we have many women in other governorates in the Central Bureau of the Movement. Do you know, it is very difficult to reach the central Bureau.

Maya points to how women in the Movement have climbed the hierarchy rather than challenged it. In this course, Maha addresses how she could win a position over a male candidate: 'I lead a group in the Movement, and there was a man who competed with

me for that position in the election, but I won'. These statements reveal that the interviewees were aware of the impact of women's leadership on women in general.

The emphasis on qualifications when filling a position indicates that the interviewees wanted to feel they had not been nominated because they were public figures or known in old political networks, as often happened in political organisations during Mubarak's time, but rather as ordinary women with little or no experience in formal and informal political activism. Muhanna-Matar (2013, p. 4) argues 'ordinary' women in Egypt, those who participated in grassroots activism, like 6AYM, redefined the notion of leadership in politics since the uprising of 2011. By 'ordinary women', Muhanna-Matar means those who had not previously participated formally or informally in politics and suffered daily from the state's neoliberal economic policies and repressive security apparatus.

Some interviewees compared the situation of leadership to other organisations, as they knew each other or had previously joined other political groups. Maya says, 'In our rich civil society, there are plenty of organisations and political parties in Egypt today, but it is unusual to see women in a leadership position'. The interviewees have a political awareness of their leadership role as women in a male-dominated space. Maha was aware of the implications of her leadership role as a woman competing with men in internal elections, as well as Samar, who sought to improve the situation of women a male-dominated space in the Movement, as we will see later.

However, based on their experiences, the interviewees reported that the situation in 6AYM was different, even before the 2011 uprising. Nael reports, 'We have women who were co-founders of the Movement. We also have women in charge of groups and committees, so women are everywhere in the Movement.' Indeed, women such as Esraa Abdel Fattah and Asmaa Mahfouz, who inspired many women to join 6AYM, have been co-founders and leading members of 6AYM since its inception in 2008 (Carnegie, 2010b).

However, in contrast, some interviewees experienced that some male counterparts did not accept women holding positions. Although Samar described the situation of women as excellent, she also revealed how she suffered from holding a position, 'I tried to improve women's situation in the Movement, but some men tried to exclude me from this position. I resisted this by proving myself and doing my best'. To elaborate on Samar's statements, the women's situation felt satisfactory when it came to dealing with rules and leading groups, but there was resistance from some men. She continues, 'Some wanted to impose male norms by force. Despite this opposition, they accepted my role as leader because of my negotiation strategy, which undermined their dominance'. This situation suggests that Samar's persistence led to her being recognised in her leadership role.

Shereen explained that some male counterparts wanted to put women in the shadow of men's power:

There is also a male mentality and dominance in the Movement; for example, the important positions are taken over by men. Women, on the other hand, are given unimportant or easily managed positions. You are told that 'you are women' or 'we are worried about you because you are women'.

I asked Shereen, what about democracy in the Movement that strengthens the position of women? She replied, 'I think the electoral process does not help so much to let women take positions'. This means that democracy may help some interviewees to hold positions, but it does not impede some men from denying the leading role of women and continuing the power they have as men.

It seems, then, that the imposition of masculine and patriarchal norms occurred at the level of interaction between male members rather than within the context of the politics of the Movement. These individual attitudes were rooted in societal perceptions of the predominant masculine gender norms that came from outside the Movement. People in the Movement knew this and they tried to break free from it so as not to be influenced by the masculine norms from outside the Movement. Ansam says, 'They are the minority. We are trying to overcome the problem of the male mentality that is spreading in society and not [allow it to] be inside the Movement'. Thus, the imposition of masculine norms was inherent in the social structure and appeared in the form of control, which partly marginalised women from expressing themselves.

Accordingly, the interviewees reported they were recognised for their leadership role despite the constraints imposed by some male counterparts. They enlarged their role in a male-dominated space as they redefined the notion of women's leadership in political organisations to be attributed to ordinary women. 6AYM supported women's leadership through a democratic process, but democracy was not enough.

### *Gender equality in 6AYM*

Gender equality is another positive practice that the interviewees experienced, as they reported. Gender equality is defined following interviewees' perception of feeling equally treated and having equal access to resources, communication, and interaction. The description is consistent with McClain and Grossman's (2009, p. 2) definition of gender equality, which means gender neutrality or equal treatment.

Maya says, 'The idea in this Movement relies on equality between women and men. We all have the same obligations and instructions'. Reham also explains, 'Men and women are treated in the same way in the Movement'. 6AYM has not included gender equality in its vision or agenda. Instead, the Movement seeks to ensure gender equality

indirectly by proclaiming equal citizenship as a strategy. Nael insists on practicing gender equality rather than theorising about it:

We have gender equality. Women hold high positions and take on high responsibilities in practice, not in theory. We do not have that in our written agenda because that would be a kind of discrimination. We would send a message that we all are equal, regardless of gender. We would present a model that is different from what exists in society.

Thus, the Movement presented a model for the inclusion of women that was in opposition to many political parties, the state and feminists who demanded a quota to include women in decision-making.

However, this astonishing image of gender equality has not always taken hold. Shereen believes there is gender discrimination within the Movement, 'You see, men in the Movement are not harming women, but they are part of male society. They behave like other men in society in how they treat women'. Shereen holds a position, which affirms that she is subject to pressure from men.

Miles (2013, p. 145) argues that women activists from 6AYM embody a 'double deviance'. They challenge the state, as male activists do, and challenge conventional gender norms, as women, which poses a threat to their male counterparts' interests. I think Miles' view was partly correct but not entirely all-encompassing because many of them believed they were supported by male counterparts and male leaders in the Movement. Compared to the interviewees from MB, who denied gender equality and many from OPPs – who reported facing discrimination – the interviewees felt equal to men. Thus, despite the constraint (albeit weak), the interviewees were able to deal with this by insisting on fulfilling their role on an equal footing with men, which helped to expand their role in the male-dominated space of 6AYM and with limitations.

In summary, the interviewees experienced an expansion of their visibility within the Movement, but in the context of the Movement's various tactics to improve women leadership and gender equality. One of these was to set up a democratic election, although democracy was not enough.

### *The perception of a fair democratic process*

According to Della Porta (2009, p. 1), a move towards the application of participatory democracy has been noted in many volunteer groups, such as social movements which refer to

decisional processes in which, under conditions of equality, inclusiveness, and transparency, a communicative process based on reason (the strength of a good argument) may transform individual preferences, leading to decisions oriented to the public good.

These movements seek to create participatory democracy by introducing new language to promote internal democracy. This is what is happening in 6AYM. All of the interviewees have benefited from what they call fair democratic elections that have increased their chances of holding a position.

Reham insists on fair elections as a way to hold a position: 'In the question of why or how someone can hold a position within the Movement is undoubtedly through election. The candidate, [whether] a man or a woman, must be qualified'. As the interviewees reported, qualifications refer to the skills and abilities that the candidate must have when holding position, regardless of gender. Maha expressed her feelings of pride with a smile because she felt she had an equal chance in a competitive election process, 'I won the election, and my competitor was a man. They voted for me as group coordinator'. Being assigned a position meant that she became recognisable in her leadership qualification and could help improve gender equality.

In its officially published documents, the Movement states that one of its strategic goals is that 'the movement is committed to democratic practice in all aspects of its work and management' (Shabab 6 April, 2018a, own translation). Singerman (2013a, p. 16) confirms this accordingly: 'The 6 April coalition in 2008, and Kefaya before it strove to create a new kind of political model designed to work across ideological lines to build a more diverse, internally democratic, and youthful coalition for Egyptian oppositional politics'. Although this portrayed self-image is a kind of ideal that is manifested in the Movement's published texts, the interviewees – with the exception of Shereen, who says that this image was not always fully implemented in practice – confirmed this image. Moreover, this self-image does not mean that the interviewees were not sometimes critical of the Movement on various issues, as we will see later.

Compared to MB – the lack of an internal democratic process had a negative impact on the status of women in MB – the democratic process in the Movement promoted women's leadership and gender equality to enlarge their role in the male-dominated space of the Movement. Here, the interplay between the primary (individual) and corporate (group) agency becomes fruitful when the latter strengthens the former through the use of a strategy. Archer (2000, p. 260) argues, 'Corporate Agents act together and interact with other Agents and they do so strategically'.

In summary, interviewees experienced an expansion of their visibility through the redefinition of female leadership and the practice of gender equality. They were able to enlarge their role in the male-dominated domain of the Movement despite the constraints. Moreover, they went beyond that to have autonomy and were critical of the Movement. The 6AYM supported women by promoting gender equality in practice and applying the democratic process, even if democracy was insufficient.



## Visibility in Tahrir Square

Since 11 February 2011, when SCAF ruled the country, the interviewees reported that they experienced an expansion of their visibility as part of 6AYM's visibility in Tahrir Square. This expansion varied according to the regime's repression of Morsi's rule between 2012–2013, the military-backed interim government formed after the 3 July 2013 military coup, and the El-Sisi-ruled period since April 2014.

During these periods, Shereen described how the public space was gradually restricted from the time of SCAF in 2011 to the time of El-Sisi in 2014. Then, 6AYM pursued a strategy of protecting its female protesters from gender-based violence by creating a fence of men who gathered around the women members. Not only did 6AYM do this, but also many other groups, like anti-harassment groups that harnessed their efforts to protect women from 'collective rape' and SH in the Square, for example, the Op Anti-Sexual Harassment/Assault group (Elnadeem, 2013).

While some of the interviewees, along with many other women, accepted this strategy to feel safe, other interviewees, along with many other women, rejected this strategy to not feel under the control of male counterparts. Shereen, Reham, and Maha welcomed this strategy because they felt safe during the protests in Tahrir Square. Shereen says, 'During the demonstrations during SCAF and Morsi, our male counterparts always protected us as females from harassment. I am so proud of them'. Maha says, 'We went to demonstrate with men from 6AYM who protected us by surrounding us like a fence'. These interviewees felt their bodies were protected, and some, like Shereen, would not participate again without this protection. This situation gave the exclusion and inclusion another meaning that was controlled inclusion.

However, other interviewees rejected the protection strategy outright because they disliked being controlled by the men in the male counterpart. Maya reports that:

There was a circle of men to protect us from harassment, but what upset me in some demonstrations was that some male members tried to prevent us from participating to protect us. We never followed that because we already participated and were exposed to difficult things like men.

Samar also describes this protection as a double-edged sword: 'I think SH is a dangerous and crude endeavour that could prevent women from participating in demonstrations. But it is also used by the Movement as a justification to control women on the grounds of protecting them from any SH'. These quotes reflect the high level of political awareness between these interviewees. They were aware of the importance of their autonomy and agency within the Movement and saw the negative effects of control in the long run.

Female activists from different other groups also described how they rejected this strategy. Sally Dahni is one example:

I arrived on June 8 at six in the evening with some friends. I was shocked to see more than 50 people gathered in a human chain around the demonstrators, wearing phosphorus vests. I am against the idea of women taking to the streets only if they are protected in demonstrations. (Elnadeem, 2013, own translation).

Moreover, some of Allam's (2018a, p. 110) informants refer to this strategy as 'counterproductive', 'gender hierarchies' and 'the patriarchal norms of alpha male'. Thus, the interviewees' dismissive attitudes were part of a prevailing perception among many women activists who have a feminist consciousness to advocate for women's role and position in the political domain.

The protection strategy was never a spontaneous response to gender-based violence but rather a well-planned strategy. Both men and women activists knew the advantages and disadvantages of it. Maha explains that the safety of women members was a concern because it was discussed in internal meetings:

We had an event during the time of Morsi; some suggested that women should not participate because of the security situation. We refused and considered it a kind of discrimination, but we found many other men who defended our right to participate, more than women. We said, 'We like you men. You have been beaten; we have also been beaten. You have run; we have also run. You defend yourselves; we defend ourselves'.

The quote reveals the feminist consciousness between men who support women in their demands. This situation exemplifies the extent of individual agency and autonomy of many women and interviewees versus the agency of the Movement. Thus, this protection strategy was applied to circumvent the punishment of dissenting women from opposition groups during SCAF, Morsi (2012–2013) and El-Sisi's terms (2013–2014) and employed to undermine the power of security forces over women's bodies through what Young (2003, p. 2) calls the 'logic of masculinist protection'. In this logic, protectors assume to have a patriarchal order over protected people like women and children, as in, those who are seen subordinate and obedient.

We can say that 6AYM offered women an alternative option to secure their existence in the Square, rather than choosing other options. For example, conservative groups, like MB, 'suggest that women need male protection or guardianship or should stay at home and remain in so-called safe segregated spaces' (Singerman, 2013a, p. 21). Later, and during Morsi's tenure from 30 June 2012 to 3 July 2013, the Shura Council, Egypt's upper house of parliament, blamed women for being exposed to SH in Tahrir. Reda Saleh El Hefnawy, a member of FJP, stated, 'I call on women not to stand next

to men in protests [...] they must have special places' (FIDH et al. 2013, p. 25). The same call came from members of the Salafi Nour Party and Wafd Party (FIDH et al. 2013).

However, the price that the interviewees, who accepted 6AYM's strategy, had to pay was that they became under the control of their male counterparts. According to Young's (2003, p. 2) 'logic of masculinist protection', the protectors expected obedience and loyalty from the protected. The Movement sought to take over control from the regime and bystander harassers; it was a kind of exchanging the patriarchal control from the state to the Movement, which seemed lenient and justified in the name of protection. While the regime's control tried to expel the interviewees from the Square, the Movement's control tried to keep them in the Square with restrictions. De facto access to space became conditional for many interviewees (who accepted the protection), as they could not do so without the protection of 6AYM.

The protection strategy could thus be understood as an attempt to negotiate the predominant masculine norms in Tahrir Square through keeping the space of appearance intact, but on the movement's conditions. In this way, the Movement compromised some of its visibility to fit with the setting of visibility in Tahrir Square.

This protection strategy sheds light on the relationship between primary (individual) and corporate (group) agency. While the former could not solve structural constraint as individuals, the latter negotiated this constraint in an organised way, for example, by changing its strategy (Archer, 2000). In this way, the visibility of the interviewees (with differences between them) was expanded, with 6AYM's efforts in the male-dominated space to slightly pushing gender boundaries in the Square, compared to participating as unaffiliated participants, as they reported.

### *Visibility between repression and facilitation*

The visibility of the interviewees was varied in how 6AYM dealt with repression imposed by successive regimes. While the interviewees reported that they clashed with security forces during SCAF's tenure, they also noted that they had more freedom to participate during Morsi's tenure until 30 July 2013. Maya says, 'I have to say that the freedom of political activism was greater during Morsi's time than it is today. That is why we took to the streets with *Tammarud*<sup>2</sup> on 30 June to demand Morsi's resignation'. Initially, 6AYM supported Tammarud by launching a campaign called *inzil* (taking to the streets) to demonstrate against Morsi (Mayada, 2016).

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<sup>2</sup> In April 2013, a youth-led campaign called *Tammarud* was launched – the security apparatus ultimately co-opted Tammarud (Halawa, 2019) – demanding the resignation of Morsi and early presidential elections (Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy, 2017).

All the interviewees joined Tammarud, not only as members of 6AYM but as women who were upset by the anti-women rhetoric of MB. Samar says, 'In the days of Tammarud, I was on their side against Morsi. You know how MB emphasised restricting women then, for example, to legitimise and legalise underage marriage'. Heba also claims that 'Women's participation in the June 30 protest against Morsi increased because of the impression that MB would force women to wear a veil, stay at home, and marry while they are young'. Scholars such as Hassan (2018) and Adly (2017; and Goes, 2015), in addition to reports by NGOs and NCW, contend that anti-women rhetoric became widespread in the political sphere during this period, threatening to deprive women of many rights. Hassan (2018, p. 8) reports that: 'conservative forces deployed a misogynistic public discourse against women who protested against them'. Of NGOs, Nazra explained that 'the attack on women is calculated and organised to scare women away from the public sphere, punish women for their participation, and keep them at home' (FIDH et al. 2013, p. 12). Naglaa al-Adly of NCW, which is actually run by the state, says,

In the first year that Morsi's period, MB instigated anti-women rhetoric, for example, to change PSL, to allow women to marry early by lowering the legal age of marriage. Women felt threatened and therefore took to the streets against Morsi.

The interviewees thus took to the streets not only against the regime but also against the cultural Islamist discourse that has historically sought to control their subjectivity and bodies to resist the Western cultural hegemony and the colonial legacy (El Said, Meari & Pratt, 2015). In this way, the interviewees expanded their visibility as part of 6AYM and the overall situation that encouraged women to participate and defend their rights against the increased risk of MB. In a way, they were gendered in their actions to defend women's position.

On 30 June 2013, the first anniversary of Morsi's inauguration, a mass protest supported by Tammarud's campaign and the security apparatus led to a military-led coup that overthrew Morsi on 3 July 2013 (Abdalla, 2016, p. 48). Heba explains, 'On June 30, the military sent a message to men and women to take to the streets against MB: Just go to the street and the military and police would take care of your safety and that was why we found many women participants'. Yet, despite this assurance, many SH incidents were reported (HRW, 2013).

Since the military coup on 3 July 2013, the situation began to change, and an internal split occurred within 6AYM after the Movement failed to come to terms with the new rulers. Maha says, 'I think Tammarud had hidden goals that were not clear to us in 6AYM'. Months after the military coup on 3 July 2013, 6AYM had fallen into political stagnation due to antagonism between the new military-backed rulers and the

pro-Morsi movement. By November 2013, 6AYM returned through rejecting several laws, like the protest law issued by the interim president Adly Mansour, who was in power from 4 July 2013 to 8 June 2014 (Mayada, 2016). According to Mayada (2016), on 28 April 2014, the Cairo Court of Urgent Matters decided to ban all 6AYM activities – the court had already banned MB in September 2013 – and seized its headquarters on the pretext of receiving foreign funds and threatening civil stability. The Movement decided to boycott the presidential elections in May 2014 and join a movement called dhdak (against you), which meant against El-Sisi (Al-Jazeera, 2014).

Since then, Egypt has entered a new era of authoritarianism (Hamzawy, 2017). Many activists, such as Alaa Abdel-Fattah and Ahmed Maher from 6AYM, were arrested under the repressive new protest law and security forces and the army used lethal force against opposition activists (Amnesty International, 2014).

Many interviewees continued their activism but with concern and caution. Samar says, 'I am still active because I want to keep my position in the Movement. We already were part of the opposition front called Revolution Path Front. Now I have become more concerned and careful in my participation in demonstrations or gatherings'. Heba says, 'I do not recognise this ban, also for MB, because the principle is to make a political group illegal by means of an illegal law. It makes no sense; it is absurd'. Then, 6AYM, as a challenging counter-public, distanced itself from the broader public as an effect of exposing the regime's repression.

Other interviewees preferred to participate more through social media to avoid clashing with security forces, although they did not completely abandon participation in demonstrations. For Maya, the internet was a sanctuary for her activism: 'Nowadays, I have become more active on the internet because of the security situation'. Reham also reports, 'I have been using the internet a lot now to know what is going on'. So, every interviewees found her way to continue to participate in the public sphere.

## Summary

Based on their reports, the interviewees experienced an enlarged role in the male-dominated space of the Movement by redefining the notion of female leadership and practising gender equality. They were aware of the significance of their leadership roles as women and how this would affect women in general. They have a feminist consciousness without being affiliated with any feminist organisation or orientation. They challenged both the secular nationalist discourse by the regime and the cultural Islamist discourse that sought to control women with its anti-women rhetoric. 6AYM supported women by creating an environment for equal citizens and applying participatory democracy. However, democracy was not enough, because some male

counterparts restricted it for women. However, they were also supported by many men on the opposite side.

The interviewees also experienced a larger role in Tahrir Square. The movement used its protective strategy to negotiate the predominant masculine norms and open up a space of appearance. However, this does not mean that the interviewees had lost their individual agency, as some interviewees rejected and were critical of 6AYM's protection. The interviewees also participated in the 30 June 2013 anti-Morsi campaign as women who felt threatened by MB's anti-women rhetoric. The interviewees slightly pushed gender boundaries to keep the space of appearance intact in Tahrir, compared to the short-lived appearance as unaffiliated participants in the first days of the uprising.

The impact of the interviewees' visibility varied depending on the relationship between 6AYM's challenging counter-public and the level of the repression. The interviewee's visibility was constrained when El-Sisi's regime severely restricted the public sphere until late 2014 and 6AYM lost its space of appearance.

## Conclusion

Spurred by their high political awareness, as citizens and with a feminist consciousness as women, the interviewees joined the revolution against Mubarak's regime and challenged the new political system until the reign of El-Sisi in 2014. They chose different individual trajectories and manifestations of their participation. They constructed their anti-neoliberal, ideological, and institutional political subjectivity and developed agency in a long process by practising everyday politics and participating in political discussions at home and on the internet. In this way, they challenged the dichotomy of political/public and apolitical/private.

Political family played a significant role in motivating some interviewees to participate in politics. Those whose families constrained them redefined their gender roles to include a political role. The weakness of the patriarchal family had possibly contributed to challenge this patriarchal order.

The interviewees initially participated as unaffiliated participants to challenge the predominated masculine gender norms and the regime's repression in Tahrir Square. They enlarged their role to slightly push gender boundaries in Tahrir Square by engaging in practices that challenged compared to the period before the uprising. They were aware that the point was to challenge the patriarchy of the state, society, and at home. The interviewees developed agency in a way to circumvent the state's secular discourse, which sought to control women activists by targeting their bodies and subjecting them to SH. They also challenged the cultural Islamist discourse that sought

to control their bodies after responding against anti-women rhetoric during Morsi's reign.

The findings reveal that it is difficult to continue accessing the public sphere as unaffiliated participants without joining a group due to the regime's repression. The interviewees overcame their exclusion by joining a group.

However, participation through 6AYM was more fruitful because 6AYM strategically dealt with structural constraints and used enablement(s) to facilitate participation. Based on compatibility between the two parties, the interviewees reported they felt they belonged to 6AYM as saviour and representative to a new generation of youth who had distanced themselves from institutional politics and wanted to stay on the streets. 6AYM provided a healthy environment of participatory democracy – although it was not enough. Many male revolutionaries tried to impose patriarchal values on the interviewees. However, they also received the support of many male counterparts who believed in the role of women in the uprising.

The interviewees had more room to not only act individually but also criticise the movement. The interviewees enlarged their role within the male-dominated space in the Movement by redefining the notion of female leadership and experiencing gender equality.

By using its protective strategy, 6AYM negotiated the predominant masculine norms in the Square to open up a space of appearance. This gave the interviewees more space to contest, in Fraser's (1990) terms, and slightly pushed gender boundaries to overcome their marginalisation in the context of the revolutionary environment in Tahrir, compared to their participation as unaffiliated participants, as they reported. However, after the legal ban on 6AYM in the severely restricted public sphere following the military-backed coup in July 2013, some interviewee still participated but with concern and caution. Other interviewees used social media as an alternative but did not abandon street participation altogether.

## *Chapter 5:*

# Women's participation in the public sphere through the Muslim Brotherhood (MB)

This chapter sets out to understand how the interviewees of the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) participated in the public sphere between 2011–2014 and how they experienced their participation.

The chapter will show that the interviewees overcame their exclusion from the public sphere on the condition of joining MB. They have constructed their Islamist subjectivity and developed their agency to participate in the uprising. The interviewees' families played an essential role in their participation in politics through MB. Their role within the Movement was limited by the gender ideology of MB, although they made efforts to mediate their voice to be heard.

As part of a new generation of women within the Movement, the interviewees reported they expanded their role but within the confines of Sharia limits, from women-only spaces to male-dominated spaces, such as Tahrir Square in 2011 and the Rab'a sit-in in 2013. They developed their agency to challenge the state's secular discourse and criticise the Islamist cultural discourse of MB, which seeks to control women. They slightly pushed gender boundaries in public space like Rab'a and overcame their marginalisation in the public sphere when compared to their participation as unaffiliated participants.

According to Farag (2012), women from MB – the female branch of the movement called Sisterhood (*al-Akhwat al-Muslimat*) – were among those responsible for safeguarding the checkpoints at the ports of Tahrir Square. These women provided the demonstrators with medical care during the first eighteen days. One thousand women from Sisterhood were among those who formed the Freedom and Justice Party (FJP) (Ikhwanweb, 2011), and seventy-six out of eighty were elected as representatives of FJP as part of the Democratic Alliance in the parliament (Farag, 2012). However, this chapter does not include FJP in its analysis. After the ouster of President Morsi in a



military coup led by general El-Sisi in July 2013, women from MB also struggled with security forces against the crackdown on their male counterparts when they launched sit-ins in two locations in Cairo: *Rab'a al-Adawiyah* Square and *al-Nahdah* Square (Hydaia, 2017).

This chapter includes six interviews with five female members of the MB organisation and one male (former leading staff) of MB. I selected MB because it has had a significant impact on the Egyptian political scene, and it has a long political history dating back to its founding in 1928 by Hasan al-Banna in *al-Isma'iliyah* (Mitchell, 1969, p. xxiv). After the uprising, through FJP, MB won 235 seats (nearly 47%) in the new parliament in the first parliamentary elections in 2011–2012 after the uprising.

## Becoming part of the MB's Islamist counter-public

This section focuses on how the interviewees became part of the Islamist counter-public of MB before joining MB as members. In what follows, I will first define the Islamist counter-public. Second, I will show how interviewees differed in their individual trajectories to become part of MB's counter-public. Finally, I will elaborate on how the interviewees shared a common background and understanding of political Islam based on the vision of MB.

### Islamist counter-public

Hirschkind (2001, p. 117) describes people of the Islamic [sic] counter-public in Egypt before the uprising as 'they inhabit a counter-public: a domain of discourse and practices that stand in disjunctive relationship to the public sphere of the nation and its media instruments'. According to Hirschkind, the Islamic counter-public can emerge as an ethical profile in tension with the dominant secular norms and values or as a form of political anti-government mobilisation. The Islamic ethical profile can underpin the political anti-government profile.

I use the concept of Islamist counter-public to describe the political anti-government mobilisation of MB. People in this counter-public used Islamic practices, virtues of Islamic norms and values, and shared a certain idea of political Islam. Bardhan (2018, p. 22) highlights the Ikhwanweb website as a channel used by MB to demonstrate its counter-public rhetoric. MB had been a counter-public to regimes over time; it presented a vision of the nation, a process of identification, and a definition of the common good that was contrary to the existing one.

However, the interviewees had different individual trajectories to become part of three Islamist counter-publics of MB: the 2010 parliamentary elections, the 2011 uprising, and the overthrow of Morsi in 2013.

### **The parliamentary election of 2010**

On 28 November 2010, the last parliamentary election under Mubarak's time, the outlawed MB presented its candidates as independents. MB with the Wafd Party withdrew between the two rounds of voting in protest of irregularities (Dunne & Hamzawy, 2010). Opposition groups, both pro-democracy and Islamist MB, described the election as being fraught with widespread fraud and farce, in El-Baradei's words (BBC, 2010). According to Tadros (2012, in Tadros, 2017, p. 100), 'The elections were considered one of the main drivers of the formation of a counter-coalition against the regime'. The anti-government opposition groups, including MB, formed a new challenging counter-public criticising the government and its ruling NDP, which won about 80% of parliamentary seats. Many Islamists, including Jasmine, became part of this new MB counter-public.

Jasmine lives in a working-class neighbourhood and was a university student until she was expelled for her political activism. Her father is a former member of MB and was imprisoned during Mubarak's regime. Jasmine says, 'I was there to support MB's candidates, and then I threw stones at the police forces. They attacked us, and we just ran away and escaped to a sanctuary in the narrow alleys'. According to Dunne and Hamzawy (2010), the security service and individual candidates affiliated with Mubarak's regime and NDP hired the thugs, *baltajiyah*, and tolerated the uniformed security forces systematically intimidating or beating up MB supporters and campaign workers.

Jasmine seemed inclined towards the Islamist politics of MB because of her family and her Islamic voluntary activism:

My father was a former member of MB, and he was very concerned that we keep Islamic practices at home. He opened the way for me to understand what was going on in politics and supported me to join MB. He told me how he was arrested a long time ago when he supported MB and became a member there.

Her father left MB because of the regime's repression, but that did not stop her from trying to join in 2010. She began to gain experience by discussing politics within the family. She also sympathised with the mass mobilisation led by MB, along with many other opposition groups, to support Palestinian people when the Israeli army attacked Gaza in 2008. Jasmine says, 'The attack on Gaza in 2008 made me join MB later. I did

not join any political organisation other than MB'. Jasmine's Islamist subjectivity went in the process of constructing from one event to another. When I asked Jasmine if she supported or sympathised with the El-Mahalla El-Kubra strike in 2008, she replied, 'The El-Mahalla strike never influenced me because the motive for that strike had nothing to do with Islamist goals, although that was before I enrolled in MB'. So, Jasmine was involved with MB from the beginning, even if not formally.

Jasmine also participated in volunteer Islamic activities:

Before the revolution, I participated in social activities for some time to help poor people through many Islamic organisations. These activities helped me a lot to find myself and understand what the social problems are and what kind of solutions we need at the political level.

After this time, MB began to use informal networks, such as family, and voluntary activism to facilitate Jasmine's participation when she felt excluded from participating due to the regime's repression.

This facilitation occurred in the context of loosening control over opposition groups, as in, the banned MB presented its candidates as independents (Dunne & Hamzawy, 2010). Tadros (2017, p. 100) points out that this election was heavily engineered by the security apparatus and its legitimacy so that MB participated through their independent candidates, with a green light from Mubarak's regime.

### **The MB's Islamist counter-public during the uprising of 2011**

Khawla and Jasmine were among the MB supporters who participated as unaffiliated participants from the first day of the uprising of 2011 after the Supreme Guidance Bureau (*maktab al-irshād*) refused the call to join the uprising. Later, most Sisters joined the uprising from 28 January through a formal delegation from the Supreme Guidance Bureau (Tadros, 2017).

Khawla comes from a middle-class family, lives in Cairo, and her father is a former member in MB. She says, 'I participated in Tahrir like many Egyptians, but only with women from MB to avoid mingling with men. This was in line with my religious upbringing'. Khawla was eager to keep her Islamic practices alive and was interested in political Islam.

Previously, she was among those who sympathised with the Palestinian people: 'I was greatly influenced by events in Palestine, especially Israel's attack on Gaza in 2008. Back then, I was more interested in Palestinian issues than Egyptian issues before the revolution'. Khawla also participated in voluntary Islamic activities with an Islamic orientation, which paved the way for her to participate in the uprising: 'I participated

in many social activities with Amr Khaled in Sunna' al-Haiyat. Social activities developed my political awareness to understand what was going on and what needed to be done'. Thus, Khawla constructed her Islamist subjectivity and developed her individual agency against Mubarak's regime. The mass mobilisation that challenged the regime's repression allowed both Khawla and MB to come together on a platform to act collectively.

### **Overthrowing Morsi from power**

It took Houda a long time before paying attention to the happenings that led-up to the event of Morsi's overthrow in July 2013. She comes from a family with a father who was a former member of MB and imprisoned during Mubarak's regime. She lived in another governorate northeast of Cairo before moving to Cairo in 2012 to study at the university. She then participated in the Rab'a sit-in.

Houda says, 'I participated in Rab'a with my parents; we were there as families to say no to the military and for Morsi return as president'. Participating in Rab'a with her family strengthened her motivation to join MB when she participated in the demonstrations at the university: 'As a university student, I participated in the students' demonstrations against the military coup. When I was at CU, I observed how the regime brutally suppressed the students' movement against the military coup and how women courageously responded to this suppression'.

Houda constructed her Islamist subjectivity against the regime with an inclination towards the Islamist ideas of MB in a process that began long ago at home. After moving to Cairo, Houda volunteered in Islamic organisations, which led her to formally join MB: 'I entered the political world through the door of social activities in Islamic organisations while I was studying at the university'. Abdel-Latif (2008, p. 5) refers to women of MB who began their political activities primarily through participation in Islamic charities. At this time, Houda was in contact with the MB community, which helped her settle in to life as a university student:

They helped me find a room with other religious students; they were somehow connected to MB before I knew that. We helped each other in many ways, such as getting copies of books for my courses, which were expensive to buy. What these people offered me in Cairo was great.

MB's role was to facilitate the way for Houda to become part of its counter-public, collective interest, concern, and action at the Rab'a sit-in.

## **The shared background of being an MB family**

All the interviewees told me that they came from MB families. However, not all people from MB families become members, such as Ebtisam (from the political party chapter), who preferred to join a political party instead. The interviewees have in common that they share a similar understanding of Islam that is consistent with MB's version of political Islam which underpins their Islamist subjectivity. Mitchell (1969, pp. 263–4) points out that politics and religion are one at MB. The interviewees view political action as a form of worship and piety through which they become closer to God. Jasmine points out that

Since I was a child, I have thought about politics, and the motive behind that was Islam. I thought for a long time about why we cannot apply Sharia in society? It was a provocative question that we read Islamic morality and Sharia in school, but did not apply it. Sharia should be applied everywhere, including politics.

Raouf (1995), and McLarney (2015) who shares similar views, points out the important role of Islam in the family in adopting Islamic morality and culture by making use of Islamic practices as a context to promote political Islam.

In addition to Jasmine, Houda also says, 'I believe that it was a religious and moral duty to support MB because I liked to pray and fast and do other religious obligations; that is what a practical Muslim who wanted to be close to God does'. Omaina Abou Bakr speaks about her experience with women from MB: 'The participation of the Islamist women of MB in the public sphere is organised and driven by an ideology. They consider it as part of their duty and loyalty'. Thus, the interviewees constructed their Islamist subjectivity in a process that took place within their MB family and in the context of MB networks, collective interests, and actions.

## **Summary**

In contrast to the 6AYM interviewees, the MB interviewees constructed an (ideological) Islamist subjectivity based on the Islamist ideology of MB. Families socialised them to view religious practices and politics as worship and piety. This situation increased their political awareness and motivated them to participate in political Islam. They participated in voluntary Islamic activities that gave them experience in public activism. The interviewees reported they felt excluded from participation by the regime's repression before the 2011 uprising. They became part of the Islamist counter-publics of MB at different times due to their personal situations. For example, Houda is from another governorate, and therefore, she contacted MB in 2013 when she came to Cairo to study in the university.

The MB facilitated the interviewees to become part of its counter-public, such as Houda, who was supported by MB community at the university. Jasmine participated when the regime relaxed control over MB in the 2010 elections, Khawla participated during the uprising, and Houda participated for the same reason in 2013. Thereafter, they tried to connect with MB.

## Participation as members of MB

In this section, the first subsection elaborates on the role of the family in supporting the interviewees to participate in politics, but only through MB. The second subsection elaborates on the compatibility between the interviewees and MB about the complementary role of women in the public sphere. The important role of MB was to provide the interviewees with a gender ideology that was consistent with their families' desire for Islamic practices. MB also facilitated the interviewees' access to the public sphere in the context of the alliance between MB and SCAF, which held power at the time. The third subsection elaborates on the assisting role of structural enablement(s).

### **The interviewees and their families**

The family plays a central role in mobilising the interviewees to participate in politics via MB. While there was opposition in Houda's family, Jasmine and Khawla come from two supportive families. In Houda's case, her father did push her into politics, but through the MB. Houda's mother and grandmother demanded that she give up politics altogether because they believed women and politics were incompatible:

My father wanted me to participate in politics, but my mother and grandmother were against my participation in politics. They demanded that I stay at home to get married, have children and serve my husband instead of doing politics. They thought, as did people in our community, that politics was only for men who decided almost everything.

Participation via MB made it easier for her to cope with her mother's attitude because the gender ideology of MB includes the belief that a woman's role is primarily at home while participating in politics. Like Islamists in general, MB espouses a conservative gender ideology that emphasises that a woman's traditional role is primarily at home to tend to the needs of the family (McLarney, 2015).

As all interviewees stated, the task of taking care of the family is not perceived as completely non-political or private. Instead, the role of women may serve the Movement and Islamist doctrines in general. The woman's role in raising children leads

to raising an Islamic generation and standing by one's husband is seen as an impetus for Islamic activism. McLarney (2015) points to the important role of the family as an energising segment of the Islamists' political project in Egypt. Raouf (1995, pp. 156–8) developed a theory of women's political participation in the Islamic '*umma*', through which the family embraces women's jihad or 'non-violent Jihad' within the family. It reduces politics to the personal level, where it takes place in the intimate sphere of family relations. This view means that the distinction between public/private is challenged, as feminists have suggested.

However, the rest of the family discouraged Houda because they believed that women should behave in a certain way and be under control of men:

I suffer from how women are expected to behave at home and in my small community. For example, my uncle told me to behave in a certain way because I am a woman, which restricted me, such as not mixing with men, laughing loudly or talking to unknown men. Therefore, I preferred to join only women to feel free and escape the control and consideration of men.

The central point in this statement is that women must be under the control of men within a fixed gender frame determined by the community's predominant masculine gender norms.

However, Houda believed that Islamist women could do anything within the confines of Sharia. 'I believe that women can work politically even at home'. Houda negotiated her situation at home and community to include her political role. She convinced her mother and family after seeing the presence of women in the demonstrations. In Cairo, the high number of women in Tahrir Square changed her mother's mind: 'My mother started to encourage me, not like before, because of political events and the large presence of women. She saw many women participating in Tahrir like me, and for her, everything seemed normal, so she did not refuse anymore'. What helped Houda was that she moved to Cairo in 2012 to study, which allowed her to escape community pressure. She negotiated her situation – which seemed flexible enough to allow her to participate in MB – to redefine gender roles for women to include being political.

Unlike Houda, Jasmine and Khawla were fully supported by their families in politics, but only if they adhered to Islamic practices (and social norms, in Jasmine's case). Jasmine states,

My family encourages me to participate in politics, but I have to fulfil my duties at home. Women can do politics at home when they are raising their children to build Islamic society. The only concern the family had was that I would not get married because then

I would be perceived as a man, bold and strong in the eyes of people in *Imbabah* (a working-class neighbourhood in Cairo).

The family's support was conditional on not transgressing masculine gender norms in male-dominated domains. It could endanger her future as a woman if she did not marry. However, Jasmine would extend her role to politics: 'In my family and also in Imbabah, women should stay at home and serve their husbands'. Jasmine also describes how her friend perceives women who are involved in politics, 'My friends see me as a strange person because of my activism in politics. I just ignore them and the people in my community. My community is now MB; even my fiancé is from MB'. In this way, she has expanded her role within the confines of the predominant gender norms and Islamic practices.

In turn, Khawla has more autonomy to make decisions about her personal life, but within the boundaries of Sharia limits:

I come from a religious family, and my parents do not prevent me from doing politics, but they make it a point for me to wear my hijab. I have an older brother who never controls me because we live like individuals within the family. My brother has also been participating in politics in another Islamist group. He accepts my participation, but he does not encourage me, to be honest.

The situation in Khawla's family seemed to be more flexible in terms of the division of gender roles, so she could participate in politics without any problems.

In summary, with variation, the interviewees' families supported them to participate in politics via MB and in the context of the 2011 uprising.

## **Enrolment in the Movement**

This section reviews how MB and the interviewees were compatible with a gender ideology (women's complementary role) and how this compatibility became a de facto way for them to deal with their situation in the family. Later, I will emphasise how MB provided a particular mobilisation process that helped the interviewees to deal with the regime's repression.

### *Women's complementary role*

The interviewees were compatible with MB regarding the gender ideology of men and women having complementary roles – based on their sex and biological characteristics – that is, the role of women in public life is seen as complementary to that of men, as women determinedly and primarily are associated with domestic role in private life. The MB's website states that



The husband has a right to permit his wife to work. This right is to be regulated by an agreement between the husband and the wife. Such rights should not be regulated by law and the authorities should not interfere with them except in some rare cases. (Ikhwanweb, 2007)

Despite that the statement mentions an agreement between men and women, men have the ultimate right to prohibit women from work, in a regulation far from law and authority interference. Another example is that in MB's statement denouncing the UN Women Declaration for violating Sharia principles, the movement rejects the 'full sharing of roles within the family between men and women, such as spending, childcare, and home chores'. The statement goes on to say, 'The Muslim Brotherhood also calls on Al-Azhar (the highest seat of learning for Muslims) to take the lead, condemn this declaration, and state clearly the Islamic viewpoint with regard to all details of this document' (Ikhwanweb, 2013). Hafez (2015) points out that the role of women in public life in the Islamic discourse in general, and MB in particular, is seen as complementary to the role of men. This discourse underscores the patriarchal system within the movement and reinforces Islamist cultural control over women – their subjectivity and bodies – in their struggle against Western cultural hegemony, for example, in UN Women's doctrines and CEDAW.

The MB's gender ideology pursues conciliatory policy consistent with the role of women in successive Egyptian constitutions since that of 1971. These constitutions emphasised the agreement (*tawfiq*) between women's public work and their duties in family life; they considered women equal to men in political, social, cultural, and economic life, but without violating Sharia (McLarney, 2015). According to Tadros (2011, p. 92), 'The Muslim Brotherhood is opposed to any constitutional guarantee of women's right to work as citizens'. Marcotte (2005, p. 60) describes the gender ideology of MB as 'a mixture of traditional religious conservative ideas, alongside modern ones, producing a new hybrid, neo-traditional gender discourse compatible with its "restorative" ideological project'. Thus, the Islamist cultural discourse of MB sought to maintain women's visibility within its gender ideology of women's complementing role.

In terms of interviewees' views, I asked Houda, 'Can women participate in a demonstration?' She replied, 'Of course, but they must not suppress their role in the family, because that is also a political role and no less important'. Eickelman (2002) argues that the boundaries between public and private are blurred in Muslim societies, compared to Western contexts, so these boundaries should not be applied rigidly. Yadav's (2010) examination of the role of Islamist women in Yemen called for a reassessment of the gendering of public and private metaphors in relation to public activism. She argues that Islamists in Yemen produced women's activism in what she

calls a segmented public that was spatially private but substantively public in its means and effects. The interviewees understand their role in the family as political and as part of their public activism, as long as they contribute to the perpetuation of Islamist doctrines.

One reason that underpins the notion of women's complementary role may be that the interviewees do not believe in gender equality. Khawla makes a clear-cut distinction between women and men's roles in society: 'The role of women is not based on gender equality, like liberal women. Instead, men and women complement each other because they have different biological characteristics. While men take on external and public challenges, women take on internal and private challenges'. The electoral platform of MB for the 2010 parliamentary elections shows that

The basis of Islamic Sharia emphasizes the equality of women and men in public rights and duties, but this equality does not conflict with the role of women as wives and mothers. The Brothers are committed to supporting women and also preparing them to take on this role. (Muslim Brotherhood, 2010, own translation)

Fatima (a high-ranking official female member of MB and FJP) elaborates, 'Basically, there is an absolute equality and a relative equality. Women and men are equal, but because of biological differences, we cannot say that they are always absolutely equal. We have a relative equality because of social roles'. The notion that the separation of men and women is equal, but unequal in practice fits with what Deeb (2006) brought to light when she studied the situation of women in the *dahyiah* (southern suburbs of Beirut), where Shiite Lebanese dominate the neighbourhood. The women there believe in spiritual gender equality, but the temporal distinction between men and women is intact in practice.

Thus, MB understands gender equality differently than liberal and leftist feminist groups that emphasise equality of roles and opportunities. As delimited in the theory chapter, gender's role is constructed in its context and formed in the social relations of the structure of that context (West & Zimmerman, 1987).

The second reason that underpins the notion of women's complementary role is that women's role in society should not exceed traditional social norms and MB's interpretation of Sharia.

In terms of traditional social norms, Jasmine feared that she would not be able to maintain her traditional role in the family if she enrolled in MB:

When I was a young girl, I saw a female doctor from MB who wore niqab, took care of her family and worked at the same time. This female doctor changed my life profoundly. I realised that I could participate in politics and maintain my role as a wife who takes care of her husband and children, studying and working in Islamic dress.

Jasmine thus found a tangible example of what she envisioned. Regarding the attitude of MB towards traditional social norms, the MB states, 'Thus, if today's societies have different social circumstances and traditions, it is acceptable that the exercise of these rights should be gradually introduced for society to adjust to these circumstances' (Ikhwanweb, 2007). In fact, Abdel-Latif (2008) argues that even though the movement emphasises the empowerment of women to obtain their rights, this empowerment should not conflict with society's entire value system and its traditional social norms.

In terms of MB's interpretation of Sharia, it is clear from MB's document that the role of women must be based on Sharia, which binds women to the family:

The woman is also the lord of the house, and it is her task to care for the family and prepare the home as a place of comfort; her role is a huge responsibility and noble mission that must not be in any way neglected or underestimated. (Ikhwanweb, 2007)

In this respect, Amira (a high official leader of MB and FJP) gives an outlook on the role of women in politics, 'Muslim women are invited to participate in politics if it does not violate the Sharia, which considers the role of women primarily as mothers and wives. Everything is political, including family'. On the other hand, the interviewees believed that their role goes beyond their complementary role to more participation in public life and activism in general. Unlike other interviewees, Khawla stressed that the traditional role of women should not come at the expense of women's role in the public sphere:

Forget what people think about women having to fulfil their role at home; it is only in theory. Women's role in the movement is of great importance because they organise social activities, arrange and manage public activities, and provide a large number of participants in demonstrations.

For her part, Jasmine claims that in an exceptional situation some rules should be broken: 'We did not always follow orders, especially when the security situation got worse. There was always an exceptional situation'. Khawla and Jasmine represent a new generation of women within the movement who called for an expansion of women's role beyond their complementary role. Biagini (2020, p. 384) points out that a new generation of young women emerged in MB with an overtone of feminist consciousness, although they do not call themselves feminists. They adopted feminist practices that opposed the patriarchal structure of MB and the authority of the man at home. In an early article, Biagini interviewed D. Wafaa Hefny, a member of MB, who said, 'Women do not want to stay inside. They feel that they have voted, and they want their votes. They want justice' (Interview with Hefny, 2014a, obtained from Biagini, 2017, p. 46). This view is consistent with Abdel-Latif's (2008) statements that many

in the Sisterhood in MB wanted to increase their role within the movement and in the public sphere in general, but within the boundaries of Sharia limits. While the interviewees agreed with what Biagini mentioned, they would expand their role within the boundaries of Sharia.

In summary, because of the compatibility between MB and the interviewees regarding gender ideology, MB provided the interviewees with a collective action frame that was familiar with the traditional social norms of society. The collective action frame reflects the values of society; otherwise, movements may miss their mark (Tilly & Tarrow, 2007). Bringing up a collective action frame that reflects unfamiliar traditional social norms and values may alienate people within their communities and prevent movements from achieving their potential change (Tarrow, 2011). This situation is consistent with Archer's (2000, p. 260) view of corporate agency, which pursues its goal 'in an environment modified by the responses of Primary Agency to the context which they confront'.

In this way, MB's agency facilitated interviewees' participation through which the Islamist cultural discourse maintained its control over the role of women within MB's Islamist gender ideology. However, the interviewees, among other women, sought to expand their role, but within Islamist gender ideology by negotiating Sharia and traditional social norms. The facilitation of women's participation took place within the context of the political situation as a structural enablement's assisting factor.

### **The assisting role of structural enablement**

The interviewees joined in the Movement through trusted women's formal and informal social networks or by individual invitation.

First, as mentioned earlier, Houda had contact with the MB community through Islamic volunteer organisations in 2012. In addition, Houda comes from a family and has friends already connected to the MB community.

Second, MB uses informal networks to circumvent the regime's repression because informal Islamist networks are difficult to control (Mitchell, 1969). In the immediate aftermath of the 2011 uprising, Khawla tried several times to join in the Movement, but she failed: 'I asked some friends to enrol me in MB, but they refused because they thought it was strange for a person to take the initiative to join the movement. They were sceptical that someone would contact them in this way'. Later, Khawla was recruited by a relative who was a member of the Movement: 'My sister married a member in MB, who was close to the leaders of the Movement. He helped me get in touch with people in the Movement'. The statement reveals that, although MB sided with SCAF in 2011–2012, the Movement continued to use its informal networks to recruit its adherents because this alliance was temporary. The Movement likely never

relied on the influence of the government, which was not in control of the game even when Morsi was in power. Indeed, Gamal (2015) argues that a rift between SCAF and MB appeared on the surface since the post-Mubarak parliamentary elections in March 2012. Therefore, MB maintained its recruitment methods to avoid an awkward situation, particularly the informal networks that they relied on during its decades-long existence; they trusted this recruitment method and continued to hand-pick the members during their rule.

Final, Jasmine was recruited through an individual invitation (*da'wa fardiyah*) in 2010 but was not formally admitted until the 2011 uprising. The Movement tasks some members with inviting those deemed suitable to join the Movement. This type of recruitment is gendered, so that women invite women and men invite men. Jasmine states,

In 2010, I participated in a demonstration in support of candidates from MB when the elections were held. We escaped the police who attacked us. We entered a small mosque and I did not know at first that some of the women who were with us were from MB. Later, I knew because they welcomed me and invited me to join them later after the revolution.

This type of individual invitation serves to circumvent the regime's repression and filters those who want to join the Movement.

In summary, the interviewees enjoyed MB holding power between 2011–2013, but not without friction with SCAF. Jasmine says, 'The time under Morsi's period was the best time for many political groups'. Even though MB was cautious with the new military rulers, it built an alliance with them with the blessing of the United States (Gamal, 2015). SCAF and MB shared a desire to contain liberal forces, albeit for different reasons. While SCAF suppressed liberal forces, it paved the way for MB to expand its power. Gamal (2015) points out that the alliance led MB to boycott the second 'Day of Rage' demonstration in May 2011, which youth groups organised against SCAF. MB also organised a pro-SCAF demonstration called 'The Friday of Subversion'.

## Summary

With the support of their families, all the interviewees overcame their exclusion, on the condition that they participate through MB. Through the gender ideology of MB, the interviewees perceived their role in the family as a political form of worship and complementary to the role of men. That means they challenged the political/public and apolitical/private distinction if we want to understand their political participation.

However, with the new situation of the uprising, the interviewees went beyond their complementary role. They were part of a new generation of women within the Movement who demanded an expansion of women's role that was not limited to the family. They negotiated the Islamist cultural discourse of MB's gender ideology to circumvent control over their role.

The alliance between MB and SCAF between 2011–2013 made it possible for the interviewees to overcome their exclusion by negotiating the structure to continue to access the public sphere.

## Visibility through MB

This section focuses on answering the second research question about how the interviewees experienced their participation in the public sphere through MB.

The section shows that interviewees overcame their marginalisation in the public sphere but nevertheless within the Islamist visibility of MB. They were diminished in their visibility within MB because they were subjected to gender segregation, lacked access to high positions, and lacked democracy. Despite that, they felt self-empowered and an enlargement of their role in the male domain space but within the Islamist visibility of MB. As part of a new generation of women in the Movement, they slightly pushed gender boundaries to expand the space of expression – compared to their visibility inside MB – beyond a women-only space to a male-dominated space, like that of Tahrir Square and the Rab'a sit-in.

The following two sections focus on visibility inside MB and outside of Tahrir Square and the Rab'a sit-in.

### Visibility inside MB

The interviewees reported that women were subject to gender segregation and had no access to high positions. However, as part of a new generation of women in the movement, they expanded their role beyond that of a women-only space to male-dominated space. They attempted to mediate their visibility, but without significant objective results.

#### *Subjection to gender segregation*

The visibility of the interviewees was subject to gender segregation due to the position of the Sisterhood in the MB. The Sisterhood was founded in April 1933 by Hasan al-Banna under the name 'Institute for the Mothers of the Believers', but was still directly

headed by men associated with the Supreme Guide (Mitchell, 1969, p. 175). According to Tadros (2017, p. 95), Sisterhood is not a form of organising [*tanzeem*], so that 'Women members of the Muslim Brotherhood were organizationally envisaged to serve as the helping hand of the Brotherhood and never as a parallel women-led movement'. An interviewed woman activist from MB told Abdel-Latif (2008, p. 7) that Sisterhood is 'an organized entity' but not 'an organisational structure'. This view entails a gender-segregated form of recruitment and organisation.

Gender segregation within the Movement is designed to be based on MB's interpretation of Sharia. The newcomers, both men and women, are socialised and receive their training in a process segregated by gender. Khawla explains this process, 'I participated in religious education for two years to raise my religious awareness; it composed only of women and is a kind of preparation for joining the Movement'. Hafez (2015, p. 322) asserts that MB's forms of teaching are based on the patriarchal system in which gender segregation and male authority over female are presented as the ideal of the Muslim family.

Once admitted, the interviewees became members of a cell called a 'family'. Houda explains in detail:

Each family '*usrah*' consists of five to six women with one woman as a leader. We communicate with other families, but not with men. The gathering of many families is called '*shu'bah*', a division, and then becomes '*mantiqah*', a district consisting of many '*shu'bah*'. We are only women with female leaders at the district level. After that, a male from the top category is the leader. From the district level up, no woman is allowed to be a leader.

If we imagine these two parallel bodies as vertical lines on a blank paper, the female line would be shorter than the male line because the female line ends at the district level of '*mantiqah*'. From this level, men lead female branches, which means that women are subordinate to the men. The connection between the two vertical lines, the female and male, must be based on the religiously legitimated channel of Sharia, for example, through the wife, sister or daughter of the leaders. Abd Elgalil Sharnoby (a former member of MB, founder and editor-in-chief of the website Online Brothers) explains:

Look, the role of women within MB is subjected to the desire, plan and vision of a completely masculine shape of the organisation. Let me tell you about a funny situation. I developed courses for training different male and female groups to work in the media across Egypt. When I gave my speech for women, MB put a screen or curtain between me and them to avoid [them] being attracted to me as a man.

I told him that I have communicated freely with many women from MB. He replied,

You have to distinguish between outside MB, which is open, and inside MB, which is restricted, when dealing with women. They have a pragmatic strategy that allows some mix with men outside the organisation. But inside MB, the mix between men and women is not tolerated.

So, the interviewees were under the patriarchal control of their male counterparts that marginalised them within the Movement.

The interviewees acknowledge these constraints, but they justify their lack of integration (though not completely) for two reasons. First, Sisterhood is used as a survival strategy. Jasmine argues, 'If the security apparatus could infiltrate our group and expose our way of organising. Women keep the Movement alive'. According to Tadros (2017), Sisters played the role of keeping the Movement from being completely obliteration by the regime in the 1950s and 1960s and systematically suppressed by the government in 2013. Second, MB would protect women from exposing to abusive situations. Houda argues, 'We do not integrate into the Movement like the male members because women need to be protected from being arrested or exposed to violence'. Fatima also says, 'There are no women in the Guidance Bureau because of the aggressive security apparatus against MB's community in the era of Mubarak's regime'.

The objective result shows that both survival and protection strategies put women in the shadow of men's power and patriarchal order. Women having less access to communication, interaction, and participation in decision-making constrains women's visibility and marginalises them. I think that in addition to the fear of the regime's repression, the gender ideology of MB also contributes to putting women in the shadow of men (although not completely) due to the interpretation of Sharia by MB. It is a strategy to keep the Movement acceptable and effective in a conservative society, as this strategy does not violate traditional social norms.

#### *Women have no access to high positions*

MB has a progressive attitude toward women's political rights compared to other Islamist groups (Abdel-Latif, 2008). However, women in the Sisterhood are not represented in neither the Brotherhood's Consultative Council nor the Guidance Bureau. Both levels determine the decision-making bodies of the Movement (Çavdar, 2012, p. 599). Based on the interviewees' stories, they do not access high positions in the Movement due to Sharia, traditional social norms, and lack of democracy in MB.

Regarding the first reason, Sharia, theoretically, MB argues that Sharia is never about preventing women from holding positions, with the exception of the presidency:

We are of the view that there is nothing in Shari'a to prevent women from taking part in these matters [...] their right to be elected as well [...]. The only public office which it



is agreed upon that a woman cannot occupy is the presidency or as a head of state. (Ikhwanweb, 2007)

Accordingly, Jasmine emphasises, 'Women can be leaders, but not as president because a woman cannot lead an entire country for religious reasons'. Amira expresses this fact even more clearly: 'A woman cannot be president because it would contradict Sharia, which prevents a female presidency in the Islamic State'. Tadros (2011, p. 95) also points out that women cannot become president of an entire country because of Sharia and because MB's interpretation of *qawāmah* (when a woman is under the guardianship of her husband) prohibits women from assuming the highest leadership positions such as Supreme Imamate and the position equivalent to president or prime minister.

In practice, it is not only the presidency, women have also been excluded from decision-making. Khawla says, 'Women cannot take leadership roles in the Consultative Council, which is composed of only men. Women discussed and recommended leaders through their leaders' wives'. According to Tadros (2017, p. 94),

In the absence of a *tanzeem* (women-led organizations) for women, the Muslim Sisters have been governed (except for the first few years) by male leadership, have more limited opportunity for leadership training in comparison to men, and no voting power over the members who represent the movement (not to mention they cannot be leaders themselves).

In practice, the interviewees were excluded from high positions because of Sharia, which gives men a superior position and reflects the patriarchal organisational system.

Regarding the second reason, traditional social norms, they contribute to deprive women from assuming leadership roles because of the culture within the Movement that denies women's leadership. Khawla experienced leading men under duress, but she received a negative response from the Movement: 'When I led a group of men who connected to MB, I was castigated by my female leaders because I am not allowed to lead men for religious reasons'. Not only Khawla, but also Jasmine experienced a similar situation: 'Women from MB in the university just asked me how I, as a woman, could lead a group including men. They rejected me as a speaker in the demonstrations because I am a woman who should be under supervision of men due to tradition and religion'. This situation reflects how some women themselves reinforced their seclusion and thus were not integrated into the structure. The reason could be the Islamist gender ideology that strictly enforces local social norms in every context.

Abdel-Latif (2008) claims that women in MB are excluded from becoming president because it contradicts the socially accepted role of women. Unlike the 6AYM interviewees who were supported by the Movement to eliminate the effects of the male mentality, MB secures the male mentality, and some women were part of this mentality.

As for the third reason, lack of democracy within the Movement, this negatively affects the interviewees because it hinders them and women in general from holding high positions. According to al-Anani (2016), the Movement has conducted an internal democratic election process at all organisational levels since 2004, but only from the district '*shu'bah*' level upwards, which does not include female members.

According to Jasmine, important issues, interests and concerns are not discussed in '*shurah*' (consultation) within the movement: 'Yes, there is democracy in the MB'. When I asked her to describe in more detail what kind of democracy it is, she told me that 'the thing is that we tackle the issues for discussion and consultation, but in other cases, we just obey, especially when the order comes from the highest decision-making bureau. We see ourselves as soldiers who have to obey their leaders'. As al-Anani (2016) explains, women discuss and obey only, not vote like men in a high position. The principle of obedience subjects the interviewees to men's power, control and patriarchal order.

The situation in which the issues are addressed in a women-only space seems to correspond to what Yadav (2010) discussed among Islamists in Yemen, in what she calls a segmented public. She argues that women's activism in the segmented public – the public in which only women discuss issues – provided Islamist women with the effect of undermining their segmentation because they went beyond that to be integrated into a gender-integrated public.

Tadros (2017) argues that MB allowed a select number of women to enlarge their leadership roles outside the Movement, within FJP, but not within the actual MB. Furthermore, Muhanna-Matar (2014) argues that Islamists, like MB, have skilfully promoted women's political participation to gain international legitimacy for their moderate Islamist agenda, for example, by calling for gender equality. While this reason may be correct, it should not discount the role of women, among them the interviewees, and their efforts to enlarge their role beyond their women-only space in the male-dominated space.

In summary, based on the interviewees' reports, because of the gender segregation, women have no access to high positions, which resulted in the visibility of the interviewees being subjected to the control of men and patriarchal order as part of the MB's Islamist cultural discourse. Çavdar (2012) argues that Islamic law, culture, and tradition justify the marginalisation of women in the MB. This contributed into the de facto marginalisation of women within the Movement and the restriction of their agency in the name of MB. Archer (2000) demonstrates how the corporate agency reduced the primary agents for consolidating the group. Therefore, the interviewees, with other women, attempted to mediate their visibility to deal with these constraints and the Islamist cultural discourse.

### *Mediating visibility*

The interviewees, and women in the Movement, deal with their marginalisation through using an informal way of communication with the layer of leading men in the context of trusted male members (Tadros, 2017) or leaders' wives, sisters, or daughters. As mentioned in the theory chapter, visibility can be mediated through an intermediary. Khawla asserts,

Some women meet with the *murshid* (MBs topmost leader) every week; I am close to a family who told me weekly about what happened at the meetings. The most important thing is that women's voices reach the high decision-making bodies of the Guidance Bureau, for example, through their husbands.

The interviewees, and women in general, sought to break up the women-only space through inventing ways of communication.

The leaders legitimise and accept this informal mode of communication because they also convey their messages and commands to female members through their wives or sisters. Thus, the interviewees attempted to escape the control in part by negotiating Sharia to make their voices heard.

However, according to Jasmine, this strategy has been reconsidered since the 2011 uprising: 'When the revolution came, a discussion opened up about the question of communication between men and women. The political situation became more open, especially with the establishment of FJP'. The uprising and the high presence of women motivated the interviewees and women in Sister to criticise the situation of women, to make their voices heard directly rather than being mediated. This situation underscores how the uprising raised women's awareness of their role in bringing about change.

In summary, the interviewees' visibility was a compromise between recognition and control. While the Movement sought to control the interviewees' visibility – that underpinned its Islamist cultural discourse against Western cultural hegemony –, the interviewees also had their strategy to circumvent this control. Therefore, the interviewees' agency within the Movement was limited on behalf of MB. Even after the call to expand the role of women during the uprising, their voices were marginalised. This call allowed them to expand their role outside the Movement and move from the women-only space to the male-dominated space.

### **Visibility outside MB in public space(s)**

First, I will present the Islamist visibility of MB and second, how the interviewees expanded their visibility in Tahrir Square and the Rab'a sit-in. Third, the subsections

highlight how the interviewees were constrained in their visibility and how they dealt with these constraints.

### *MB's Islamist visibility*

MB's Islamist visibility is a milieu dominated by Islamic norms and practices based on Sharia. This Islamist visibility manifests itself in the form of rules, style and behaviour in a particular context, such as the use of gender-segregated communication and interaction, Islamic dress, style, codes and performance. Alcoff (2006) argues that social, political and cultural affiliations are marked by visible dress codes, such as the veil, to reinforce group identity.

MB has institutionalised and internalised the Islamic norms and practices of the group to create a solid Islamic identity (Hafez, 2015). MB's view is that: 'For the woman is bound by the Shari'a to abide by the Islamic dress code, whether she goes out to take part in elections or to attend the sessions of the council in which she is a member or for any other purpose' (Ikhwanweb, 2007). Jasmine describes Islamist visibility in the Movement, 'The Islamic practices of praying and drees are very important to exist in the Movement as an Islamic milieu because our dress represents Islamic norms and identity'. Khawla also describes this, 'We do not mix with men unless it is very urgent because we need to preserve our Islamic milieu'.

I saw a tangible example of MB's Islamist visibility while observing several demonstrations of the pro-MB movement, 'Student against Coup' at CU. In 2014, when I was in my room in the guesthouse on the campus of CU after El-Sisi ruled the country, I heard the chants of male demonstrators: 'Down ... down with military rule'. After a few minutes, the same chants came from women. I observed this phenomenon several times during my stay there. When I took a look from my window, I saw women were walking behind men, with a distance of five meters between them. These women were veiled, and many of them covered their faces with the *niqab*. However, in some cases, the separation between men and women was not strict, so there could be communication between them. MB's Islamist visibility constrained the interviewees to submit to the patriarchal control of MB and men counterparts with the help of Islamist ideology.

### *The MB's Islamist visibility in Tahrir Square*

MB used the inclusionary environment during the uprising to present its Islamist visibility alongside other visibilities in Tahrir.

Jasmine talks about her feelings in Tahrir after joining MB: 'In Tahrir we demonstrated as a group for the revolution, but that did not mean there was mixing with men. Yes, that happened, but within Sharia limits. Then and for the first time, I felt like I could do what I wanted in politics'. Khawla also describes how she was part

of the visibility of MB in Tahrir, 'We saw on Tahrir what liberal and secular women were wearing. They were unveiled, smoking and laughing loudly. This depraved image did not fit with what I believed. So, I participated only with women from MB to avoid mingling with men'. However, unlike the other 6AYM interviewees, no one was subjected to the regime's repression or was constrained by SCAF's strategy of gendering the public space or was exposed to SH from 2011 until the fall of Morsi in July 2013. Since SCAF took power in the country in February 2011, MB was allied with SCAF. The interviewees enjoyed the space of appearance to show their visibility as part of MB's counter-public, which turned from a challenge to a negotiation with SCAF.

Khawla describes the repression-free environment in MB: 'Once I went to a MB meeting to find out what they would say. I found people could speak freely and without fear. Even me, because I could put forward what I wanted to say without any problems'. Her positive feelings led to a kind of self-empowerment. Tadros (2017, p. 101) refers to this event and how 'MB youth meeting in April 2011 attended by around 1500 youth'. Tadros (2017, p. 104) also describes how Sisters enjoyed the moment of the uprising to exercise their agency, 'In fact this was a time when the Muslim Sisters were frequently travelling, campaigning out of the house until late with relaxed curfew and rules on gender mixing'. Then, the regime's repression targeted those against SCAF, such as 6AYM (Gamal, 2015; Halawa, 2019). SCAF was thus selective in its attempt to include or exclude collective action in the public space.

Moreover, none of the MB interviewees complained of exposure to SH at Tahrir. Instead, the interviewees denied that SH was even there. Jasmine says, 'I was never exposed to SH. It never existed during the protest. Of course, there is SH in general, but just single incidents here and there'. In this context, Amira says that

After the January 25 revolution, the liberal political parties and movements wanted to implement their secular agenda of freedom, which was linked to and recommended by the agenda of the West and Western countries. Therefore, they claimed that SH was a social phenomenon to justify their secular agendas.

The denial of SH reveals the contestation between MB's cultural Islamist discourse, which sought to control women's bodies, and women's rights and feminist groups supported by CEDAW, which sought to undermine this control. The difference in views on SH shows that there was a struggle over who would control women's bodies and use them as a political tool in the political contestation.

Thus, between 2011–2013, the interviewees reported they enlarged their role in the male-dominated space by negotiating the predominant masculine norms in Tahrir. Based on their experience, they slightly pushed gender boundaries in the context of revolutionary protests but only as part of the visibility of MB and in a particular context.

Then, they overcame, to a moderate degree, their marginalisation, compared to their marginalisation inside MB and in the pre-uprising period.

Later, after the fall of Morsi in July 2013, the public sphere was gradually restricted. Jasmine describes, 'After Morsi's term, the situation was restored and women who were active in politics were arrested, as was the case during Mubarak's regime'. Since then, MB had been subjected to a systematic and extreme crackdown by the regime (Tadros, 2017). MB has been evicted from public spaces, like Tahrir Square to reduce its influence in the public sphere. The military-backed regime pushed them to find new alternative public spaces like the al-Nahdah or Rab'a sit-ins. Warner (2002) argues that counter-publics must either appropriate their representation to cope with the dominant public or discursively create an alternative counter-sphere (space) to present themselves in.

### *Rab'a sit-in as an Islamist public space*

A few days before the military coup, a coalition called the National Alliance in Support of Electoral Legitimacy – founded on 27 June 2013 by MB and its supporters from some movements and parties of different affiliations (DW, 2014) – established two territorially isolated public spaces, albeit located in metropolitan Cairo, to hold sit-ins: al-Nahdah Square and Rab'a al-Adawiyah Square "*Maydan Rab'a*." One reason for choosing Rab'a sit-in as a case in this dissertation – in addition to important speeches and statements came out from Rab'a – was that the site witnessed the founding of several women-only movements, as we will see later.

Rab'a sit-in created as an alternative space for those who challenged the new rulers of pro-military politicians and generals away from the regime's supervision, as Fraser (1990) puts it. Rab'a sit-in was an almost closed place controlled by the followers of MB that no one could enter without being patted down (Hydaia, 2017).

Rab'a became a place where Islamist visibility was displayed to dispute the new military-backed rulers and dominant liberal norms. According to Khawla, 'We saw our community of MB in Rab'a as a core, which might contribute to building an Islamic society in opposition to the liberal and secular society, where men and women mixed and communicated freely on Tahrir'. Hatem (2013) points out that MB described Tahrir and people in it as licentious in contrast Rab'a as a friendly family place with Islamic modesty. Hatem (2013, p. 14) continues, 'the Brothers construct Rab'a instead as an everywoman who sought to be judged by the strength of her faith and service to God'. Houda describes how the Islamic norms overwhelmed Rab'a sit-in:

In Rab‘a, we participated as a family, and I was with my father. My father trusted people there and let me be with other women. Men and women were separated, and everyone had their own activity. I slept alongside women there. It was important for women to be with their (*mahrām*), but it was not a forced condition.

According to Cherribi (2017), during the sit-in Rab‘a, Morsi's adherents gathered with their families in this place to establish a pure Islamic community. Hydaia (2017) refers to the Islamist discourse which overwhelmed the entire scene in Rab‘a, such as the language, behaviour, Islamic songs, and strict gender segregation. Warner (2002) argues that counter-public usually uses the style of dress and the choice of lifestyle and performance to convey a political message. Thus, Rab‘a sit-in was a political and cultural manufacture that served to build an Islamist community and protest the secular profile of the new rulers.

### *The expansion of women's visibility inside Rab‘a*

All interviewees point to the central role of women in Rab‘a in leading protests and organising their activities. Houda reports, ‘In Rab‘a, we marched, protested and gave a speech on the stage in front of the demonstrators’. Moghera (2015), a journalist and pro-Morsi writer, was there and describes how women looked like:

Women from different backgrounds made up almost half of the participants. They were protesting as a body, marching on the paths between tents and some refusing to leave the camps when everyone knew that the army would attack Rab‘a in the morning. They cooked food, provided medical aid to the injured, and, as journalists on the ground, broadcast live on the internet. (own translation)

The interviewees who were in Rab‘a slept alongside women, marched between tents and refused to leave the camp. At the time, women of Sisterhood had formed a women-only movement that was independent of MB. It called itself ‘Women against the Coup’ ‘to stop the unprecedented persecution, degrading treatment and violence against women by military rule authorities in Egypt’ (Ikhwanweb, 2016). Other movements, like the 7-AM movement, Girls Against the Coup, Students Against the Coup, have also been formed. Jasmine explains, ‘In Rab‘a, we marched, spoke out and took the initiative to launch many campaigns, organise and lead activities like Women Against the Coup’. Biagini (2017) interviewed several women, including Aya Alaa Hosny, a female leader, who said,

The movement that I established and I am working on at the moment, which is Women against the Coup, has not emerged as a consequence of an initiative of the MB leadership. The movement emerged out of an independent initiative. We were in Rabaa, and we

were trying to find a way to help the revolution going on. (Interview with Hosny, 2014, obtained from Biagini, 2017, p. 45)

Fatima was among those who formed a committee for women leaders to organise their activities when men were attacked or arrested. Since the uprising, the rise of a new generation of women in MB demanded more power, including more leadership roles for women. According to Tadros (2011, p. 96), MB made a shift regarding women taking leading roles:

Perhaps the most important shift in the position of the Muslim Brotherhood has been in its delineation of the limits of *qawāmah*, restricting it to the private domain. The pertinence of this position shift lies in its ramifications on women's occupation of leadership positions, which necessarily entail women's direction/leadership over women as well as men.

Initially, MB did not want women to participate in the Rab'a sit-in because they did not want women to be hurt. However, women insisted on participating in the sit-in. Jasmine says,

We all gathered in Rab'a, men and women, defending our Islamic principles and identity. Women did not care about their families because they participated with them. In such a situation of jihad, women did not need permission from their husbands and did not have to obey those who think women should be protected.

This is how Jasmine interpreted the situation, justifying her stance with Sharia to participate in Rab'a. In the same interview Biagini conducted with Hosny above, she explains:

When the Rabaa sit-in was organised, the MB did not want women to go. They said, 'This sit-in will be only men'. What happened? We did not say, 'Yes, okay. We will not go'. We opposed, and we went! It is my role to be there! I am part of society and I am part of this group! (Interview with Hosny, 2014, obtained from Biagini, 2017, p. 44)

It seems that the interviewees (and women in general) in Rab'a enlarged their role beyond the women-only space to the male-dominated space. This enlargement increased women's influence to demand change in the situation of women within the Movement. After the regime brutally broke through in Rab'a, they maintained their demonstrations, for example, at universities, until the end of 2014. In this way, the interviewees overcame, to a moderate degree, their marginalisation in Rab'a in the context of a male-dominated space, compared to the previous period and their role inside MB. However, this expansion was subject to various constraints.



### *Constraining visibility inside Rab'a sit-in*

Based on their stories, the expansion of the interviewees' visibility occurred within the confines of Sharia limits (gender ideology) and in the context of the regime's repression, which brutally eliminated the Rab'a sit-in.

Conforming to the MB's Islamist visibility put the interviewees in a subordinate position and under men's control. Shereen, a 6AYM interviewee, visited the Rab'a sit-in as a journalist: 'I was in Rab'a as a journalist and visited some relatives who camped there. Women were separated from men and considered their activities as jihad'. Hydaia (2017, p. 36) also claims that all women there were veiled and lived only in women's tents. They had their mosques, but they preferred to pray in the street behind men because they were separated. In contrast to the situation in Tahrir (where there also were only women's tents), there was an atmosphere of gender segregation in Rab'a.

The interviewees, however, have a different story. They found a way to circumvent male control and not always obey men leaders. Jasmine says,

We did not always obey the orders. There are two types of jihad: conquering other countries, which women are not obligated to do and defensive jihad, when the country or city is attacked. Women must go out to defend their city, religion, and country without seeking permission from their husbands, all based on Sharia.

Here, the friction of individual and group agency is apparent, not only for Jasmine but for all interviewees. On the one hand, the interviewees acted according to their own will, desire, and self-confidence. They were content to accept the gender ideology of MB. On the other hand, the objective result of this acceptance was subordination to the domination of male counterparts and the MB's gender ideology. This situation is similar to Mahmood's (2001, p. 205) discussion of women's agency and their pious subjects, in what she calls a 'mosque movement' in Egypt in the late 1990s. Mahmood (2001, p. 207) argues, 'Thus, even illiberal actions can arguably be tolerated if it is determined that they are undertaken by a freely consenting individual who acted on her own accord'. According to Mahmood, the central point of agency is to act according to one's will, even though the result may be to limit that agency because of the acceptance of those limitations.

Mahmood (2001) reasons that feminists from the Western perspective consider women as 'instruments of their oppressions' when they submit to hegemonic cultural practices. Mahmood (2001) criticises these feminists for using the concept of agency as a tool and synonym for resistance to domination or cultural hegemony. However, she argues that agency and resistance are not always the same thing, as liberal feminists claim from a poststructuralist perspective. Mahmood's understanding of agency is

linked to the capacity and capability to act and is not based on the normative liberal assumptions of these feminists, which emphasise women's freedom.

If we use Mahmood's view to understand the interviewees' agency, then the gender ideology of MB did not restrict the interviewees' agency because the interviewees already believed in the ideology of MB. They also justified their marginalisation based on this belief. Their actions would be understood as acting according to their own will and within the limits of these constraints, even if they sometimes tried to go beyond these limits. I think it would be problematic if we understand individual action in isolation from the structure of the objective world, if we use Mahmood's view and the post-structural approach, in general, for understanding agency.

However, using the critical realism approach, I would argue that the objective results of constraining the interviewees' visibility made them less effective in the public sphere. In contrast to the post-structural approach of liberal feminism, critical realism understands agency as integrated into structure, whereby agency alters and is altered by structure (Archer, 2000). There is also objective evidence that the interviewees, along with other Sisters, wanted to challenge and move beyond these constraints to enlarge their roles. They sought to elaborate the structure by circumventing Sharia using Sharia itself, as in, mediating their visibility within the Movement and acting on the principle of defensive jihad.

On the other hand, my argument against Mahmood does not coincide with the liberal feminists' argument of freedom of women and liberty. While these feminist scholars stand on a normative platform in understanding women's agency, my argument is based on the empirical, objective result – as suggested by critical realism (Clegg, 2020) and the empirical model of the public sphere (Koçan, 2008) – of restricting women's agency on behalf of MB's agency.

Therefore, at the Rab'a sit-in, the interviewees enlarged their roles, albeit under the control of men, and slightly pushed gender boundaries beyond the women-only space into the male-dominated space. Compared to the period before, they made progress when their individual agency found a small space to criticise and counteract the agency of MB.

As for the regime's oppression, on 14 August 2013, security forces opened fire on mass protesters, killing 19 women among at least 817 victims on the day the Rab'a sit-in was broken up (HRW, 2014a). Later, the regime began targeting Sisters who demonstrated in universities and many neighbourhoods in Cairo and other urban cities. In a public conference, Women Against the Coup announced that the regime had killed 40 women and arrested 500 women in the demonstrations (Alquds, 2013). So, the space of appearance in Rab'a disappeared after this attack. Despite the crackdown, Women continued to demonstrate through the end of 2014.

Jasmine was still expelled from the university because of her political activism: 'I am still in my position of leading the women in the university, as we are demanding that Morsi be restored to his rightful and legitimate place as president. Yes, we are facing a crackdown, but this is what we have to do'. Khawla says, 'We just keep going. Yes, I know it is difficult to challenge the brutal regime, but we have no choice'. Houda also says, 'Yes, I still protest in the university to say no to the regime'. They were concerned and spoke carefully about how they were demonstrating because of the security situation.

While observing at CU, I witnessed many demonstrations on campuses organised by the Students Against the Coup movement. There was a kind of hit and run between the demonstrators and the security forces, with tear gas canisters, arrests, shootings and explosions. Women were a hallmark of the demonstrations as they chanted, 'Down, down with military rule'. The police then replaced the university's security personnel with a professional security firm. In addition, the security forces decided to change the wrought iron columned fence that surrounded the campus into a closed iron fence. As a result, the university campus became isolated from other public places outside the university.

## Summary

Based on their reports, the interviewees overcame, to a moderate degree, their marginalisation, compared to the previous period and their role inside the MB. While the interviewees suffered from the reduction of their role within the Movement, their visibility outside the Movement was expanded in Tahrir and Rab'a. Based on MB's ideology, they were exposed to gender segregation and no access to high positions within the Movement. Unlike 6AYM, MB would ensure the male mentality to fulfil the requirement of applying gender ideology and gaining social acceptance. Some interviewees were involved in disseminating this mentality.

Even though the interviewees were satisfied with MB's gender ideology, the objective results show that their visibility was under the men's control due to the cultural Islamist discourse against the secular profile of the state and Western cultural hegemony. Therefore, they sought to circumvent Sharia by using Sharia itself, as in, mediating its visibility and acting on the principle of jihad.

They were part of a new female generation that was trying to move out of the women-only space to the male-dominated space. They slightly pushed gender boundaries in Tahrir and Rab'a, far from the regime's supervision. After the brutality of the sit-in in Rab'a was removed, the interviewees from MB, like those from 6AYM, continued to demonstrate in universities and some neighbourhoods until 2014.

## Conclusion

The MB interviewees overcame their exclusion from the public sphere, compared to the pre-uprising period, on the condition of joining MB. Unlike the 6AYM interviewees who constructed an anti-ideological subjectivity, the MB interviewees constructed an Islamist subjectivity, which shows that the uprising reproduced different forms of subjectivities constructed within the national framework. Family played an essential role in the early socialisation of political Islam as worship and for joining MB exclusively. The distinction between what is perceived as public/political and private/apolitical was challenged as a way to understand the public sphere in non-liberal authoritarian context. MB used relaxed regime control at MB in 2010 and its alliance with SCAF between 2011–2013 to facilitate access the public sphere.

Based on their reports, the interviewees also overcame, to a moderate degree, their marginalisation, compared to the previous period, in the public sphere because they became visible within the frame of MB's Islamist visibility. While some groups supported women to enlarge their role, for example, 6AYM, MB deliberately diminished the role of women within the Movement because of its gender ideology, as in, women's complementary role to that of men in the public sphere. Some women in MB could be a reason for their marginalisation because they did not believe in gender equality and women's leadership. Moreover, some strategies the interviewees used did not work well, for example, mediating their voice.

However, spurred on by their political awareness and feminist consciousness, even if they did not call themselves feminists, the interviewees found ways to enlarge their role and critique MB's gender ideology but still within Sharia limits. They went beyond the women-only space to the male-dominated spaces, such as Tahrir and the Rab'a sit-in. In the new situation as a result of the uprising, the interviewees, as part of a new generation within the Movement, sought to escape the Islamist cultural discourse that disciplined their subjectivity and controlled their bodies in the struggle with the secular profile of the state and Western cultural hegemony. Like the 6AYM interviewees, the MB interviewees were still challenging the regime by the end of 2014.



## Part III: Participation in the public sphere through political parties



## *Chapter 6:*

# Women's participation in the public sphere through opposition political parties (OPPs)

This chapter sets out to understand how the OPPs' interviewees participated in the public sphere and how they experienced their participation.

I use the term 'political party' only within the limits of formal politics related to the government decision-making process, for instance, voting, contributing to electoral campaigns, competing to get parliamentary seats, or holding political government offices, et cetera (Verba, Nie & Kim, 1978). As for OPP, Dolo (2006, p. 1) defines it accordingly, 'Partisan political institutions that are intentionally designed to temper the ruling party's excesses while still pursuing both legislative and presidential offices'. According to Demirkaya (2017), OPP not only plays a role as an alternative for discontented voters to express their demands and interests, but also fulfils other functions such as providing accurate information about government policies and criticising the contents of the government programme. In other words, OPPs can form counter-publics that criticises the mainstream policies pursued by the government.

The chapter will show that, as part of critical counter-publics, the interviewees overcame their exclusion from the public sphere on the condition of joining OPPs. They constructed their critical political subjectivity and adopted agency that formed across the networks of political institutions. Their agency was critical of the state's patriarchal cultural discourse and its vision of gender policies. While many interviewees redefined gender roles within their families to participate as political actors, other interviewees had supportive families. To participate safely, effectively, or for ideological reasons, the interviewees shifted from informal to formal political participation by joining newly formed OPPs.

Based on their reports, they overcame their marginalisation in the public sphere as they enlarged their role within the male-dominated context of the OPPs. They redefined the notion of female leadership by ascribing it to ordinary women who make



efforts towards gender equality, with a feminist consciousness. They pushed gender boundaries slightly – compared to the previous period – in the context of the political and institutional domain to open up a promising space for women to make their voices heard.

As background, since the 2011 uprising, more than 40 political parties have been formed and competed in post-Mubarak elections (Gamal, 2015). This fact is considered a remarkable change in political participation in Egypt compared to the period before the 2011 uprising, when the law significantly restricted the establishment of new political parties. After the uprising, the new rulers attempted to establish a new political system with an assumed democratic process. SCAF amended the Political Parties Law No. 40 of 1977, which facilitated the establishment of political parties. Against this backdrop, many revolutionaries moved from informal to formal political participation by joining OPPs, mainly newly formed parties (Abdalla, 2016).

This chapter is based on seventeen interviewees from three OPPs formed after the 2011 uprising. I selected these OPPs due to their diversity, popularity and availability. I tried to cover a wide range of political parties with different ideologies, public figures and seats in the parliament. The three OPPs were more available groups to contact because of the security situation. All three OPPs are described as opposition to the political regimes between 2011–2014 ‘to offer strong ideological or political competition to the state even under the extremely difficult circumstances since 2013’ (Dunne & Hamzawy, 2017, p. 7).

The first selected OPP is thus the Egyptian Social Democratic Party (ESDP), which was founded on 3 July 2011. Only five months after its establishment, the party received nineteen seats in the parliament and six seats in the Consultative Council (*Majlis al-Shura*). ESDP became the fourth largest party in the parliament (Carnegie, 2011b; ESDP, 2016). The second OPP is the Constitution Party (CP), founded by Mohamad El-Baradei on 23 April 2012. It claims to be based on an inclusive ideology for all Egyptian people and has a liberal ideology. Although the party was founded after the uprising, it emphasises the realisation of the slogans of the 25 January revolution, namely ‘bread, freedom, social justice, and human dignity’ (Carnegie, 2012; CP, 2018).

The third OPP is the Strong Egypt Party (SEP), which was founded on 16 June 2012, by Abdel Moneim Aboul Fotouh, a former member of MB who ran as an independent candidate in the 2012 presidential election. The party emphasises national identity represented by the country's history and heritage but seeks to respect all other cultural and religious identities (Carnegie, 2014; SEP, 2018). The party is committed to centre-left ideologies and a moderate Islamic stance as a fundamental component of Egyptian identity (Abdalla, 2016).

## Becoming part of several counter-publics

This section elaborates on how the interviewees became part of different counter-publics before joining their OPPs.

The section will show that the interviewees reported they shared (for different reasons) sentiments against the Mubarak, SCAF, and Morsi regimes, respectively, which prompted them to join different counter-publics. In the following subsections, I will present three counter-publics: the counter-public of the 2011 uprising, the counter-public against SCAF in 2011–2012, and counter-publics formed by public figures (El-Baradei and Aboul Foutoh) between 2010–2013.

### The OPPs counter-public of the uprising of 2011

Ten interviewees participated in the first days of the 2011 uprising against Mubarak's regime. To avoid repetition, I will present three different cases (Nadeen, Hala, and Hind) from the three OPPs.

Nadeen (ESDP) comes from an upper-middle class Christian family that was frustrated and angry because of Mubarak's sectarian policy. In the early days of the uprising, she participated with her husband in Tahrir Square:

On January 28, I went to Tahrir with my husband, who was hesitant at first because he was afraid of the police; especially, we heard about violence against women. We wondered how we were going to participate. We had no culture of how to demonstrate. Our ideas of a demonstration came from the Kifaya movement, when 20 participants were surrounded by 200 security forces. Would they do the same with us? After that, we continued to participate even after the first eighteen days of the revolution. Then we joined others in cleaning up the square.

Nadeen followed the events before the uprising for a long time because she felt frustrated and angry about the situation, and she wanted to do more than only participate in charitable activities. I asked Nadeen, 'Why politics, and why in the uprising?' She replied, 'Like many Egyptians, I read *Al-Ahram* (the main government newspaper) newspaper and believed that nothing would change'. Her frustration stemmed from what she perceived as a second-citizen Christian:

Let me be more specific, the sectarian incidents affected me as a person. Besides the fear of belonging to a minority, we felt rejected and not accepted by society because people perceived us differently. This situation frustrated me, especially the bombing of the Coptic Christian *al-Qiddissin* Church in Alexandria in 2011. After this incident, I said to my family, 'Mubarak must go'. I suggested joining a political party, but they said, 'Are

you crazy? Your name will be listed in the security apparatus'. After a short time, the revolution broke out.

At least 21 people were killed and 71 were injured in the bombing of the al-Qiddissin Church on January 2011 (BBC, 2011). This incident led to a dramatic change in Nadeen's feelings and political thinking as a Christian.

Nadeen, like many other interviewees, had constructed a critical political subjectivity long before the uprising, when she was reading about politics and wanted to join a political party before the uprisings. As Hanafi (2012, p. 199) argues, during the upheaval in many Arab countries, a new political subjectivity emerged from a specific form of individuality, which he calls 'reflexive individualism'; it was not a straightforward anti-political party sentiment; rather, it was formed within the networks of political institutions and their production of legitimacy and knowledge. Hanafi's theory could be useful to describe a part of the revolutionaries, like Nadeen, who was still within the limits of the political system, but critical of it.

Later, Nadeen developed her individual agency when she participated in the uprising. after she felt excluded before, and took part in cleaning the square to spread a pure image of collective action against the corrupt regime.

The second case is Hala (CP) who lives in a working-class neighbourhood in Cairo. Unlike other interviewees, Hala had no interest in politics or any kind of public activism until the 2011 uprising. I asked her, 'Did you participate in the uprising?'

Yes, I did, and for a geographical reason [*laughs*]. The demonstrations started from a place near my neighbourhood. I began to think about why this large number of people took to the streets together. At first, I only participated to march for half an hour and go back home because if I was late, my family would find out I was at Tahrir.

This is what social movements do – they mobilise people and make them part of a collective concern, interest and action (Melucci, 1996). To understand why Hala became interested in politics, I asked her, 'May I ask why [you decided to participate] at the time of the uprising?' She replied,

I discovered that I was not alone. I saw what was happening in Tunis and started reading foreign newspapers. Also, we did not have a satellite at home until after the revolution. We only watched the official channels TV, which obscured what was happening in the streets.

As Hala learned more, she began to think about politics to construct a new political subjectivity. She shared a sense of sadness and injustice with the protesters and sympathised with them after Mubarak's regime shut down the internet. Immediately,

she adopted her individual agency to become part of this collective and be visible when she participated in the demonstrations. Unlike Nadeen, who was in contact with opposition groups, Hala was not, as she had no satellite and minimal access to the internet. As a researcher, she knew English, and she looked for new information in English foreign newspapers. Paying for a satellite device and access to the internet were also new ways to get more information.

The third case is Hind (SEP), who comes from a middle-class family and is interested in politics. She participated in the uprising with her family: 'I participated in the January 28 revolution with my sisters. I mean, all the family were there. [*laughs*] I was like a resident in Tahrir, *alhamdulillah* (thank God)'.

Since the 2005 election, Hind gained her political experience by debating and volunteering in politics. She felt disappointed and dissatisfied with what was happening to poor people, 'The experience of working in Sunna' al-Haiyat taught me a lot about how to carry out public activism'. Prior to the uprising, Hind had constructed the critical political subjectivity against the government policy of Mubarak's regime and developed individual agency in voluntary activism. Due to political restrictions, she did not join any party or social movement: 'Before the revolution, to vote in the elections was all we could do. There was no political life in Egypt and no real opposition'. Thus, until the outbreak of the uprising, she felt excluded from political activities related to the political system.

In summary, the interviewees participated in the uprising because of their political awareness, accumulated political experience, sense of exclusion, and feelings (for various reasons) against Mubarak's regime. During the uprising, they became part of their counter-publics.

### **The counter-public against SCAF**

Many interviewees participated after the fall of Mubarak as part of the counter-publics against SCAF since February 2011. I will present Samma (CP) and Shaima (ESDP) as the most diverse examples from three OPPs.

Samma (CP) comes from a middle-class political family. Her husband was a member of CP, and her husband's parents were members of al-Tajammu' Party. She participated in the demonstrations since March 2011 against SCAF: 'I did not participate in the revolution because I gave birth. Later, my family tried to prevent me from doing so out of fear. I participated in Tahrir with my friends – the whole society was in the streets. We talked a lot about politics'. Before the uprising, Samma participated in the discussion in politics with her family,

None of us joined a political party or anything like that, but we came from a normal middle-class family that was always talking about politics and public affairs. I read a lot about politics. My husband is a member of CP [Constitution Party], and his father was a leftist and leader in al-Tajammu' Party and so was his mother.

Samma has quite a lot of political experience through her everyday politics and political discussions in the family. She describes why she was against Mubarak's regime and why she could not participate in politics:

Before the revolution, I thought I would never be able to participate in politics. I wished I could, but it was difficult for women. The cultural environment did not provide women with facilities to participate in politics at all levels of society, home and state. Instead, I volunteered in many NGOs to make a difference.

Coming from a political family with networks of people close to formal politics helped Samma construct her critical political subjectivity and develop her individual agency in a long process that ranged from voluntary activism to participation in the aftermath of the uprising.

Shaima (ESDP) also comes from a middle-class family that advised her against political participation. She is exceptional because she took a different path to politics. Shaima was never interested in toppling Mubarak until he stepped down in February 2011. Later, she switched to the side of the opponents when she demonstrated against SCAF in March 2011: 'At the beginning of the revolution, I was not one of the revolutionaries, but I was afraid of the sudden removal of the Mubarak's regime. I thought the situation would lead to chaos – that we could not afford. I do not know if you understand that exactly?' I said, 'Yes, please continue', and she continued,

I did not want MB to lead the country. At that time, I participated in a demonstration called The Battle of the Camel<sup>3</sup> to obstruct the revolution and show that not all Egyptians agreed with it. I later learned that NDP had organised this demonstration, but I wanted to raise my voice against the revolution. Until February 11, I was against the idea that Mubarak had to go, and then I felt that I had lost my fight for Mubarak. Later, I started attending many seminars and conferences organised by many political parties. I listened to Amr Hamzawy,<sup>4</sup> Galal Amen<sup>5</sup> and George Isaac<sup>6</sup>. George Isaac inspired me to join ESDP. After that, I participated in the demonstration against the constitutional amendments adopted by SCAF and later every Friday against SCAF.

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<sup>3</sup> Mubarak's regime sent men on camels and horses to break up a protest in Tahrir.

<sup>4</sup> An Egyptian political scientist, human rights activist and public intellectual.

<sup>5</sup> An Egyptian economist and commentator.

<sup>6</sup> An Egyptian politician and activist.

From Shaima's story, we learn that although she had similar feelings of frustration and anger before the uprising, it was only after the fall of Mubarak between February and March 2011 that she became part of a counter-public. Asen (2000) and Warner (2002) also points out that counter-publics must be aware that they are excluded and should challenge the wider public. Indeed, she did not challenge Mubarak's regime before the uprising: 'After the brutal murder of Khaled Said, I sent a letter to the Ministry of Interior to ask for Khaled Said's story, but they never answered me'. She was trying to find out from the government what had happened to Khaled Said, not like other interviewees who got the information from dissent who inflamed public opinion against the government. At the beginning, Shaima was mobilised against the revolutionary protesters in 2011. Melucci (1996) describes the mobilisation process as aimed at changing or resisting possible change in the case of demobilisation.

The change Shaima made could be described as a form of 'cognitive liberation' (McAdam, 1982, p. 51), when she cognitively cut off the relationship with the regime to connect with opposition groups. Then she could share with opposition groups the definition of an unjust situation. Shaima constructed her critical political subjectivity when she participated in the political parties' events to connect with the networks that were close to formal politics. Thus, she developed her individual agency to participate in the demonstrations against SCAF.

In summary, the interviewees reported they participated for several reasons after the eighteen days of the uprising. They also have a political awareness of being critical of the new rulers of SCAF. The role of the OPPs was crucial for them because the OPPs held meetings, public conferences, and seminars.

### **The counter-public of public figures**

There were interviewees who paid attention to El-Baradei and Aboul Fotouh, as two public figures who mobilised youth before and during the 2011 uprising. Many voters did not know newly formed parties until they knew their public figures, and sometimes they referred to the parties by the names of their leaders (El-Sharnouby, 2017). The two public figures were at the centre of the counter-publics that formed before the uprising against Mubarak's regime not only against SCAF (2011–2012) and against Morsi (2012–2013) but also against each other through creating communicative discursive alternatives that attracted many revolutionaries to join them. Asen (2000) refers to persons who could be a common focus for emerging counter-publics.

Regarding El-Baradei, he criticised Mubarak's regime since his return to Egypt in 2010 and founded NAC with other politicians. El-Baradei joined the protesters on 28 January 2011, put under house arrest. He was later appointed interim leader of the opposition groups to negotiate with the government. El-Baradei announced he would

run for president in the first elections after the uprising, but he withdrew in January 2012 because he was disappointed with the progress in the transition to democracy. In April 2012, he founded the CP. After Morsi was ousted from power in July 2013, he was appointed interim vice president of the country's transition government. He resigned in August 2013 following the bloody crackdown on the Rab'a sit-in. Like Reem, Nedhal and Amena, many interviewees were inspired by El-Baradei.

Reem was among those who admired El-Baradei since his return to Egypt in 2010: 'My first participation in politics was with El-Baradei's arrival in Egypt in 2010 and the establishment of the NAC. That was like a dream for me to make the country better'. Wahba et al. (2014) report that public figures such as El-Baradei attracted women voters and candidates for the parliament in the period following the 2011 uprising, for example, Suad Hamada (CP), who entered politics with the arrival of El-Baradei in Egypt in 2010.

In a long process, Reem constructed her critical political subjectivity because she comes from a political family that was interested in opposition politics: 'My grandfather was among those who worked with Gamal Abdel Nasser, and my mother is still a Nasserist. My grandfather brought me political books every week and told me many stories about politics'. She also was one of those who came from the middle class, and the bad economic situation affected her the most:

I have many friends who thought politics was not for me and why should I expose myself to trouble with the regime? I think they thought that way because they were not affected by the regime, since they were from the aristocratic class who lived in *Maṣr al-Jadīda* (Helipolis) neighbourhood. I am not saying they did not care about others, but Mubarak's regime had no influence on them.

Reem was unemployed and looking for a better future before the 2011 uprising: 'Before the revolution, I was tired of looking for a job'. When I asked if she had a university degree that could help her find a proper job, she replied, 'I have, as a tourist guide'. I asked her, 'How did you live?' She said, 'I depended on my parents, and I also had some money left over to spend on myself'. Singerman (2013b) argues that the neoliberal project in Egypt caused young people to revolt and was also problematic for women, as women were employed in the civil service and public sectors and spent most of the state budget. In particular, with women becoming increasingly educated and having expectations of a high standard of living, they used this situation to become involved in opposition groups, such as the labour movement of the El Mahalla strike (Sika & Khodary, 2012).

Reem was interested in El-Baradei, who tried to persuade revolutionaries to participate in formal politics. So, she was in contact with the networks that were close

to formal politics. Then in 2011, during the uprising, she developed her agency to become part of the counter-public against Mubarak.

As for another public figure, Aboul Fotouh, in his political life, he was on the side of the opposition against presidents Sadat, Mubarak, SCAF and Morsi. In 1987, he served in the Guidance Bureau of the MB. He later left MB in 2011 because he was announced as a presidential candidate. In March 2012, he launched a presidential campaign to be a rival of Morsi and Ahmed Shafiq. After losing the election, he founded SEP on June 16, 2012. Before and during his presidential campaign, a counter-public was formed by its supporters who wanted to become president because 'Dr Aboul Fotouh has been an outspoken critic of the military which took over from Mr Mubarak' (Knell, 2012). The presidential campaign consisted mainly of young men and women in yellow uniforms who called themselves Aboul Fotouh ultras (BBC, 2012 'video', own translation).

Many interviewees from SEP, such as Ebtisam, Hind, Amena and Sana (SEP), were interested in Aboul Fotouh. For example, Ebtisam (SEP) became part of his presidential campaign in 2012:

I was exhausted during the revolution. Then a male colleague recommended to see Aboul Fotouh, who was scheduled to speak at a public conference in Helwan. I found a different life; many young people present. I did not participate in the revolution, but my real political participation came through Aboul Fotouh's campaign in 2012.

In fact, Ebtisam comes from a middle-class MB political family, but she sought to participate through a political party:

My father and mother were members of MB and my grandmother. I did not join MB because I had a lot of reservations about it, which I often discussed with my father. As a family, we were always against the regimes, especially Mubarak's regime, because of the atrocities the regime did to the country, like the bad economic situation, corruption and oppression.

I asked, 'Why not MB? And can you give a concrete example?' She replied, 'MB performance was not good. They have not learned from their mistakes since Nasser's time, although they have suffered. For example, my father was tortured in prison'. So, her experience of coming from a political family gave her a political experience to determine the right group to join.

In addition, her frustration and anger with Mubarak's regime and later with SCAF for being responsible for the disastrous economic situation affected Ebtisam greatly.

Before the revolution, we were all frustrated, especially women who got nothing. I felt desperate by the situation because I was unemployed. As an educated woman, I was



looking for a real job to be independent from my parents. Unfortunately, I worked for small and bad companies that used me when they did not give enough money and sometimes, I worked without a salary.

According to Beinin (2012b, p. 332), women in Egypt before the uprising often were employed in lower-paying jobs and in companies with lower wages (30% less than men) due to differences in education and experience rather than outright discrimination. Ghada Lutfy (Egyptian Centre for Women's Rights) described the situation in the decade before the 2011 uprising: 'There was a general feeling of frustration, even among those who wanted to change, because of limited job opportunities'. Kandil (2012) mentions that the middle-class in Egypt faced eradication and suffered from the economic situation due to the regime implementation of the neoliberal project since 2005 and the international crisis (according to United Nation Development Programme's report (Bargawi & McKinley, 2011)). Previously and since the introduction of free education in the country during Nasser's rule, the middle class had been nurtured by the state, but it was also exposed to the neoliberal project and economic impoverishment and later turned against the state (Kandil, 2012). In the words of Bayat (2011), they were among the 'middle-class poor' – white-collar, educated people who were affected by neoliberalism in the decade before the 2011 uprising.

Thus, Ebtisam had already constructed her critical political subjectivity towards the Mubarak's regime and developed her agency to participate in politics, but she could not because she was afraid: 'I wanted to participate in politics before the revolution, but after my father's warnings, I did not. He talked about the wrong path of politics and the brutality of authority'. Later, she found Aboul Fotouh to work with.

In summary, Reem and Ebtisam were mobilised together by public figures who were close to formal politics. The relaxing of SCAF's control over many political forces allowed them came together to integrate into the new political system through the OPPs.

## Summary

The OPPs' interviewees constructed a critical political subjectivity that emerged within the networks of political institutions and their production of legitimacy and knowledge. They were opposed to SCAF, but they, as unaffiliated participants, were concerned with integrating into the new political system by enjoying the open environment and relaxing control over OPPs and public figures.

The interviewees have a political awareness and willingness to participate in political change because they shared their frustration and anger against Mubarak's regime and SCAF for different reasons, such as being Christian (Nadeen), sympathising with poor people (Hind), and being affected by the economic situation (Samma, Reem and Ebtisam).

The interviewees gained their political experience by discussing politics at home, and reading foreign newspapers in English, like Hala. However, participation in politics did not necessarily lead to participation in opposition politics, as was the case with Shaima, who shifted from supporting Mubarak to join a OPP. The role of the political family was central in stimulating some interviewees to participate in formal politics (e.g. Nadeen and Samma).

The role of OPPs was central to facilitating their participation. Further, the inclusionary environment during the uprising and relaxed control over political forces also helped facilitate participation. In addition, the structural enablement(s), as facilitating factors, like the transformation of the media landscape or the impact of the neoliberal project on the economy and women, also encouraged many of the interviewees to participate in politics.

## Participation through OPPs

After the outbreak of the 2011 uprising, many interviewees were among those who joined their OPPs. Abdalla (2016) refers to a group of protesters who preferred to continue participating by joining OPPs. Other interviewees did not participate in the uprising but joined later their OPPs directly.

The section will show how, based on their reports, the interviewees overcame their exclusion on the condition of joining the OPPs. Many interviewees, especially married women, shifted from an informal to a formal form of participation to avoid repression. Some also believed that participating through OPPs was an effective way to make a difference, and others were attracted by the OPPs' ideologies or public figures to join OPPs. The OPPs played a central role in facilitating participation, but in the context of the inclusionary political environment and relaxed control by SCAF over political forces between 2011–2012.

In what follows, the first subsection focuses on how interviewees dealt with the situation in their families to participate in the uprising. The second is about how and why they joined the three OPPs and the assisting factor of structural enablement.

## **The interviewees inside the family**

The family's attitudes toward the interviewees' political participation were varied between objecting, supporting and discouragement. I will present examples from objecting and supporting attitudes, and thereafter, I present some married interviewees whose families discouraged them.

Regarding objecting family attitudes, Hala (CP) had a substantial problem within her family, as they tried to prevent her from participating in the uprising because they believed that women and politics were incompatible. By 'politics', Hala meant joining a political party or social movement; otherwise, there was no objection to participating in voluntary activism or discussing politics:

Before the revolution, I never thought of participating in politics. My family thought I should study, get a high degree from a prestigious university, and work later. All my relatives, friends and community were of this opinion. No one from our family participated in politics.

I asked Hala what her family thought about women's participation in the uprising? She replied,

When my family watched young women talking about politics on TV, they were impressed, like seeing an actress or singer. They said: our daughters do not dress, or work like these women. They believed that politics was only for men and women should not become politicians.

Hala, however, thought differently from her family and its patriarchal order: 'I do not have a specific ideology, but I think in free thoughts that help me make a decision, and my role in politics that lets me experience new things'. The family's attitude was part of the perceptions about women and politics in the community. Hala explains,

Since the revolution, people, particularly older men, welcomed the new form of politics because they saw a new image they did not use to see before. However, they did not allow their women to participate in politics. They would ask you: do you accept that your daughter participates in politics? So, my family was happy when people participated in the streets, but they did not allow me to do so. The disapproval came from my mother (since my father died), but also from uncles and relatives.

Community and family ties are obviously interconnected and influence each other, as pre-existing informal social networks generate traditional belonging and communal solidarity (Melucci, 1996). Thus, the family's attitude was part of the predominant culture of the community, which underscored the structural constraint that Hala had to challenge.

In the beginning, she lied to her family until they happened to see her on TV. It was prompted her *fait accompli*, as in, she then became a political actor:

I lied when they questioned where I had been, but then they saw me on TV in Tahrir [*laughs*]. Then my aunt asked my mother, 'Where is Hala?' My mother answered, 'She is not here, and she might be somewhere doing something before returning home'. My aunt replied, laughing, 'I saw her on TV in Tahrir. After that, they had no more objections, but they are still not pleased'.

Hala redefined her gender role at home, through which, she enlarged her role beyond studying and working to participate in politics. The personal situation of Hala of being employed, economically independent and having a high university degree allowed her to challenge the patriarchal order of the family, as the family no longer had enough power to object, especially with the absence of her father.

Abrar is the second example. Her working-class family tried to prevent her from participating in the 2011 uprising for fear of regime's repression:

My parents utterly prevented me from participating in political activities, especially in opposition groups like 6AYM. My father was an Imam in a mosque, and he had a file with the security apparatus. Once, when I wrote a political poem, he made me swear on the Quran that I would never write about politics ever again. The objection also came from my extended family.

Her husband and his family were also involved in this objection: 'They kept asking questions like, "Why are you doing this? What is your goal?" And also "What is the end of your ambition?" All these questions were mockingly asked by the husband and his family'. When the opportunity arose, Abrar participated in the uprising and was exposed to violence in Tahrir:

After my father's death, I was able to participate in the first days of the revolution, except for one that was in The Battle of the Camel when my husband stopped me and said, 'Enough with demonstrations'. I think he was right at the time because I was exposing myself to violence and SH, and I could be arrested.

Abrar was one of many married women who stopped participating in demonstrations to join a political party, as this seemed safer than protesting. In this way, she redefined her role at home by negotiating her situation to convince her family and husband's family. I asked her, 'What happened after that?' She answered, 'I became interested in a political party. I started to understand Egyptian parties by attending public meetings, and the first one held by the Justice and Freedom Party for the MB'. Thus, the political

parties offered those who could not afford to participate in informal politics, such as social movements, the opportunity to continue to participate through OPPs.

The death of her father opened the way to change the manner of participation from informal to formal political participation.

In terms of a supportive family, Hind and Nadeen received the full support of their families when they decided to participate in the 2011 uprising. Hind (SEP) says, 'We all agreed to support the revolution, especially my father who fully urged me to participate in the revolution. My mother was not against the revolution, but she was afraid that something might happen to me'. In 2012, the family opened their home as a centre for Aboul Fotouh's presidential campaign, 'I was the first to launch Aboul Fotouh's campaign in our neighbourhood, and it was in my house'.

The second example is Nadeen (ESDP): 'My father encouraged me to participate in Tahrir. He was proud that I would become a politician, but my mother was a little afraid for me as a woman because I might be sexually harassed. You know, our police were not nice at all'. The fear gradually disappeared, as the family, especially the mother, understood that it was safe to participate. Nadeen's only problem was managing her time as a married woman. Therefore, she could not participate without compromising with her husband. I asked her, 'Does your husband object to your participation?' She says,

A little bit, because of the time I would spend in politics. We do not have children, which gives me more free time. He knew I would never give up, and by the way, he could not divorce me [*laughs*] because in our church, there are no divorces. So, there was always a compromise between us.

Nadeen also negotiated the situation from within, because she used the condition that there was no divorce in her church to compromise with her husband.

Thus, Hind and Nadeen did not need to redefine the gender role because their families' attitude seemed more flexible about their participation in politics. Other interviewees, most of whom are or were married, were discouraged by their families.

### *Marriage and participation in politics*

Marital status, among other factors, routinely appears as either a major explanatory variable or a necessary control in research on women's political activism (Inglehart & Norris 2003). Of the nineteen interviewees, three are married and three were married (three have children) when they joined their OPPs. Five of six interviewees were discouraged from participating in politics by their husbands or husband's family. Of course, marriage is not categorised as a restrictive factor in general (e.g. Nadeen was married and supported by her husband), but it describes a situation of some women

who used some strategies to participate because they were married. I will present two examples.

The first example is Nedhal (ESDP), who refused her ex-husband's order to stay at home and not participate in the 2011 uprising:

I got divorced because I had many problems with my ex-husband, and the core of these problems was our different political views. I participated in the revolution from the first day. My ex-husband said no to me; it would mean a problem for my business. I refused and said, 'I am now over 40, and want to serve my country'. According to the customs in my family, he could not force me to do anything and had no right to stop me.

It seems that Nedhal decided to take responsibility for her country and prove her autonomy by making her own decision. Nedhal broke with the patriarchal order when she redefined gender roles within the family as she decided to expand her public activism to include participation in politics.

Nedhal came from an upper middle-class family, was professionally and economically independent, highly educated, and had a high degree of autonomy. She had been a guest on various TV programmes to talk about health. She lived abroad and had experience with volunteerism. These factors had contributed to her rejection of her husband's patriarchal order and her choice of a strategy of challenge.

The second example is Samma (CP), who comes from a political family with a husband who also participates in politics. She was employed and economically independent and had a high degree of autonomy and expertise in public activism. Like the others (Mona, Nadeen and Abrar), she struggled with being employed, married and political activists at the same time:

I cannot deny that I have problems with my husband because of my political activities. I feel deeply offended as a woman activist. My husband wants me to reorganise my roles, priorities and time because I completely do all the work at home. So, I have to balance politics, work, and my role at home; taking care of my family and kids, first, my work second, and the political activities in the party third.

Sayer (2005) argues that a woman's leisure time is decreased when she gets married because she spends most of her time doing housework. Samma has to manage her time, which is based on predominant gender norms that divide men's and women's roles in public life in favour of men. Omaima Abou Bakr asserts that

In our culture, I mean the conservative culture in Egypt and other Islamic countries, there is a sharp division between what is public and private. That division is used against women, particularly in the division of roles between men and women at home and

outside. Even when we talk openly about women's activism and their right to express themselves, we still end up returning to this division.

Samma negotiated the situation by prioritising her roles and time. Since the uprising, Samma redefined her gender role in the family, expanding her public role within the limits of the division of roles between men and women.

Therefore, it is more difficult for married women to participate in politics than for unmarried women, which places a heavy burden on them as married women and political activists. Allam (2018a, p. 46) argues that because women's primary role was in the family as mothers, 'the revolution in Egypt did not completely "modernize" gender relations or install equality in the private and public domains'. In practice, married women employed different strategies or dealt with patriarchal order in different ways than unmarried women.

Despite redefining gender roles and confronting the patriarchal order in their families, the interviewees needed the role of OPPs to continue to access the public sphere for several reasons.

### **Joining a specific opposition political party**

I will present three, not mutually exclusive, prominent components of compatibility between the interviewees and their OPPs: providing a safe pathway to participate in politics, the effective way to participate in politics, and the sharing of similar ideologies.

#### *A safe pathway to participate in politics*

To avoid SCAF's repression in 2011–2012, many interviewees reported they joined OPPs as a safe pathway to continue their participation in politics. This motive was also a reasonable choice for those who had never participated in politics before joining their OPPs.

After the fall of Mubarak in February 2011, SCAF, in an alliance with MB, suppressed the liberal forces and the labour movement of revolutionaries to force or persuade the revolutionaries to integrate into institutional/formal politics (Gamal, 2015; Halawa, 2019). The SCAF undertook a number of procedures to promote the democratic transition and also to manipulate it to keep its power intact (Azzam, 2012). Gamal (2015, p. 181) notes that SCAF amended the law to facilitate the establishment of new political parties. In addition, in September 2011, SCAF laid out a six-month timetable for a new constitution in 2011 and parliamentary and presidential elections between 2011–2012 (Childress, 2013). As a result, OPPs found a space to establish and hold conferences, seminars, and election campaigns.

This situation encouraged many interviewees to join their OPPs, such as Nedhal (ESDP), Entesar (SEP), Mona (ESDP), Samma (CP) and Abrar (ESDP), through changing from informal to formal political participation. Other interviewees, such as Ream (SEP), Sana (SEP), and Ebtisam (SEP), who had never participated in the uprising, found that joining OPPs might save them from SCAF's repression. I will give some examples of both groups.

Nedhal (ESDP) was one of those who chose to participate through ESDP rather than continue her demonstration in Tahrir because it was safer for her and her family:

First, I was interested in politics because I love my country. Second, I decided to participate in the revolution because I was afraid of being arrested, harassed, killed, and my children would grow up without me. And finally, I took more challenging steps forward when the *Maspero* Massacre happened. Then I witnessed the regime's most brutal and sectarian crackdown on Christians. I almost died when my body turned blue from the beatings. I saw corpses and body parts everywhere. When I woke up after a blackout, I wondered why God saved my life? I was sure there was a reason. For me, the reason was to move on, but by joining a political party instead of demonstrating.

The Maspero Massacre, the clash between demonstrators and military-led security forces that erupted against SCAF in October 2011, left 24 dead and more than 200 injured (Kirkpatrick, 2011). Many families felt it was dangerous to demonstrate and sit-in or clash with police; it would be safer to join a political party because these parties were registered and legitimised by law.

Consequently, all political parties conducted their activities in full view of the regime, which kept them away from repression. Joining a political party also meant attending more seminars, conferences, meetings, and doing more public relations work, such as what Sana, Abrar and Mona did. Sana says,

Look, not all members are required to attend everything and come every day unless there is a big conference. For example, I did not come here for less than a year because I had nothing to do. All my activities in the party took place in our office in the *al-Mukattam* neighbourhood, where I live.

In summary, the interviewees avoided, instead of challenged, SCAF through OPPs, which facilitated their integration into the new political system. Then, the interviewees became compatible with the OPPs, which led them to convince their families that it was safe to participate.



### *Effective participation through the political party*

Samma (CP), Hala (CP) and Hind (SEP) believed that continuous participation through political parties would be more productive and effective in achieving political change than just demonstrating.

Samma emphasised, 'I believed that the revolution erupted without the regulation of a political party, a movement or anything like that. I believed that, after the revolution was over, there should be legally regulated organisations to run the country, like political parties.' Samma used her political experience, coming from a political family, to understand that the revolution would eventually lead to an organised form of activism. Samma considered choosing an appropriate party to achieve her goal, one that could fulfil her hopes of realising the mottos of the 25 January revolution: bread, freedom and social justice. Therefore, in 2012, she became one of the co-founders of CP. She did so because of the organisation's ideology and El-Baradei: 'I believed that El-Baradei was a revolutionary symbol who ignited the spark of the revolution'. In his tweet on 4 March 2011, El-Baradei explained his view of how the political process should work and what that process should look like to achieve a democratic system:

The interim constitution, a constituent assembly to adopt a new constitution, presidential and parliamentary elections are our path to democracy. All this should be based on genuine participation and equal opportunities (El-Baradei, 2011, Twitter, own translation).

When I asked Hala (CP), 'Why did you choose a political party?' She replied,

I became a member of NCW. My colleagues recommended that I join a political party to learn how politics and political processes work. The prevailing tendency in NCW was to integrate the young revolutionaries into political institutions like political parties.

The institutional norms within NCW, owned by the state, motivated Hala to change her participation from informal to formal. Hind (SEP) also preferred to promote the democratic process:

I was with the Revolutionary Youth Alliance and the *Miṣruna* (Our Egypt) movement. After the 2011–2012 parliamentary elections, we believed that we had achieved our goal, and the next goal was to make a change by participating in the 2012 presidential election. I participated in the presidential campaign of Aboul Fotouh, who later founded SEP.

Hind's previous experience and political experience helped her move from one movement to the next until she realised, she needed to change her participation from informal to formal.

The belief in formal/institutional politics is perhaps best explained by Bayat's (2017, p. 18) term 'refolution'. Bayat argues that what happened to revolutionaries in Egypt – and other Arab countries – was that 'revolutionary movements [...] emerged to compel the incumbent states to change themselves, to carry out meaningful reforms on behalf of the revolution'. Refolution was neither a revolution to mobilise people for an ultimate change of the political system nor a reform from above within the existing structural arrangement. Instead, it is a complex, contradictory mix of the two procedures. The revolutionaries make change through existing political institutions and that's what the interviewees believed when they changed the way they participated. The de facto compatibility between the interviewees and their parties allowed them to circumvent the repression of SCAF.

### *Sharing similar views of ideology*

Many interviewees were compatible with their OPPs because of a shared ideology. For example, Nadeen chose ESDP because of its ideology, particularly the segment on recognising and respecting identities and the cultural rights of minorities: 'In the revolution I started to read about political orientations and found that I have a social democratic tendency because social democracy matched my situation as an upper-middle class working woman and a religious minority in society'. This kind of ideology was a source of reassurance for Nadeen after the bombing of the Coptic Church in Alexandria. In its vision of Egyptian society, ESDP espoused a clear ideology of including all identities in its cultural rights, particularly the Christians: 'It is important to appropriate the legislation to build churches and change the current situation, which has led to social problems' (ESDP, 2016, own translation).

Abrar also joined ESDP because of its ideology: 'We need social justice, and that is why I chose ESDP, because of its ideology'. Social justice was one of the demands of revolutionaries in the revolution and an important focus of ESDP: 'The social justice we seek is to correct the social injustice which makes the poor become poorer, preventing social mobility and depriving citizens of the minimum of a decent life' (ESDP, 2016, own translation). Samma (CP) also believes in the liberal ideology of the CP: 'It is natural that when you want to join a political group or organisation, you choose the one that is closest to your views. That was why I chose the CP. It does not categorise people by gender or groups, but as individuals'. The party's programme met Samma's demands for a liberal ideology. The party treats women and young people as individuals, not groups; for example, women have no quota: 'The party does not have a single paragraph in its programme about women or young people. Women and young people are an integral part of the social fabric' (CP, 2013, own translation).

This compatibility has allowed them to de facto escape the repression of SCAF, as they now participate as members of their parties.

To summarise the three subsections: the interviewees reported that they had different motives for why they joined their parties due to their different personal situations. SCAF successfully forced and attracted many revolutionaries to participate in formal politics and adapt a new political environment with newly formed OPPs. Thus, OPPs facilitated the interviewees' sustained participation in the public sphere, but within the assisting role of structural enablement(s).

### **The assisting role of structural enablement(s)**

While most of the interviewees joined their OPPs when they attended seminars and conferences, others joined their OPPs through presidential election campaigns between 2011–2012.

Shaima (ESDP) listened to some ESDP speakers before joining the party in 2011: 'Since the announcement of the constitutional referendum in 2011, I started attending seminars to know whether to say yes or no. I listened to Amr Hamzawy and Galal Amen. The vision of ESDP convinced me, so I joined the party in August 2011'. Another example is Neven (ESDP), who went to a conference with her friend when the party was founded in March 2011: 'One of my friends was a leftist, and her father was one of the co-founders of the party. We attended the party's founding conference, and then I filled out the application to join'. The interviewees enjoyed the inclusionary environment to switch from one political party to another. Hala and Reem switched from one party to another until they found the party that suited them best. Reem describes the period between March and June 2011,

After the revolution, I participated in many volunteer activities, such as anti-harassment activities. Then, I joined ESDP for a year and a half before joining CP. Through our discussions, meetings and conferences, I cultivated political work and established many relationships with many politicians.

Thus, the inclusionary environment increased the space to gain political experience and awareness for Reem and other interviewees.

Other interviewees from SEP joined the party when they participated in the presidential campaign of Aboul Fotouh, who used public conferences to attract his supporters. Heikal, Aboul Fotouh's assistant, says, 'In every governorate, we held a public conference for Aboul Fotouh; a breakthrough has happened with the acceptance of Aboul Fotouh, who met thousands of people'. (BBC, 2012, 'video', own translation). Amena, Entesar, Sana, Hind, Ebtisam, and Ream have all joined SEP's campaign. Amena states,

Before joining SEP in 2012, I was wavering between three parties, CP, SEP and the Egyptian Current Party. The idea of choosing a party came to me later when the political situation became open. I participated in the presidential campaign of Abould Fotouh, which later became a political party.

Sana (SEP) also says, 'I voluntarily participated in Aboul Fotouh's presidential campaign. After the elections, along with many other volunteers, I decided to join SEP.'

We have to keep in mind that informal social networks were not completely absent because some interviewees already came from political families, which made them interested in joining a particular OPP. This situation shows the groups' agency was varied in its power to deal with structural constraints. For the OPP, it was easier to negotiate the structure because SCAF favoured them over social movements.

## Summary

To ensure sustained participation in the public sphere, the interviewees sought to integrate into the political system through the OPPs, while being critical of it. Many interviewees changed the way they participated from informal to formal. Other interviewees joined their parties directly for the same reasons. Then, the interviewees overcame their exclusion on the condition of participation by joining OPPs.

Many interviewees confronted the patriarchal order in their families by redefining their gender roles to participate as political actors. Compared to unmarried women, married women used a negotiation strategy by managing their roles between work, home and politics (Samma). However, those who came from political families – or families that had an interest in politics – were supported to participate through OPPs. Being workers and economically independent was a helping factor in challenging the patriarchal order (i.e. Nedhal) or negotiating the situation within the family. Moreover, the weakness of the patriarchal family played a role for many interviewees to challenge or negotiate their situation.

OPPs played an important role in facilitating the interviewees' participation to avoid repression, especially among married women who were more concerned about their families. Unlike the 6AYM and MB interviewees, the OPPs interviewees preferred to attend seminars, conferences, and meetings. The interviewees were compatible with their OPPs on many themes, including avoiding repression, believing that this was an effective way of participating through OPPs or their ideologies. They enjoyed the inclusionary political environment when SCAF relaxed the control over OPPs between 2011–2012 to restore the political system.

## Visibility through OPPs

This section sets out to answer the second research question, that is, how the interviewees experienced their participation in the public sphere through OPPs.

The section will show that, despite their marginalisation in the public sphere and with the help of their OPPs, the interviewees reported that they felt recognised and empowered in their leadership role in a male-dominated space in the parties. They slightly pushed gender boundaries, compared to the previous period, to expand the space of expression for women in the context of institutional political domain.

In what follows, the first subsection focuses on how the interviewees expanded their visibility by taking positions in their parties. The second section looks at the constraints of this visibility and the third at the strategies that the parties have used to expand the interviewees' visibility.

### **The expansion of visibility through holding a position**

With the exception of Entesar (SEP), the interviewees held positions within their political parties, through which they felt recognised and their leadership roles enlarged in a male-dominated space. Hind (SEP) reports that: 'As the leader of my governorate, I prefer SEP because people in the party believe in qualification as a criterion for leadership'. She felt her qualifications for the leadership role were recognised in a male-dominated domain. Hala (CP) is secretary for membership affairs at CP:

We have many women holding positions; that is not unusual in this party. Before me, Gameela Ismail was the secretary general. Two women were competing for this position, and this was what we expected from the party – a good example for others in Egyptian political life.

Gameela Ismail was an Egyptian politician and a former TV host. This situation allowed Hala to expand her visibility, as she felt empowered when she was recognised in her position. Mona (ESDP) describes her experience of having a position and getting support for it: 'Many people encouraged me because they felt I had skills, abilities and seriousness to be qualified for holding my position'.

The recognition of women's leadership qualifications broke the stereotype that women cannot lead because they are too emotional or lack leadership skills (El Feki, Heilman & Barker, 2017). They redefined the notion of female leadership by attributing it to ordinary women who had no or less experience in public activism and leadership. They challenged the notion that women leaders were only attributed to middle and upper middle-class women with long political and leadership experience.

Indeed, ordinary women actively participated as leaders in all forms of political party organising and decision-making after the 2011 uprising (Pratt, 2020; Muhanna-Matar, 2014; OECD, 2018; Al-Ali, 2012). In this sense, we need to understand this expansion of, first, the role of parties in the application of a democratic process, as perceived by many interviewees, and second, the inclusionary environment in the wake of the uprising.

Regarding the role of the parties, according to most interviewees (with the exception of some who disagreed), the party's role in conducting fair elections and transparent democratic processes paved the way (but was not the only reason) for holding their positions.

Samma (CP) claims, 'In our party, there is an election that helps women hold positions as qualified members. We have Hala Shukralla who became the president of the party'. Hala Shukralla was a leading figure in the party and the first-ever woman to head a political party in Egypt. She was elected president of CP in early 2014 (Pratt, 2020). Nedhal (ESDP) also comments on this issue, 'I was nominated for a position and actually won the election. After a few months, the party had an opening for the middle secretary position, and again, I won the election'. Winning a position in two elections indicates that women did not hold positions by chance but because there were prevailing norms in the party supporting women.

The use of a democratic process has undoubtedly helped some interviewees expand their visibility and overcome constraints like the masculine environment and strongman leadership. The OECD (2018, p. 17) report describes political parties in the post-uprising period as follows:

Most political parties often mainly focus on 'strongman leadership' or a single male figure or personality instead of encouraging broader engagement and input into party leadership. This can serve as a barrier for women seeking to take on a more significant role within a party.

The interviewees also compared what they gained from the democratic process to the previous period during Mubarak's regime. They reported that NDP designed a false democracy by including some OPPs to polish the political system. When I asked Mona why she did not participate in the elections before the uprising, she replied, 'All the elections before the uprising were false and corrupted. I did not think of joining an OPP before the revolution because these groups and the regime were cut from the same cloth'. Ream (SEP) had lost faith in all OPPs and the entire political system before the uprising: 'I rejected the entire political system, including opposition groups that only operated in the background. They were just make-up to beautify the face of the regime'.

However, after the 2011 uprising, the newly formed political parties sought to create a new political environment through which they would restore confidence in the entire political system, particularly in social democratic parties, like ESDP (OECD, 2018, p. 17). The three OPPs emphasised individuals as citizens and as real observers of the democratic process; it is about restoring the sovereignty of the individual instead of the state, which has expanded its power through autocratic regimes. This restoration would take place through a reorganisation of the relations between the state and citizens and society in general. Part of this restoration was the common interest in bringing women into top party positions, for example, prominent figures such as Hoda Elsadda as vice president of ESDP and Hala Shukrallah as president of CP (Kamal, 2016). Whether or not the rhetoric of ideals was used in the documents of the three parties, these ideals were attractive to many interviewees. For example, SEP states in its election manifesto that 'We in SEP have sought to strengthen participatory democracy, which is defined as "the participation of citizens in political decision-making and policy"' (SEP, 2018, own translation).

In its programme, CP challenges the presidential political system of the 1971 constitution because it gives the president all the power without being adequately accountable to the citizens. Therefore,

CP offers a new vision that does not set the state against the people and does not call for antagonism between them. On the contrary, the party is committed to bringing the two into an integrated and equal relationship. (CP, 2013, own translation)

Even though it was too early – because these parties were newly established – for the interviewees and observers to judge whether these ideas were applicable in practice or not, the interviewees were interested in these concepts and wanted to be part of the critical tendency within OPPs towards the old and new political systems. In contrast to the challenging counter-publics of 6AYM and MB, the interviewees were visible through the critical counter-public of OPPs, which was integrated into the political system but critical of the mainstream politics. Following Squires' (2002) understanding of counter-public, the critical counter-public communicates with the dominant public in order to influence it.

We must keep in mind that the role of parties took place in the context of the inclusionary environment and the relaxing of control over some political groups in the wake of the uprising. Neven (ESDP) says, 'The revolution was an opportunity for us to show ourselves and exist, not just as numbers'. I asked her, 'Were there no women before the uprising?' She answered, 'There were, but they were invisible, or rather they were harassed, served others, or were treated like pieces of furniture without influence. Did you see a female minister do anything? You get the sense that they came out from

one box of cartons'. Neven spoke about women within the institutional political system, including OPPs. This situation coincides with the situation that women were poorly represented in formal politics, as reviewed in the background chapter. Hind (SEP) confirms that the uprising empowered women to become more visible:

Before the revolution, the only thing I could do was vote in elections; it was difficult for women to participate in politics because the culture of society did not support women who opposed the regime or participated in politics in general. But the revolution gave women more power than before.

Of course, this does not mean that women did not participate before the uprising, but it was about the general situation overwhelming the institutional political climate, which was perceived as a masculine domain reserved mainly for middle-class women who had a long experience in politics. The uprising empowered women to expand their visibility, but within the vision of the parties and the state's vision of gender policies. This vision and its discourse sought to keep women within the confines of patriarchal, traditional politics of discrimination and marginalisation, even though the interviewees were critical of this vision. The interviewees were aware that women in these political parties should not be used as puppets to polish the face of these political parties.

Thus, the inclusionary environment provided by SCAF to the political parties allowed the interviewees to enlarge their roles in the male-dominated domain of their OPPs. They slightly pushed gender boundaries and overcame, to a moderate degree, their marginalisation within the institutional political domain, but not without constraints.

### **Constraining visibility inside the OPPs**

According to the interviewees, the path to leadership is theoretically open to two main, not mutually exclusive, constraints: gender-based discrimination and the marginalisation of women within their parties.

#### *Gender-based discrimination as a constraint*

Gender-based discrimination is unfair or negative behaviour directed against an individual or group because of their gender, such as a woman not receiving the same opportunities or consideration as a man (Parpart, Connelly & Barriteau, 2000, p. 118). This section focuses on gender-based discrimination within political parties from the interviewees' experience and reports, such as the unfair division of roles between men and women, misrecognition of women's efforts, underestimation of women's



leadership roles, or the different and humiliating treatment of women by their male counterparts.

While all interviewees from ESDP reported that gender-based discrimination exists, other interviewees from SEP and CP said it does not. However, all interviewees have witnessed and agreed that gender-based discrimination exists in their parties in different governorates.

Let us start with some of the ESDP interviewees. Neven says, 'We have a male mentality among some men, so if you are a woman, you can be assaulted by them calling you 'hello sweet cat' or other provocative words like you are a cookie. I think the role of women is underestimated'. Neven resists being labelled soft, weak or emotional because she sees herself as a qualified woman for leadership roles. Adly (2017) points to many psychological factors that constrain women from participating in politics, including the perception of women as soft and weak in a male-dominated space. Some interviewees also report insults to women in their political parties. Neven told me a story about a woman who was slammed by a man from the party, but let me present what Nedhal (ESDP) says about a similar situation:

Our party is not separate from Egyptian society and its privileged male mentality. One day, there was a meeting of the Human Rights Committee. A male member insulted a veiled woman. He started talking and repeating [the insults] in a discriminatory way. So, I decided to call a meeting to clarify the situation. Then we decided to abrogate his membership.

Adly (2017) points out that the dominant masculine culture in society affects the situation of women in Egyptian political parties. Shaima (ESDP) also reports, 'When we had an activity to introduce the party to people on the street, men did not participate, not even the enthusiastic young men. The old men also think that social activities are for women, and politics is only for old men'. The quote explains how many women were serious about making their activism effective to compete with men who thought they were more capable of making politics in an overwhelmingly masculine environment.

In their study examining barriers to women's representation in Central and Eastern Europe CEE – in the fifteen years after the fall of the Berlin Wall – Clavero and Galligan (2005) found that women complained about dismissive comments from their male colleagues. These male members intentionally ignored women when they spoke in meetings or subjected them to other disrespectful behaviour. The authors explained that these behaviours were related to gender stereotypes involving certain notions of feminine and masculine values. This stereotype was associated with the perception that a woman's natural place is at home. In relation to Egypt, researchers point to the existence of gender-based discrimination in political parties after the 2011 uprising,

especially in relation to women in leadership positions (Adly, 2017). In short, Abrar (ESDP) summarises the situation of women in her party:

There are three types of people in this party: those who see the role of women as equal to the role of men, like D. Mohamad Aboulghar. Those who believe that women are important but are not qualified for public work, like two-thirds of male leaders. And those who do not see women as existing at all. They only see women when they need their votes or collect denoted money. They do not believe in women at all.

So, we need to distinguish between some male members at the individual level of interaction in the party and the party's policy against gender-based discrimination (not all parties in Egypt support gender equality in their agenda (OECD, 2018)). The male members of the parties have different backgrounds; many already believed in traditional perceptions concerning women in politics. In short, this gender discrimination constrained women's visibility because it was embedded in the social structure.

However, other interviewees from SEP and CP claim that there is no gender-based discrimination within their parties. When I asked Entesar (SEP) if there was discrimination in this party, she replied, 'Not at all. In the last elections, many women nominated themselves, and they were widely supported by the party, so all but two of the female candidates won'. Mohammed El-Mohandas (member of the secretariat of SEP) says, 'In our party, there is no division of roles between men and women. We have women everywhere, even at the top of the party, in governorates like *al-Qalyubiyah*, and *Asyut* before'. When I asked Hala (CP) the same question, she replied, 'Never. I have no difficulties or discrimination'.

However, interviewing only some women does not tell us everything about the situation of women in their parties. Adly (2017) refers to women who faced various forms of discrimination in Egypt's political parties after the 2011 uprising and whose qualifications were not recognised enough to engage in the same activism as men, for example, to hold positions. When I asked Hoda Elsadda (ESDP) if some women believe that there is no gender-based discrimination in their parties, she said,

Well, this is a very romantic picture. In general, women do not like to see that some friends treat them differently. I know many women who find that they are not called to important meetings by their male colleagues, although the other male colleagues are. Then they wonder why? However, we cannot generalise this fact because political parties are different, and it is difficult to know. In general, there is an exclusionary discourse for women in all political parties, but these parties differ in the extent of this exclusion.

Indeed, all interviewees admitted that there is gender discrimination in their parties, but in other governorates. Nadeen (ESDP) says, 'In Upper Egypt governorates, women

are discriminated against because the party is similar to society, so all social problems are reflected in the party'. Hala reports, 'In other governorates of the party, we receive complaints and hear about frustrated actions against women there'.

I also met many women from CP from other governorates who told me how they were discriminated against because they were women and therefore, they left the Party. The point is that the consensus on gender-based discrimination in other governorates explains that gender-based discrimination exists (with various intensity) in a way that reduces women's visibility and is underpinned by structural constraints.

### *Marginalising women inside their political parties*

Marginalisation is a form of gender-based discrimination that consists of excluding women from positions and accessing decision-making processes because they are women. Despite the situation that women are more represented in the newly formed political parties after the uprising than in the old parties (OECD, 2018), Ezzat (2017) found in her study that in 12 political parties in Egypt, women were less represented compared to men in all the highest leadership positions of the political parties.

This situation also is reflected within the three OPPs, and the interviewees confirm that. For example, Elsadda says, 'Look, I am from ESDP. The party is known for having a good percentage of women in leadership positions, about 30%, but there are cultural factors that hinder women from holding high positions'. Abrar also said,

Look, I joined this party (ESDP), which claims to be the most organised and democratic political party in Egypt. However, women are only 30% represented in the high bureau and only 2% in the high administrative hierarchy. Despite this unfair representation, women work more than men, and we have a women's committee.

Ezzat (2017) points to only nine women among the 36 leaders of the ESDP's leadership body, although the percentage of women in this political party is higher than in other parties. The party also has some high-profile women's rights activists such as Hoda Elsadda (Pratt, 2020). Ezzat (2017) continues that only two women among 11 are in the CP's leading body leaders, and in SEP, it is worse.

Dina Wahba, who led the women's committee in ESDP told Pratt (2020, p. 189) about her struggle with party leaders and resistance to include women in decision-making, 'I was twenty-four, very new to political life, and I would have huge fights with party leaders, basically older men, very experienced, and I don't know how I got the courage. I think it was [because it was] the aftermath of the revolution'. So, transparent democracy and elections are not the whole story to get women into high positions, especially if we understand that democracy is not only an electoral process, but also transparency, equality and respect for minorities. When I asked Neven (ESDP) if there

was democracy in the party, she said, 'No'. I asked again, 'Do you have a voice in the party?' She replied, 'Listen, I do not like to argue about the concept of democracy, because democracy means not only elections, as I understand it, but also processes, transparency, availability of information, and many other things. We do not have those things'.

Democracy may have helped some interviewees hold their positions, but it was not enough, as some interviewees felt marginalised by certain people or leaders in their parties. The interviewees offered three explanations for why women are marginalised from holding high positions.

First, some interviewees believe that the reason for women's marginalisation is their lack of self-confidence, skills, and abilities to assume positions. Ebtisam (SEP) says, 'Many women think that they cannot hold political offices because they lack self-confidence. But that does not mean the party has a male mentality or excludes women from political positions'. In their study, Clavero and Galligan (2005) found that lack of self-confidence, as in, the fear of being called dumb, or lack of motivation were among other barriers to women's representation in Central and Eastern Europe. However, the authors describe these barriers as a societal problem, not just a personal problem, because politics is perceived as a masculine domain.

Consistent with Clavero and Galligan's explanation, the lack of self-confidence, skills, and abilities could be seen as a structural constraint embedded in the political system, not just a problem for women themselves. Some interviewees like Abrar notes that, 'To be fair, women in Egypt have not exercised doing politics because political life in Egypt is rife with bad talk and disgraces the reputation of women who engage in politics. Normally, any woman would distance herself from such a place'.

Second, women are thought of as not able to hold positions because they are primarily mothers, sisters, and wives, which inevitably leads to a lack of time. Neven says, 'We have many women on the party's high board, but they rarely attend meetings because they are busy with their families, especially when they come from governorates outside Cairo'. Lack of time forced many married interviewees, like Abrar, Mona, Nadeen and Samma, to divide their time between household chores, work and politics. However, not every woman was able to solve this problem. Adly (2017) points to functional factors that hinder women from participating in politics in Egypt, namely women's primary role at home to take care of their families. In another study, Clavero and Galligan (2005) found that lack of time was a one barrier to women's representation because women devoted their time to domestic work. This situation put female respondents in a struggle of priorities between politics and family. They felt guilty and regretful when they thought their time in politics was stolen from their time with the family. Again, the authors argue that this obstacle is embedded in the structural

inequalities in the division of social roles between men and women in society. As mentioned, being assigned to the domestic role is seen as a structural constraint.

Third, other interviewees believe that some male leaders discriminate against women, which reduces their chances of obtaining high positions. These leaders believe that promoting women would reduce the party's competitive chances and opportunities to compete with other parties in parliamentary elections. In statistics, the percentage of female candidates in the 2012 parliamentary elections who ran as individuals or through political parties did not exceed 12%. Because of this low percentage, a new law was enacted stipulating that each political party include at least one woman in its list of candidates, but this stipulation is just symbolic because it failed to fulfil its function to increase women's representation (Nazra, 2013a). Shaima (ESDP) confirms this fact:

One day, there was a conference with different parties. I suggested that we put up a woman to speak on behalf the party. Why not? They rejected it because they wanted a well-known male figure in order to be accepted by people. On another day, there was a similar situation at a party press conference. A public figure asked a female candidate not to speak and let him speak instead, but she insisted and did. They did not want to give women a chance to be seen.

One could see this case as a form of misrecognition of women's qualifications as competitors outside the parties. When I asked Neven why it is mostly men who are appointed to high positions, she said, 'Because they contribute to the party to become parliamentary candidates later. That is something of a norm in the party. Youth and women need a quota to be appointed to positions; otherwise, they will be forgotten'. Mona (ESDP) echoes this sentiment: 'When we list candidates in elections, the first victims are women'. The discriminatory role of male leaders corresponds with the fact that female candidates receive less economic support from outside the parties (Nazra, 2013b, p. 13). Therefore, they are likely to receive less support within their political party. Many donors who have supported political parties believe that investing in the campaign of a female candidate is a deal-breaker because people are less inclined to vote for women. Abrar says, 'Women have fewer supporters from outside the party of merchants and businessmen funding women's election campaigns'. Adly (2017; OECD, 2018) points out that many political parties in Egypt remove female candidates from their list because they fear that women do not have broad support in society.

The situation of less supporting women candidates reflects the general election mood in society which discouraged voting to women. According to Nazra's (2013b) report, the general electoral sentiment in society did not support female candidates, especially in newly formed political parties or those that advocate for gender issues. The report goes on to say that in addition to discourses that reject the existence of women in the political domain, the traditional culture in society at large tends to make people, male

or female, reluctant to vote for women. The conservative electoral and political environment, governed by a patriarchal culture, limits the role of women in society and does not create an open public space in which women can exist. Thus, the third explanation could also be seen as a form of structural constraint.

All three explanations for the marginalisation of women are rooted in structural constraints in society. We can say that a dominant cultural patriarchal discourse within the political system discriminates and marginalises women in formal/institutional political parties by controlling the role of women in politics.

However, the interviewees were among those who challenged this cultural patriarchal discourse when they could overcome these constraints, compared to their participation as unaffiliated participants or through other political organisations, with help of their parties' strategies.

### *Dealing with discrimination and marginalisation*

Based on the interviewees' reports and previous studies, the three OPPs have strategies to deal with gender-based discrimination and marginalisation. One strategy used by two of the three parties was the introduction of an informal quota; it was an agreement to a norm – not formally included in the written policies of either party – to provide a certain percentage of positions for women in each election. Another strategy used by all parties was to conduct training courses to empower women in leadership, discussion and debate.

First, some political parties used the informal quota strategy as an incentive method to invest in women's leadership, such as ESDP (Ezzat, 2017; OECD, 2018). Mona (ESDP) states,

The percentage of women in leadership positions is not very high, so we asked for a specific quota. Until now, we could not do it formally because women themselves were afraid of failure. However, we started to raise awareness about the importance of the women's quota. This party became the first and only party to earmark 30% of its high positions for women.

However, Shaima believes the ESDP quota does not help women so much, 'We have many women members in the party, but we found out later that they were relatives of the leaders in the governorates. They brought their wives, sisters, daughters and so on'. 'May I ask why?' I asked. She answered, 'Because they wanted to fill the gap in numbers of women when the elections were held. However, when things got serious, there were no women left to participate in the party's activities'. Shaima's concern might be understood in the relative lack of enthusiasm shown by political parties to support women candidates after the 2011 uprising. Most political parties did not have a clear goal of supporting women in leadership positions or promoting gender equality

(OECD, 2018). Many researchers concluded that quotas do not help women unless there are also structural changes (Adly, 2017). So, we can say that a quota alone is not enough to empower women to hold positions and eliminate their marginalisation.

Second, unlike many political parties in Egypt that show little enthusiasm for training and supporting women – for example, by supporting female candidates during elections (OECD, 2018) – the interviewees say that their political parties have supported them. Their parties offered training to develop their leadership skills and to speak out in public and in the media.

Ebtisam (SEP) says, 'I went to Jakarta with four women to attend a course on women's empowerment and their integration into political life'. This course encouraged Ebtisam to demand more recognition within the party, 'We learned how Indonesian women united to establish their quota system and challenge poverty, illiteracy, and the male mentality. That experience was significant, and I gave seminars in the party to talk about my experience in Jakarta'. Shaima also talks about how some women leaders in ESDP tried to empower other women members to speak to the media, 'Dr Hala El-Sabbagh held a session just for women to give them tips on how to represent the party at TV. El-Sabbagh brought a female director from TV as a trainer, but ten female participants in the session have not been featured on TV until now'.

So, women in ESDP went beyond supporting women through the Women's Committee, which focused on training women to be charity activists in the party and integrating them in all aspects of the democratic movement and decision-making process. Nadia Abdel Wahab, who was in charge of the party's High Committee, Political Office, Executive Office, and Women's Secretariat, told Pratt (2020), who conducted the interview, that they challenged the idea that Women's Committees only 'do charity'. At a meeting Abdel Wahab attended, she said,

[I told the women at the meeting] that our approach as the Egyptian [Social] Democratic Party must be something completely different; we're supposed to be seeking to change women and make them a part of a democratic movement or a movement for the future. (Interview conducted by Pratt (2020, p. 189))

There was a gendered effort through which some women, who have an inclination towards feminist action and consciousness, supported other women within the parties; this corresponds to what Badran (2011) calls embedded feminism in light of new women's activism by ordinary women. ESDP promotes women through positive gender discrimination: 'Using positive discrimination – the aim is to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women and to promote equal opportunities in all types of jobs and wages' (ESDP, 2016, own translation). In other words, the interviewees were aware of the situation of women and attempted to promote it. As for CP, none of the

interviewees talked about courses to improve the quality of their leadership skills. I think that CP, as a liberal party, does not emphasise women as a group but rather as individuals.

In short, both strategies were designed to push women forward to challenge structural constraints and patriarchal cultural discourses, but they were not enough to completely eliminate the discrimination and marginalisation of women. It seems, however, that a promising evolution of the situation of women within political parties and the political system in general was achieved. This development depended on the relations between OPPs and the new military-backed rulers in 2014. Then, OPPs could negotiate the political system to open up a space of appearance in the domain of formal/institutional politics. In this context, and unlike the interviewees from MB and 6AYM – who chose to continue challenging the regime – OPPs interviewees continued to participate in 2014, although they were still critical of the regime.

## Summary

The interviewees reported they experienced expanded visibility when they felt recognised in their enlarged role in the male-dominated space of OPPs. They slightly pushed gender boundaries in the context of the institutional political domain, compared to the context of the revolutionary protests when many of them participated as unaffiliated participants. They redefined the notion of female leadership to be attributed to ordinary women who do not have long experience with political activism and leadership roles.

According to most interviewees, the fair elections and transparent democratic process in their OPPs paved the way for women to take leading roles, even if the measures for democracy were inadequate. These newly formed political parties attempted to create a new political environment by restoring trust between citizens and the political system, providing training and establishing an informal quota for ESDP. However, the role of political parties was not sufficient, as women were still less represented in high decision-making bodies in the three parties.

The interviewees reported they were subjected to gender-based discrimination and marginalisation, but with differences among the three parties. Some interviewees believed that the reasons for women's marginalisation were their lack of self-confidence, skills and abilities, as well as women's primary role in the household, which eventually leads to a lack of time. Some male leaders discriminated against women because investing in women was perceived as a deal-breaker for their parties in competing with other parties. These constraints were profoundly embedded in the social structure in which women are perceived as likely to be soft, weak and having feminine characteristics that do not fit with politics as a male job. With the support of their



parties, some female leaders, and interviewees like Nedhal, also made gendered efforts to promote the situation of women in OPPs. They negotiated the patriarchal/masculine cultural discourse that sought to control their role in the political domain.

The role of OPPs, and their negotiated counter-publics, emerged as part of the inclusionary environment following the uprising and the regimes' relaxing of control over OPPs to integrate them into the assumed democratic process. In this way, the interviewees reported they overcame, to a moderate degree, their marginalisation in the context of their OPPs, especially compared to the previous period and their situation outside their OPPs.

## Conclusion

The chapter shows that the interviewees overcame their exclusion from the public sphere, compared to the pre-uprising period for all, and as unaffiliated participants for many, but on the condition that they participate through OPPs. Through the OPPs' negotiating counter-public – which communicated with the dominant public and mainstream politics – the interviewees sought to integrate into the new political system and its assumed democratic process while they were still critical of it.

Unlike the interviewees of 6AYM and MB, the interviewees of OPPs constructed a critical political subjectivity that formed across networks of political institutions. They negotiated the structural constraints of patriarchal cultural discourse that sought to control their roles within the family, community, and their OPPs. The majority of the interviewees redefined their role within the family to include their political role. Those from the middle-class who had a high degree of autonomy or were employed were more able to cope with their situation. Unlike unmarried women, married women had to manage their roles and prioritise their time between work, home, and politics. Moreover, those from political families were encouraged to participate in formal politics.

Most interviewees changed from informal to formal participation to continue to access the public sphere through attending seminars, conferences, and election campaigns. They reported that they joined OPPs to avoid the regime's repression, to participate safely or because of ideology and effective participation. They enjoyed the inclusionary political environment after the uprising and SCAF's efforts to integrate many revolutionaries into the political system.

The interviewees reported they overcame, to a moderate degree, their marginalisation in the public sphere – compared to the pre-uprising period and other political organisations they had experience with – in the public sphere when they felt recognised

in their enlarged roles by taking positions. They redefined the notion of female leadership for ordinary women activists who did not have long experience in formal and institutional politics. They struggled with structural constraints of discrimination and marginalisation carried out by some of their male counterparts, including leaders and other women.

The cultural environment within OPPs (with differences between parties) was a facilitating factor, but not sufficient to expand the role of women through the use of transparent democracy, informal quotas (ESDP), and the provision of training. The feminist actions and consciousness also were present in gender-specific efforts to support women in two OPPs. OPPs negotiated the public sphere to maintain a space of appearance, in the context of the institutional political domain, to continue to participate rather than lose it, such as 6AYM and MB. They slightly pushed the gender boundaries in the context of the institutional political domain – compared to the context of revolutionary protests as unaffiliated participants – to expand the role of women in the political parties, which was an attempt to restore confidence in the political system.



## Part IV: Participation in the public sphere through civic engagement

Civic engagement is one avenue to participate in the public sphere as a counter-public (Lang, 2013; Ekman & Amnå, 2012): ‘Civic engagement refers to how citizens participate in the life of a community to improve conditions for others or to help shape the community’s future’ (Gogging & Adler, 2005, p. 236). In its broad meaning, civic engagement is depicted as political participation (Ekman & Amnå, 2012) to influence the political system and situation. In an authoritarian state, like Egypt during Mubarak’s regime, civil society may be transformed into an alternative forum for deliberation and discussion when the regime’s repression restricts the political domain (Albrecht, 2008).

Before the uprising, civic engagement was a way to exercise citizenship, as the political domain of the public sphere was restricted (Ibrahim & Hunt-Hendrix, 2011). Meanwhile, the 2000s civil society has cemented the terrain for the rapid proliferation, but controlled, non-government organizations (NGOs) that rely on voluntary, youth-led activism with very few staff (Sparre & Petersen, 2007; Ibrahim & Hunt-Hendrix, 2011). As mentioned in the Background chapter, the growth of youth-led NGOs collaborated with social movements and opened new outlets for dissent to express their critical views against the power structure (Ibrahim & Hunt-Hendrix, 2011). This situation opened up the door for invigorating the civil society after the 2011 uprising with the creation of thousands of NGOs, projects, and initiatives (OECD, 2018), and many of them carried out new forms of voluntary activism, such as action-oriented forms and coalitions between them (Abdelmonem & Galán, 2017; Skalli, 2014).

The layout analysis in this part is generally divided into two chapters. The first emphasises the theme of SH and how anti-harassment initiatives have highlighted it as a counter-status in the public sphere. The second chapter addresses women’s issues as a counter-status through graffiti art on the walls of downtown Cairo.



## *Chapter 7:*

# Women's participation in the public sphere through two anti-harassment initiatives

This chapter sets out to understand how the interviewees participated in the public sphere as anti-harassment counter-publics and how they experienced this participation.

The chapter shows that the interviewees overcame their exclusion to gain access the public sphere on the condition that they participate via the anti-harassment initiatives. They constructed a gendered subjectivity with a feminist consciousness and developed agency to resolve many structural constraints. They sought to escape the dominant patriarchal Islamist and state secular discourses that sought to control women's bodies in their struggle against Western cultural hegemony. By raising an alternative narrative that focused on women's bodies and sexuality, they found new forms of action-oriented activism.

The interviewees overcame, to a moderate degree, their marginalisation in the public sphere as participants and through SH as topic. They enlarged their role in the streets to push gender boundaries in the context of negotiating patriarchy and masculine gender norms in the public space. Through the two initiatives and its negotiating counter-public, the interviewees emphasised the inviolability of women's bodies by cultivating people and changing social norms to reject SH within the framework of the state's vision of gender policies, while they were critical to this vision. They have thus made an improvement and precarious achievements in removing SH from society.

This chapter analyses twelve interviews with women activists (including two men from staff) from two prominent anti-harassment initiatives. The first initiative is the 'I Saw Harassment' (ISH), founded in 2012 after the uprising in 2011. The initiative found supporters and followers during demonstrations in the streets. It operated under the umbrella of the organisation, ACT, which also sponsors other initiatives such as Fouda Watch – monitoring violations against women in mass media. ISH was awarded

the title of 'Egyptian Warrior Against Corruption' by Egyptians Against Corruption in 2013 (along with Op Anti-Sexual Harassment/Assault).

The second initiative is the Harassment Map (HarassMap), founded in 2010 to document SH pre-uprising incidents in an innovative interactive map on the internet. HarassMap highlighted SH on TV, mass media, social media, and between ordinary people in the public space. The HarassMap collaborated with several local organisations such as Nazra and international organisations such as the Goethe Institute (HarassMap, 2017a).

## Challenging the dominant discourse

Before and after the 2011 uprising, SH was a controversial topic and a point of contestation in the public sphere between the dominant and anti-harassment discourses. Fraser (1990, p. 71) argues that what counts as a common concern of discussion in the public sphere is decided precisely through discursive contestation between participants: 'Only participants themselves can decide what is and what is not of common concern to them'. Both the dominant and anti-harassment discourses were inherently a political process that fell between denying and recognising SH as a topic in the public sphere. In her dissertation on the account of anti-harassment activism in Egypt, Abdelmonem (2016) argues that despite the early activism of ECWR and HarassMap, which depoliticised SH – for which they were criticised – their efforts to combat SH were inherently embedded in the political process and dominant discourse.

By dominant discourse, I mean the attitude of the state, Islamists and conservatives who deny SH as a widespread phenomenon in society, believing that SH occurs here and there in isolated cases. This attitude is underpinned by the patriarchal and masculine state to control women's bodies in the public sphere. According to Rizzo, Price and Meyer (2012), the state strives to reinforce neopatriarchal social norms by enacting discriminatory laws against women to control them. The state is pressured by Islamists and other conservatives to maintain neopatriarchal social norms and practices to keep women under control, primarily by tying them to the family and also blamed them for their subjection to SH.

The dominant discourse sought to exclude SH from being openly discussed in the state-controlled mass media. Fraser (1990) points out that the dominant political discourse has powerful terms to legitimise and delegitimise interests, topics or concerns that determine public discussion in the public sphere. Langohr (2013, p. 24) argues, 'During Mubarak's rule, it was impossible for survivors to accuse government forces or loyalists of sexual abuse'. According to Rizzo, Price and Meyer (2012, p. 646), 'The

vagueness of laws against sexual harassment made it difficult for ECWR to agitate for enforcement without being shut down'. The regime believed that speaking openly about SH would damage Egypt's reputation (Rizzo, Price & Meyer, 2012), which could negatively impact Egyptian tourism as one of the country's main sources of the national revenue (Amar, 2011; Langohr, 2013). In 2008, the Ministry of Tourism (as the Ministry of Interior did before) criticised the ECWR second survey of the Clouds in Egypt's Sky's (Mohammad, Shoukry & Abul Komsan, 2008) study about SH in Egypt in Al-Ahram newspaper. The criticism was aimed at how the study suggested that SH was only a problem of single incidents and not yet a social phenomenon, as the survey was limited in its sample size (Rizzo, Price & Meyer, 2012). A law explicitly criminalising SH was drafted in 2010 but failed to pass after being dismissed in parliament after the uprising of 2011.

Since the 2011 uprising, rampant SH and other related issues, such as gender-based violence, have become a distinctly urgent topic in the public sphere (Abdelmonem & Galán, 2017; Skalli, 2014). Between 2011–2012, SCAF denied that SH had occurred on a large scale, but only isolated incidents that occurred here and there. The state's denial was an attempt to courtesy and accommodate the conservative groups of those who rejected the state's modern profile (Rizzo, Price & Meyer, 2012). At the time, the state-controlled media had intentionally excluded, though not completely, the SH issue from its coverage (El-Ibiary, 2017). During Morsi's tenure (2012–2013), the phenomenon continued to be denied. The Human Rights Committee of the Shura Council blamed women for being subjected to SH for mingling with men in demonstrations (FIDH, et al. 2013).

In her investigation of media coverage of sexual assault against women between 2011–2015, El-Ibiary (2017, p. 49) argues, 'The local media predominantly keeps attacking victims of street violence and sexual harassment, holding them responsible for being harassed'; it viewed the state's attitude towards gender-based violence and SH in its coverage.

During El-Sisi's tenure (2013–2014), the state reproduced the same discourse with some changes to associate SH with honour and shame, rather than a matter of human rights as the anti-harassment campaign sought to do (Pratt, 2020, p. 207). El-Sisi stated, 'Our honour is being assaulted in the streets. This is unacceptable, and we can't allow one more incident like this to happen' (Kingsley, 2014). During the period of El-Sisi's inauguration as president in June 2014, while the anti-harassment movement, as in, ISH and HarassMap, reported many SH incidents, the regime, including its media and aligned mass media, accused MB of doing so to spoil Egyptians' joy of El-Sisi's inauguration as president (Abbas, 2017).

However, the anti-harassment discourse proclaimed that SH is an escalated social phenomenon; it was held by the anti-harassment movement, which consisted of



initiatives, NGOs, political activists, journalists and academics, highlighted SH as a topic in the public sphere (Rizzo, Price & Meyer, 2012; Elsadda, 2011; Kirollos, 2016). Anti-harassment activism used reports and studies to underpin its claim. In a comprehensive study conducted by UN Women in 2013, a total of 99.3% of women in Egypt experienced being subjected to some form of SH, regardless of their class, dress, age, and marital status, and 91% of them reported feeling unsafe on the streets, which could be attributed to SH (El Deeb, 2013). In an early sociological study called '*Clouds in Egypt's Sky*' in 2008, a total of 86% of women had experienced exposure to SH (Mohammad, Shoukry & Abul Komsan, 2008, p. 10). Based on the same study (2008, p. 10), the anti-harassment movement found that 'the vast majority of women did nothing when confronted with sexual harassment, which is one of the most difficult obstacles to overcoming sexual harassment, as it is therefore "silenced" or "covered up"'.

Therefore, the anti-harassment movement sought to highlight SH as a topic in the public sphere through demanding that the state and its institutions, mass media, and society recognise SH as a social phenomenon and take responsibility and action against it (Abdelmonem & Galán, 2017; Rizzo, Price & Meyer, 2012). The anti-harassment discourse emerged, initially before the 2011 uprising, in the alternative spaces of the blogosphere and on social media sites. The discourse was also addressed in the independent mass media, far from state-controlled mass media (Langohr, 2013; Rizzo, Price & Meyer, 2012).

Prior to the 2011 uprising, the anti-harassment movement mostly employed a top-down strategy, for example, ECWR's project, to largely focus on changing laws, documenting incidents (some activists used mass and social media), monitoring media, raising awareness, publishing information, influencing authorities, and suggesting laws to criminalise harassers (Rizzo, Price & Meyer, 2012; Abdelmonem & Galán, 2017). Since the 2011 uprising, SH has become less taboo to talk about, but there is still room for improvement in how it is discussed in the mass media, social media, academic circles and public discourses in Egypt (Langohr, 2013). However, SH was still a relatively unspoken topic among women who face SH on a daily basis, even in private domains such as the family (Kirollos, 2016).

Abdelmonem and Galán (2017), as well as other scholars such as Skalli (2014; and Pratt, 2020), observed that with the invigorating of civil society, many initiatives (some started before the uprising, such as HarassMap in 2010) were launched and employed new forms of action-oriented activism to combat SH. These initiatives sought to speak directly to people, monitor mass media and social media, analyse drama productions, support offended women to speak out, reach people on the streets, provide courses and protect offended women on the ground. In short, they form an anti-harassment counter-public to present SH as a topic in the public sphere. Asen (2000) argues that a

topic can be classified as counter status if it sets out to critique mainstream opinion, narrative, perception or dominant public in the public sphere.

In this spectrum, the interviewees became part of the counter-public represented by the two anti-harassment initiatives to combat SH. The anti-harassment counter-public seemed to be a negotiating counter-public, if we use Squires' (2002) understanding of several counter-publics, as it criticised, communicated, and negotiated the dominant discourse and its public only in relation to SH, without provoking the regime or the political system in general.

## Becoming part of the anti-harassment counter-publics

This section is about understanding how the interviewees differed in their trajectories to become part of the anti-harassment counter-publics, –in respectively subsections – before the 2011 uprising and after the uprising, between 2011–2013.

### **The counter-public before the uprising of 2011**

In October 2006, on the first day of the three-day *Eid al-Fitr* holiday, a large mob of young men harassed and assaulted small groups of women in downtown Cairo after they were prevented from entering a cinema to see a movie with a well-known dancer and actress (Rizzo, Price & Meyer, 2012). The incident was filmed on cell phones and broadly broadcasted via YouTube by bloggers, such as the well-known blogger Wael Abbas (Rizzo, Price & Meyer, 2012). This very infamous incident opened a new outlet for dissenters and activists to form anti-harassment counter-public (Kirollos, 2016). Many NGOs launched projects and held workshops to raise SH as a topic in the public sphere (Rizzo, Price & Meyer, 2012). For example, between 2008 and 2010, a project called the 'Taskforce' was created and consisted of 23 NGOs (Kirollos, 2016). These projects provided a platform for HarassMap to begin using an innovative method of putting each incident in an integrative map on the internet to show when and where SH incidents occurred.

Nora and Ahlam became part of this anti-harassment counter-public. I will present Nora as an example because Nora and Ahlam used similar strategies.

Nora (HarassMap) comes from a middle-class family living in a governorate in Upper Egypt. She first noticed that SH was being discussed online in 2010 when she was studying in Cairo:

When I was at university in Cairo, I was tired of being exposed to SH, but I did not know what to do about it. I was afraid to talk to others about SH because it was

something considered taboo. I started searching on the internet and saw HarassMap's announcement on Twitter that they were looking for volunteers. I sent my CV and my application to join.

'Can I ask why?' I asked, and she replied, 'I wanted to get over my fear and get out of my comfort zone to talk about SH. It was a challenge to talk to strangers about SH'. I asked, 'When was that?' She said, 'In 2010, before the revolution, when I moved to Cairo to study at the university'. It seems that Nora has just started a new way of dealing with herself and SH, but in Cairo, not in her hometown. When she decided to speak out, she wanted to share her concerns with others. It was thus a crucial moment in the process of constructing her gendered subjectivity.

A gendered subjectivity is when a woman activist perceives herself as being in a position to advocate for women's rights and concerns (Rebughini, 2014). This is happening in the world of reflexivity to form a new arrangement of gender (Adkins, 2003) after exposing to SH. When I asked if she had been exposed to SH, she replied, 'Yes, a lot'. 'So, how do you avoid SH?' I asked, and she replied,

I cannot tell you exactly because I am exposed to SH in different situations; therefore, I prefer not to use the word (avoid). Instead, I used to use the words 'safe option'. I cried silently when exposed to SH. I grew up to walk like soldiers who marched without turning my head to the side to see. My eyes only looked forward; we looked like we were running like a horse to avoid looking to the side, with our heads bent to avoid being stared at by others.

Suffering from SH shaped Nora's life and, to a great extent, determined the way she thought, felt, and acted whether alone or among people. This way of living negatively impacted her psyche and was reflected in her everyday interactions, such as her sensitivity to those around her. One of the essential findings of Mohammad, Shoukry and Abul Komsan's (2008, p. 17) study was that SH has serious 'psychological repercussions such as a deep sense of anger, fear, pain, embarrassment, shame and turmoil, confusion and inability to act, and finally depression'. Nora goes on to tell how she changed from a person with negative feelings to an active person:

Later, I got tired of doing nothing, and I did not want to stay a negative person any longer. I thought, 'then I have to do something'. At least I wanted to fight back. I decided to volunteer to make a difference and not stay at home. I was ridiculed because I felt I did not belong on the streets anymore and was afraid to go from A to B; that scared me. Then, I said, 'Stop'.

At this point, Nora realised that she was excluded from speaking out publicly about SH, and she decided to challenge that situation. She no longer saw herself as a victim

but as an active person when she contacted HarassMap in Cairo rather than in her hometown.

Nora inherited much of her knowledge of public activism from her father, who volunteered in her city, 'It was difficult to address SH in my city. Instead, I volunteered for various social issues. I found myself in movie theatres or teaching children. I was cultivated to be a volunteer'. Unlike other interviewees, her gendered subjectivity and agency were developed in such a way that she participated in civic engagement as a social actor rather than a political actor. Nora's voluntary activism was thus political, but it was addressed in purely cultural terms, as Melucci (1996) suggests.

The role of HarassMap facilitated Nora to participate in a frame of anti-harassment collective action. In this way, Nora overcame her exclusion in speaking up about the SH issue.

### **The counter-public after the uprising of 2011**

At the time of the 2011 uprising, a novel coalition of anti-harassment movement activists formed a counter-public to highlight SH as a topic in the public sphere (FIHD, 2013; Rizzo, Price & Meyer, 2012; Abdelmonem & Galán, 2017). The rest of the interviewees became part of this counter-public between 2011–2013. I will present Nermeen (ISH) and Manal (HarassMap) as two cases.

Nermeen (ISH) was one of the co-founders of ISH. She comes from a middle-class family, is a university student with a job, and had a lot of experience in public activism before 2011. She says, 'During the revolution, there were SH incidents and collective harassment against women. At the beginning of the revolution, it was not so widespread, but it did happen'. These incidents, and her previous participation in women's issues in general, motivated Nermeen to form a network of men and women to combat SH:

In 2011, together with many women, I started a campaign called *Itksfu* (Be a shame). We were so many protesting against the regime because a woman was killed after being exposed to SH. We decided, along with many other groups, like *Fouda Watch*, *Itksfu*, *Shar' Wa'i* (aware street) and an association called *Hiah* (she), to unite our efforts and form a big group against SH. On 4 October, in 2011, we sat down together, me, Fathi Farid and Janet, and another woman activist, to form ISH in 2012.

The situation of invigorating civil society after the uprising allowed many action-oriented anti-harassment groups to form and cooperate with newly launched initiatives, projects, and many former NGOs to exercise their activism (OECD, 2018, p. 19; Abdelmonem & Galán, 2017, p. 155).

Nermeen constructed her gendered subjectivity of self-awareness and willingness to change the situation because she had long been exposed to SH: 'Honestly, I was exposed to the first major SH incident when I was in the fifth grade of primary school. I was just ten years old then. After that, my father encouraged me not to be quiet. He was not an activist, but a revolutionary person'. Exposing SH at a young age was a painful experience, she told me, and left a deep wound in her soul. However, her father's supportive attitude was a remedy through which she transformed these feelings to assert her agency and take action against SH when the opportunity arose.

Nermeen's experience with public activism predates the uprising: 'In 2010, after the rigged elections, we formed a group called *Miṣriyah Hurah* (Free Egyptian Woman)'. Participating in voluntary public activism gave Nermeen an excellent opportunity to speak out publicly during the uprising, 'The revolution gave us the advantage of being together because it made sure like-minded people came together to organise, like Islamists, feminists and liberals'.

The second example is from Manal (HarassMap), who comes from a middle-class family and lives in a governorate in the Nile Delta of Lower Egypt. Manal lives in Cairo as a university student and volunteer with HarassMap:

I knew about the initiative when I saw Ebaa (a member of HarassMap) on TV on Bassem Youssef's programme (*Albernameg*)<sup>7</sup>. She talked about HarassMap, and then I told my best friend about my desire to join HarassMap at the university. I already had experience with volunteer activities, but I suggested doing something about SH in my hometown; we were the first ever to do it there.

Langohr (2013, p. 24) points out that independent TV channels became an outlet to talk about SH and feature stories of survivors who shared their personal experiences because SH became less taboo in the aftermath of the 2011 uprising.

Before joining HarassMap, Manal constructed the gendered subjectivity of her feelings and thoughts against SH, 'I thought a lot about SH and why it happened. I did research on the internet to understand SH and participated in research and interviewed women on the street'. Like other interviewees, Manal shared with other interviewees and many women in general the experience of being subjected to SH. Friedman and McAdam (1992) argue that the experience of sexism leads women to recognise the common fate between them as a group. A woman might think that 'what happens to the group happens to me'. Integrating personal and social experiences of discrimination might make a group, such as women who share the collective concern of being exposed to SH, more likely to take collective action against SH. For Manal,

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<sup>7</sup> *Albernameg* is a very Egyptian popular news satire TV programme by Bassem Youssef and broadcasted on different independent TV channels like MBC, Miṣr, DW, CBC and OnTV Egypt.

exposure to SH was associated with feelings of shame, worry, and fear for all women, 'I did not tell my family about the SH I faced because I was afraid, and I thought they could not do anything anyway'.

Manal became part of this counter-public after moving to Cairo to study and do public activism that gave her the expertise to participate in combating SH: 'After the revolution, I volunteered at the university and at a conference called "Mission", for education development, in TEDx and another activity called "Save". HarassMap 's role was important in recruiting Manal, 'Through HarassMap, I gained a new perspective on women's freedom and autonomy. Then I was able to speak out about SH'. The transformation of the media landscape played a crucial role when independent mass media such as TV took more space in addressing and criticising the regime and its policies related to the SH issue.

## Summary

The interviewees became part of the anti-harassment counter-publics before and after the uprising. All the interviewees constructed a gendered subjectivity after SH negatively affected their thinking, feelings, appearance and psyche. They decided to stop being silent anymore, but they realised that they were excluded from speaking out publicly about SH because it was perceived as a taboo. All the interviewees had already participated in voluntary activism, which gave them the skills to participate and fight SH. They, for example, Nora and Ahlam, used the internet to obtain information or recruitment. Further, independent TV channels played a remarkable role in mobilising some interviewees, such as Manal. Moving to Cairo from other provinces was a good way for many of the interviewees to fight against SH, for example, in the cases of Manal and Nora, who were then away from the pressure of their family and community.

The availability of the anti-harassment initiatives was also significant for giving the interviewees a platform to speak up about SH. The interviewees and the two initiatives acted in the context of transforming the media landscape, for example, the internet for Nora, and invigorating civil society during the uprising to raise awareness for all by creating networks like Nermeen did, thus breaking new ground for action-oriented forms of activism.

## Participation through the anti-harassment initiatives

This section sets out to understand how two anti-harassment initiatives accessed the public sphere.

The section will show that the interviewees overcame their exclusion from the public sphere, but on the condition that they participate via the two initiatives. Most of the interviewees redefined SH as a public issue when they challenged or negotiated their situation within their families, as some interviewees' families supported them. The two initiatives offered a way to highlight the notion of inviolability of women's bodies and a new form of action-oriented activism that stood apart from the traditional type of activism. The transformation of the media landscape and invigorating of civil society after the uprising facilitated interviewees' access to the public sphere.

In the following, I present constraints from inside the family, the two anti-harassment initiatives' roles in facilitating the interviewees' participation, and the assisting role of structural enablement(s) in this facilitation.

### The situation inside the family

Based on their reports, the interviewees' families varied between objection, discouragement and support for the interviewees to participate in anti-harassment activism. I will give one example for each attitude.

Regarding the objecting attitude, Nadja's family (with the exception of her mother) tried to prevent her from joining ISH out of fear of the regimes' repression (between 2011–2013): 'My family was against my participation in the struggle against SH because they were afraid that I could not withstand the security forces or anyone who might harass me'. The family's attitude can be understood in the context of the antagonistic situation and harassment of women in the aftermath of the uprising:

They saw what security forces did to women on Tahrir. I was there when the military stripped a woman in a very well-known incident called *sit al-banāt*. Afterwards, my parents locked the door of my room and told me, 'What could we have done if you were in that woman's place? What would happen if you were naked on the Tahrir?'

The incident of *sit al-banāt* (the best of girls) or the 'blue bra incident' occurred on 17 December 2011, when a woman was stripped by the army during a demonstration (Kirolos, 2016). Thousands of disappointed and angry women and men organised several demonstrations marched in the city center against SCAF and chanted, '*banāt Miṣr khat aḥmar*' ('The daughters of Egypt are a red line') (Kirolos, 2016; Tadros, 2016).

The family thought Nadja was a weak person who could not defend herself. However, the mother stands by Nadja, which strengthened her position by helping her to challenge the patriarchal order of the rest of the family:

They told me, 'How can you change anything; you are just a young woman?' They perceived me as weak by nature and that I could not face the police alone. Everyone in the family was against me except my mother. I want to tell you something strange, my mother was on my side. She did not know much about politics, but she encouraged me to carry on. She was afraid, but I saw how she swallowed her fear.

Nadja appreciated her mother's noble attitude in standing by her side until she joined ISH in 2013: 'I realised that if I would continue to participate, there would be more conflicts. I participated many times without telling them. I participated to revolt against the patriarchal system at home and the taboos set by society and the political system.' Nadja was aware that she was challenging the patriarchal order of her family, community, political system and society in general. She insisted on challenging everyone, including her friends and neighbours who did not understand the idea of pointing out SH: 'My friends told me that I am weak as a woman. They asked me, "Why do you care about SH?" I answered, "Why do you cry out when you are harassed?"'.

Nadja was economically independent because she worked as a journalist and had insight into what was going on in the political domain. She also has experience with political participation; when she participated in the first days of the uprising, she was injured twice: 'I participated in the first days of the uprising. I was injured twice and arrested once'. As a result, Nadja redefined her role at home to include public activism to combat SH.

Regarding the discouraging attitude, Manal and Nora were among those who were discouraged by their families. While Manal was negotiating, Nora was challenging her situation. Manal's father neither rejected nor encouraged her, but her mother supported her:

My parents did not reject my voluntary activism in the fight against SH, but my brothers and sister were against it. They believed that women should not deal with such sensitive issues. We live in a conservative society where women are restricted by blemish/shame – *'ayb*. My brothers and sister also asked me, 'Are you not ashamed to talk publicly about SH? You are a woman'.

Langohr (2013) points out that survivors of SH challenged the belief that talking about SH was a source of shame in Egypt.



The way Manal describes her family was likely dominated by masculine and patriarchal norms – even among women, as in, her sisters. ‘How did you respond to your brother?’ I asked her, and she replied, ‘I said to my brother, “You should support me instead”. He thought like other young men in the city. They have typical male mentality’. Manal describes her community as dominated by masculine and patriarchal norms that have resonated in her family:

My family has repressed me from expressing myself because of tradition, culture and religious practice. My large family of relatives and neighbours treat men and women differently. As a woman, I cannot travel without permission, dress the way I want, go to places that are considered not appropriate for women, make friends with men and talk to men. Certainly, my brother has more permission than I do.

Manal, however, has other ambitions and ways of thinking, ‘I would like to work to support myself and become independent, but my father refused that. He says I should focus on my studies, and now I depend on my father, which partly affects my self-determination’. These efforts put Manal’s enthusiasm into action by highlighting SH as a public issue, not a private one related only to women.

The idea of associating public issues with masculinity and private issues with femininity is embedded in many different societies, including Egypt's (Adly, 2017). According to Fraser (1998, p. 314), ‘The meaning of boundaries of publicity depends at every point on who has the power to draw the line between public and private’. Manal negotiated the masculine gender norms in her family that set the boundaries of what is public and private between men and women. Thus, she negotiated the public/private distinction through redefining what is meant by public to include SH.

We can say that Manal has negotiated the situation within her patriarchal family: ‘My family does not know that I only put on my veil when I am in my hometown. I am sure that if I tell them, it will cause a conflict’. According to Hafez (2014, p. 178) ‘The practice of veiling in Muslim societies, for instance, is one such comportment perceived as a religious requirement for women to enter the public sphere in acceptable ways’. So, Manal made a small change within the limits of the masculine and patriarchal restrictions to redefine her role by including the role of combating SH. The patriarchal family also seemed weak due to the rift between her mother and father. She lives alone in Cairo to study, which allows her to live more independently, even if she is not economically independent.

Other families, however, encouraged the interviewees, like Faten, Sura, and Nermeen, or the family remained silent, like Ahlam’s family. Many of these families perceived combating SH as a non-political issue. None of the interviewees needed a strategy to participate or redefine SH as a public issue. They were able to talk openly about SH as an issue. I will introduce Ahlam and Nermeen as examples.

Ahlam (HarassMap) reports, 'Honestly, my family had no objection to my activities. I am a very lucky person because my family never interfered in my decisions, including fighting SH'. I asked her, 'Why do you say you are lucky?' and she replied, 'because Egyptian family does not give women space to do what they want to do'. Ahlam also moved to Cairo from another governorate and has worked for international organisations, so she is economically independent.

Nermeen (ISH) was also supported by her father. She is economically independent and has a high degree of autonomy, having lived alone in downtown Cairo since she was seventeen:

My father told me, 'If you are subjected to SH, you have to react and fight back. Do not be afraid. He describes offended women like street cats that are subjected to beating and rape'. He said, 'You should not accept being treated like a street cat. You have to go to the police. If you give up and do not report the harasser, I will never count on you as my daughter'.

All the interviewees who were supported by their families did not feel the need to challenge the gender norms that seemed flexible enough to include activism against SH as a public issue. They participated in fighting SH through the role of the two initiatives and after the 2011 uprising.

In summary, most of the interviewees redefined the gender role, which paved the way to fight against SH. On the other hand, the uprising facilitated the effort to combat SH, through which the interviewees challenged the distinction between what was perceived as public and private to highlight SH as a public issue.

### **Joining the two anti-harassment initiatives**

The interviewees' stories show the main components that underpin the compatibility between the two partners: the emphasis on the notion of inviolability of women's bodies and participation through new forms of action-oriented activism.

#### *Women's bodies as a topic*

During the uprising, women's bodies were politicised in the midst of political struggle between different political actors (Hafez, 2015). They became a point of contestation between the desires of individuals and collective social pressures, such as those related to honour and authentic national symbols (Singerman, 2013a). The two initiatives tried to depoliticise women's bodies and make people perceive women's bodies as something private, not public, and to be respected and protected.

All the interviewees reported that they chose the two initiatives to protect the inviolability of women's bodies during and after the uprising. Ahlam (HarassMap) says,

I would say SH has a very negative psychological effect on me. I feel like someone has invaded my private space and taken away my rights. I assume I exist in the street as an invisible person, but when harassers commit SH, they make me visible. Then, I become more conscious of my body in an embarrassing way; I feel more sensitive to the people around me.

Becoming more conscious of her body increases stress and anxiety, which affects her psyche (Mohammad, Shoukry & Abul Komsan, 2008). Nermeen also expresses her experience of interacting with women in the slums, 'When we did our activities in the slum, I found that SH oppressed women and made them hate their bodies and eventually their womanhood. I often hear what many women say ("I wish I were a man")'. Thus, exposure to SH negatively alters women's relationship with their bodies; they would perceive their bodies as a source of shame and as publicly available.

The interviewees aspired to have a safe body to be private, not public, in a safe public space. I asked Manal why she participated through HarassMap. She replied, 'I volunteer with HarassMap for a safe society, and we are working to change people's minds about a woman's body as a private, not public, issue'. Manal affirms that, 'I do not want anyone to violate my privacy in terms of anything, for example, my body, clothes, thoughts, behaviour, and any non-physical violation; it is about everything related to my freedom. I want to feel free and safe on the streets'. Sura (ISH) also describes SH: 'SH is an insult to women because they feel like their bodies become public property to anyone on the street'. Therefore, through the two initiatives, they sought to redefine the perception of a woman's body as private and not public.

The two initiatives – among many activists and advocacy groups – place the inviolability of a woman's body at the centre of their projects. On its website, HarassMap presents a strategy to make the public space and other institutions such as universities and workplaces safe for women's sociability and integrity. This strategy includes three steps: cultivating people to believe that committing SH is a crime, inducing individuals to take action against harassers, and changing social norms from negligence to rejecting SH. HarassMap describes its mission accordingly, 'Our mission is to build a society that guarantees the safety of all people from sexual and gender-based violence' (HarassMap, 2017b). In a leaflet (Fig. 1), HarassMap write (in Arabic), 'Do not give up your rights if someone violates your body or personal space. Take a positive stance and stand up to sexual harassment' (own translation).



**Figure 1.** The leaflet brought from HarassMap headquarter in 2014

ISH also talked to people, and tried to change their mindset about women's bodies. During the political upheaval and demonstrations, ISH's press releases portrayed SH as terrorism against women's bodies: 'The demonstrations that took place from 28 June to 30 July against Morsi and MB in Egypt. Do not use the bodies of women and girls to kill the revolution' (ISH, 2017, own translation).

Accordingly, both the interviewees and the two initiatives were compatible with highlighting the notion of the inviolability of women's bodies in a way that facilitated the interviewees to access to the public sphere.

#### *New forms of action-oriented activism*

Unlike many human and women's rights organisations and feminist NGOs that proposed to change laws, document incidents, monitor the media, and raise awareness (Rizzo, Price & Meyer, 2012), the new action-oriented initiatives, among them HarassMap and ISH, relied on voluntary groups of men and women who took to the streets with several direct actions against SH (Abdelmonem & Galán, 2017). These initiatives sought to reach people through directly talking to them, protect women during demonstrations, and rescue victims when they are surrounded by harassers in the so-called circle of hell (Fig. 2).



**Figure 2.** Graffiti for the circle of the hell by Mira Shihadeh (WOW, 2015d)

I asked Nadja, ‘Why ISH in particular?’ She replied, ‘Because ISH definitely works on the ground and directly with people. This seemed to be a new way to deal with SH because most older women’s movements did not work on the streets. I believe in street-level activities’. Sura also says, ‘I was interested in ISH because they are actively working in the streets and not just sitting at home fighting SH on Facebook’. The interviewees wanted to take action against SH to express their anger in the same place they were exposed to it.

The two initiatives used statistical facts in the studies to underpin their decision to use this strategy. They found that 88% of SH happened in public places, including streets, public transportation, parks, and clubs (Mohammad, Shoukry & Abul Komsan, 2008, p. 10). Therefore, ISH states that it works in the streets and public squares to deter SH by reaching out to people. For example, ISH’s press release states, ‘The initiative also affirms that it will be present on the ground from 12:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m. on July 28, 29 and 30, 2014 in Cairo downtown and its surroundings as well as *Kafr al-Shaykh* city in the Delta’ (ISH, 2017). Indeed, Farid (the director of ISH) points out that

We started in 2012 and conducted a small field study at that time to see the reality of SH in downtown Cairo. The results shocked us, because it was terrible. We registered 50 incidents in one day in a tiny area. So, we realised that only documenting SH incidents was not enough in the terrible reality to eliminate SH. To achieve this, we started a course to train a group of volunteers with the support of ACT.

I asked Faten (ISH), ‘What you do on the streets?’ She replied,

We encourage women and talk to men. We tell women not to be passive when they are subjected to SH and inform them of their rights to walk safely on the street without being harassed, to defend themselves in times of need. We also help women who are being harassed by taking them to a safe place. We offer legal help if they want to report the harasser to the police station.

Faten joined ISH because of a well-known incident when a group harassed a woman, 'I joined the initiative because of an incident involving the daughter of a feminist activist. She was exposed to SH when a group of harassers tried to kidnap and rape her in Tahrir Square. ISH rescued her, and that motivated me to join ISH'. The report on this incident was published by Amnesty International (2013), which mentioned ISH as one of many anti-harassment initiatives that conducted rescue operations during the mass protests in Tahrir Square to help offended women in the circle of hell.

Figure 3 shows ISH's widely distributed leaflet. It illustrates how ISH took its activism to the streets to raise public awareness about SH and how SH constitutes a significant threat to society, not just to women. In the image, 'What is SH?' is written in Arabic (own translation).



**Figure 3. ISH (2018)**

HarassMap also has a method for reporting SH incidents in data centres, and they also launch campaigns, provide training and courses on self-defence, and send out rescue teams that protect victims and disseminate information through videos, social media and leaflets. For example, (Fig. 4) HarassMap asks questions such as, ‘If SH is caused because of poverty, why does a company director harass women’ (own translation) and gives some contact information of HarassMap.





Figure 4. HarassMap (2018)

An emerging pattern in the two initiatives and other initiatives I visited, for example, the *Bassma* initiative, was that men directed these new forms of action-oriented activism groups and many men volunteers participated. This interesting information suggests that SH was a concern for women and men who were tirelessly combating SH. This pattern corresponds with the aforementioned reports of many men who supported women in 6AYM, OPPs, and later in the graffiti group, showing a feminist consciousness but without a feminist organisation. Indeed, Nevine Ebeid (NWF) asserts that,

A new generation of youth has emerged and obviously appeared who believe in human rights and women's rights and are relatively convinced of gender equality. They are not only found in the urban areas but also outside them, and one indication of this is the participation of men on 8 March, International Women's Day, in the last three years.

Another emergent pattern was that when the 2011 uprising broke out, many women preferred to participate through newly formed voluntary initiatives and projects rather than through the old feminist organisations and networks or state feminism. Pratt (2020) argues that the revolution created a new opportunity for many women to develop their innovative model of activism, which represented a clear rupture from state

feminism and the NGO-sized model of women's rights activism. Badran (2016; and Hatem, 2011) argues that the revolution produced a kind of feminist consciousness, without a feminist organisation, and many women and men developed a new form of subjectivity, such as anti-harassment activism. I said to Nadja, 'Many feminist groups are working on the same issues, so why ISH? She replied,

Of course, they existed and still exist, but they have minimal activities in the fight against SH because these NGOs take care of women's issues in general, including SH. These organisations were constituted of groups of women who are famous and public figures. Most of them focused on their efforts on middle-class women. However, the initiatives were a different thing because the idea of women volunteering on the streets was something new and interesting.

I asked Faten, 'Your mother is a feminist, and human rights activist, and she was in prison for political reasons. So why are you not fighting SH through feminist organisations?' She says, 'I wanted to deal with people. If I did not, I would not know what problems we have. Feminist groups dressing well and speaking on TV and at conferences – that does not help much'. Skalli (2011, p. 339) argues, 'Some young women also tend to be more critical of the older generation of feminists, whose leadership they reproach for being "elitist" and "out of touch" with the reality of "ordinary" women in general and young women in particular'.

The action-oriented groups thus brought a new narrative to dealing with women's issues that emphasised women's bodies, sexuality, gender-based violence and SH. According to Kamal (2016), women activists made a shift in their activism from emphasising women's committees in political parties, creating initiatives within human rights organisations and changing the government's attitude toward women's issues, with more of a focus on women's bodies and sexuality, although the previous issues were not excluded.

Many interviewees I met refused to be labelled feminists, even though they worked under the feminist umbrella, like ACT and Nazra, and some were already involved in old feminist groups and networks, like Faten and Nermeen. In her research, Muhanna-Matar (2014) reports that many Egyptian women activists refused to be called feminists because they were critical of the old feminist movement. Moreover, the initiatives also distanced from being directly related to feminist issues. Tadros (2016, p. 238) counted five initiatives, including ISH, that chose names that reflected the cause rather than the gender identity of the founders. One reason could be that the old feminist groups were associated with the state feminism supported by Suzanne Mubarak (Elsadda, 2011; Badran, 2016), and another reason could be that they do not want to be labelled with something that has a connection to a Western agenda. Indeed, Naglaa al-Adly (NEW) says,



Before the revolution, NCW had power because we were under the umbrella of the president. Immediately after the revolution, there was a tendency SCAF, NGOs and ordinary people to be against us because they believed we had links to Susanne Mubarak and could pursue a Western agenda.

In summary, the compatibility between the interviewees and the two initiatives facilitated access to the streets and public place. The two initiatives provided a collective action frame. They were able to diagnose the problem of SH, had the tools and tactics to deal with it: the expertise, legal advisors and experience and collaboration with major advocacy NGOs inside and outside the country. They used new forms of action-oriented activism with an alternative narrative than what was provided by the old feminist groups and women's rights organisations. The two initiatives dealt strategically with SH, if we use Archer's term of corporate agency, through which they were able to deal with social constraints and gain advantage through structural enablement(s).

### **The assisting role of the structural enablement(s)**

The first recruitment channel the interviewees used was the internet, but later they contacted the two initiatives at their headquarters. Bennett and Segerberg (2013) argue that the use of the internet is very important in getting people to participate in the political community. As mentioned earlier, Nora knew and contacted HarassMap through Twitter. Nadja knew about ISH through the internet because of a published survival story. She reached out to ISH to write a reportage for the newspaper: 'I knew them from social media when they rescued a woman in Tahrir. ISH was very active on social media at the time, and I decided to write a reportage about this woman. Then, I liked the ideas of the initiative. I believed in them, and finally, I volunteered'. Before and during the uprising, the two initiatives used social media as a channel to put out information about SH (Abdelmonem & Galán, 2017).

The second recruitment channel was informal social networks. Youmna had contacted HarassMap through her friend Nora, 'I got in touch with the initiative through my friend Nora, who worked as a volunteer for HarassMap for three years. Then, in 2012 I went with her on a camping trip organised by the initiative'. Faten also came into contact with ISH through Farid (ISH's director). During Morsi's tenure in 2012, his wife was friends with her mother from old feminist social networks.

The third recruitment channel was during the uprising, Nermeen describes, 'In the 2011 revolution, we benefited from the demonstrations and sit-ins to create networks for volunteerism'. The regime had relaxed the control to allow demonstrators to gather for political purposes, and this happened on 30 June 2013, when Sura contacted ISH in Tahrir Square: 'I first saw ISH on the TV programme, but I contacted them when I

was demonstrating against Morsi in the Square. I saw young women and men standing up for women. They had a tent in the Square, and I approached them to join the initiative'. Although the security apparatus strove to make Tahrir Square safe, many SH incidents were reported during the four days leading up to Morsi's resignation (HRW, 2014a). Indeed, the military has tried to facilitate (rather than co-opt) some anti-harassment groups to carry out their activism. Sometimes authorities are accustomed to not suppressing NGOs and social activism, or to suppressing them to a lesser degree, as long as they do not affect political issues and regime stability (Pratt, 2020).

When I was in ISH's situation room on the *sham al-nasiym* holiday on 29 April 2014, I was sitting next to Farid when he called a police officer to report that the rescue team was being followed by a group of harassers near the *Qasr al-Nail* Bridge. Indeed, Abdelmonem (2016) claims that ISH and the Ministry of Interior collaborated in 2014 to combat SH. HarassMap also collaborated with some official institutions to combat SH, such as CU. Meanwhile, Farid was very critical of the police and security forces for being part of a big machinery of oppression against women.

The three recruitment channels had thus changed according to the personal situation of the interviewees and these channels complemented and reinforced each other. The initiatives benefited from the structural enablement(s) – invigorating civil society after the uprising and the transformation of the media landscape – that the interviewees could not achieve solely as unaffiliated participants. Then, the interviewees dealt with the structure by using the group agency as a mediator to overcome their exclusion.

## Summary

Based on their reports, the interviewees overcame their exclusion from the public sphere but on the condition of joining the two initiatives. By negotiating (Manal and Nora) and challenging (Nadja) the patriarchal order, most interviewees redefined their role as activists against harassment and SH as a public issue within their families. Some of the interviewees received support from their families, especially their mothers, who helped them challenge the patriarchal order, like Manal, or the father, like Nermeen.

All interviewees agreed with the two initiatives that emphasised the inviolability of women's bodies and employed new forms of action-oriented activism – with an alternative narrative that focused on women's bodies and sexuality. Many of the interviewees knew each other from old feminist networks, but they refused to be labelled feminists. The uprising and the invigorating of civil society contributed to the emergence of a feminist consciousness between men and women, far from the old feminist groups of women organisations and state feminism.

Both the interviewees and the agency of the initiatives acted within the transformation of the media landscape, using social media sites and independent TV channels, and invigorating civil society during the 2011 uprising. There was also limited collaboration with state institutions to support the activism of some anti-harassment groups.

## Visibility through anti-harassment initiatives

This section sets to understand how the interviewees experienced their participation in the public sphere as anti-harassment activists.

The section will show that, based on their reports, the interviewees overcame their marginalisation in the public sphere as persons and through SH as a topic – when compared to the previous situation of excluding SH as a public issue. Through the two initiatives, they slightly pushed gender boundaries to open up a space of appearance to discuss SH in the context of revolutionary protests, mass media and the internet. However, this expansion was subject to various constraints. The two initiatives and the interviewees also have strategies to deal with these constraints.

In the following section, the first and second subsections are about the expansion of visibility through gender equality and leadership. The third is about the constraints of visibility and the strategies for dealing with these constraints. The fourth is about mediating visibility. The final subsection is about repressing the anti-harassment discourse and the strategy to deal with this repression.

### Experiencing gender equality

Based on their reports, the interviewees expanded their visibility by experiencing gender equality within the two initiatives and in the public space. They referred to equal treatment, equal expression and equal access to recourses in the two initiatives.

In Tahrir Square between 2011–2014 for HarassMap and 2012–2014 for ISH, men and women took to the streets together in teams of three and five activists, with a captain as a leader of each group. Youmna says, ‘We are usually mixed, equal men and women on the streets to do our work’. In a more explicit account, Nermeen mentions, ‘We have the same role regardless of gender. Women do what men do, even if the situation is dangerous; for example, to save an offended woman from a group of harassers’. Nora also confirms this stance: ‘We make a balance between men who can talk and women who have experience of being exposed to SH’. Compared to the

interviewees from 6AYM, MB and OPPs, it seems that promoting gender equality is part of the doctrine and project of the two initiatives in combating SH.

When I visited the headquarters of the two initiatives several times, I saw how men and women in the teams freely communicated, interacted and expressed themselves to other members and to me. I saw how teams were divided regardless of gender and how some teams were led by women. An article in ISH's agendas states, 'We work to raise awareness, spread the culture of gender equality, and combat violence against women, especially sexual violence' (ISH, 2017, own translation). In this context, Farid admits that 'the platform we stand on in shaping our policies and agenda is CEDAW to eliminate all discrimination in society and emphasise gender equality is a part of that'. As for HarassMap, Hussein El-Shafei (the director of HarassMap) states,

We adopt our policies in accordance with International Conventions about human rights and gender equality. Unlike many anti-harassment groups, such as Force against SH, we reject the notion that men protect women. Other groups have prevented women from joining rescue teams.

Thus, the two initiatives have promoted gender equality, which gave the interviewees a sense of self-empowerment and to enlarge their roles in the space of appearance for women to speak up about SH.

### **Experiencing women leadership**

Women's leadership was an attractive practice that all interviewees experienced and reported that they were satisfied with within the two initiatives. Nora (HarassMap), who led a team (including men) in the street says, 'I have worked in many positions in different NGOs where women have had less opportunity to lead men, but at HarassMap, the situation is great for women. At HarassMap, I am a captain (leader) to lead teams, including men on the street'. Compared to other NGOs, all interviewees agreed that women in the two initiatives have an excellent opportunity for leadership. Skalli (2014), and Muhanna-Matar (2014) also share a similar opinion and observe that female volunteer activists in such initiatives have expanded their role in the public sphere through leadership.

However, some interviewees experienced resistance from some male members when leading teams, like Manal,

I was a team captain for reaching out to people on the street, which meant I had to lead many people, including men. There were 30 of us who gathered in the coffee shop. Sometimes I was pressured by some young men because they rejected the idea of a woman leading men, but I asserted my personality to secure my position.

The attitudes of the men on Manal's team could be seen as a kind of misrecognition of her leadership abilities, which Manal brought under control. This control represented a form of structural constraint due to the predominant masculine gender norms. These constraints were embedded in Islamist and state secular patriarchal discourse – or neopatriarchal social norms according to Rizzo, Price and Meyer (2012) – which historically control women in the public sphere (El Said, Meari & Pratt, 2015). Conversely, Manal was able to assert her personality and was recognised as a leader.

The two initiatives supported women in leadership positions because women could play a central role that men could not, namely rescuing offended women. Adly (2017) notes that women activists in various anti-harassment initiatives were subjected to various forms of physical and psychological violence when rescuing offended women during public events.

During my visit to one initiative in April 2014, two teams were led by women who carried electric batons in their backpacks to defend themselves when necessary. Sara, an activist from ISH who led a team that included men, told me that

Women are needed more on the streets, especially when it comes to rescuing offended women from a mob. An offended woman needs someone to take her out of their arms, so she does not lose consciousness. Women need women to talk to, not men.

Sara was subjected to a very serious incident of mob harassment in what is called the 'circle of hell'. She was deeply affected, physically and psychologically. She recounts how a woman from an ISH rescue team rescued her:

I was lying there on the ground between harassers. I was about to lose consciousness; my clothes were torn. Hands were touching all parts of my body. One harasser was very close to me. I said to him, 'I am like your sister'. Then, he changed from a harasser to a protector. He protected my body to avoid being touched by others. Later, a group of rescuers intervened. One rescuer hugged me tight and talked to me so I would not lose consciousness. This group took me to a safe place at the entrance of a nearby building. After this incident, I decided to join ISH.

The two initiatives allowed women to develop their leadership skills through courses and leadership exercises. El-Shafei reports that:

Women leaders come to Cairo from all governorates in Egypt to attend intensive courses in a camp for a week. We give them all kinds of information and practices. Then we evaluate their work on the ground and give them an advanced course in how to argue with people and media and how to lead teams.

Accordingly, the interviewees enlarged their roles with a new vision of female leadership. They challenged the old feminist groups that were used to being led by middle-class women with long experience in public activism.

In summary, by promoting gender equality and leadership, the interviewees reported they experienced an expansion of their visibility and slightly pushing gender boundaries in the context of the two initiatives and the public space. The role of the two initiatives was to negotiate the public space to open up a space of appearance that increased the possibility for all women to participate in politics. However, the interviewees were subjected to constraints that marginalised them in the public space.

### **Constraining visibility in the public space**

The interviewees reported that they were subjected to two, not mutually exclusive, forms of harassment by: security forces and thugs, '*baltajiyah*' and ordinary people in public places and streets in different neighbourhoods of Cairo.

Firstly, the majority of the interviewees reported that they exposed and felt afraid of being harassed by policemen, hired thugs, security forces and mobs of harassers who collectively harassed women during demonstrations. Nermeen expresses her disgust when she talks about how security forces that were supposed to protect her harassed her instead on Tahrir in 2012: 'The military harassed me; we really have a savage state that harasses women'. Faten was afraid of collective harassment in Tahrir Square: 'When I was in the heart of Tahrir Square, I was afraid of collective harassment. Basically, I could defend myself against one or two harassers, but not against many where there was no government and no law to protect me'.

Mob harassment had been of concern for all the women I interviewed from all groups because it was very disgusting as they described it, and the opportunity to be rescued was very narrow. Similar to Nermeen and other interviewees, Faten suspected the regime, during Morsi's time in 2013. El-Shafei comments, 'During Morsi's time (2012–2013), we felt that SH and violence were organised to push women into their private spaces. One day, we rescued a victim from a collective SH. The police were near us, but they did not intervene'. Knowingly or unknowingly, security forces allowed or turned a blind eye to the use of SH and gender-based violence during the tenures of SCAF, Morsi, and El-Sisi between 2011–2014 (FIDH et al. 2013; Tadros, 2016).

In such a situation, among many anti-harassment groups, the two initiatives used several strategies to protect activists from harassment. For example, during demonstrations between 2012–2013, ISH created safe passages for offended women. Farid describes this: 'During demonstrations and sit-ins, we tried to create safe passages to open a way out between the crowds. These passages helped offended women escape mob harassment'. El-Shafei also said that 'in 2012, we, as HarassMap, along with 11

other groups, formed a network called Force Against Harassment to confront the collective SH'. The quotation shows that the anti-harassment groups formed a coalition to fight SH, which allowed them to more effectively fight the state's patriarchal discourse of controlling women activists. The two initiatives were thus about negotiating the public space to open up a space of appearance for the interviewees and women in general.

Secondly, when the interviewees worked for HarassMap (2011–2014) and for ISH (2012–2014) as teams in different neighbourhoods of Cairo, the main problem they encountered was people's denial of SH. Further, some of them were subjected to harassment and violence for raising SH as an issue.

Younna comments, 'People always ask us, "Can't you find any other issue to talk about than SH?" I think people want to talk about other things, like politics, stability and economic issues'. The interviewees felt society did not share their concern about women's exposure to SH. El-Shafei (HarassMap) says, 'After we sent our volunteers to talk to people about SH, we met resistance. There was an absolute denial of SH, as they said, "There is no SH at all". They wanted to ignore the problem.' Ahlam (HarassMap) also argues, 'There is a discourse encourages harassers. There is a social acceptance; no one will help me if I am exposed to SH, but if I am exposed to robbery, many will help me'. The mass media played a negative role in this denial (El-Ibiary, 2017). Manal says, 'The media talked about SH in the wrong way. After the incident in CU, many media professionals said that the woman was the reason for her exposure to SH because of her dress'.

However, this does not mean that the mass media was utterly absent from focusing on SH, especially the independent TV channels that had a significant impact on defining SH as an issue. According to Mozn Hassan, who works at Nazra and participates in the anti-harassment movement, 'the TV appearances made an important shift in public awareness of the problem' (Pratt, 2020, p. 191).

Furthermore, some interviewees such as Nermeen, Youmna and Nadja reported that they were harassed by people while carrying out their activism. Nermeen says, 'We were beaten up and our cameras were confiscated. We were accused of destroying Egypt's reputation'. Nadja says, 'While women were encouraging us, men were not'. Despite these difficulties, the interviewees fearlessly continued to fight SH.

Both the denial of SH and exposure to violence could be attributed to the structural constraints of the male-dominated public space, as the interviewees reported. The denial of SH led to SH being excluded as a topic of discussion and could result in the interviewees being expelled from the public space. This was what the dominant patriarchal discourse did to control women's bodies, by reinforcing patriarchal and neopatriarchal social norms (Rizzo, Price & Meyer, 2012). The anti-harassment forces were about opening a gender-neutral space of appearance to publicly address the topic

of SH and thus escape the control of the dominant patriarchal discourse. Through the strategies of the two initiatives, the interviewees could try to resolve these constraints.

### **The strategies of resolving constraints**

According to the interviewees, the two initiatives employed two main strategies to keep the space of appearance intact: appropriating their visibility to cope with the set of visibility at the place and giving the interviewees the proper training to defend themselves.

Most interviewees changed their clothing and dress style to adapt to the setting of visibility when they held public activities. Faten says, 'I prepare for public activities by wearing a cross-body bag to protect my backside from sexual friction. Then I choose my clothes according to the public places I will visit'. Youmna also does the same: 'I do not wear a veil when I go to do my volunteer work, but I try not to follow their standards of how women should dress and behave; I try to be like them'. Ilahi (2008) claims that women in Egypt have different strategies to avoid being exposed to SH by changing their daily behaviour and style to cope with this situation, such as not walking alone, wearing different clothes, and avoiding eye contact.

This strategy suggests that some interviewees attempted to negotiate the predominant masculine norms or cultural codes, as Melucci (1996) calls it, to stay in the public space and maintain it as part of the public sphere. Of course, such a strategy reduced the interviewees' agency by restricting their mobility while they were expected to be critical to the predominant masculine norms. However, minimising the interviewees' agency does not undermine the entire purpose and outcome of the action against SH, if we understand that the causes of SH are many, not only masculine gender norms.

The second strategy was to give women activists the proper training to resist SH and violence in the public space. Nermeen argues, 'I always carry a scalpel to defend myself against SH, and I have trained so much for self-defence'. Most interviewers feel the same way. When I asked Sura what she does when someone harasses her, she replied, 'I fight back'. It is the same with Manal and Nadja.

When I attended a meeting at one of the initiative's headquarters, I observed some women activists teaching newcomers to hide a long needle in their clothes and use it when confronted at SH. This was one of the desperate strategies the initiative taught women activists in order to defend themselves against SH.

These two strategies were used to negotiate the predominant masculine gender norms and escape the cultural patriarchal nationalist discourse to keep the space of appearance open for anti-harassment activists. So, based on their stories, the interviewees could overcome, to a moderate degree, their marginalisation as physical



existences in a public space compared to the previous period when they avoided some places and could not defend themselves.

## **Mediating visibility through anti-harassment discourse**

The interviewees reported that the two initiatives sought to transform the interviewees' voices from individual to a collective voice to become part of the anti-harassment discourse through transforming public space into a space of appearance and private issues into public issues.

### *The public space as a space of appearance*

The two initiatives attempted to transform some public spaces (i.e. the crime scene where offended women allegedly remained silent) into a 'space of appearance', where the content, for example, discussions and debates, become part of the publicity in the public sphere (Adut, 2012). According to Arendt (1958, p. 199), the 'space of appearance' is the place where people can raise their voices, see and be seen, hear and be heard. As mentioned in the theory chapter, the space of appearance could be open to a particular counter-public or issue, but not to others. The two initiatives sought to raise social issues rather than directly address political issues that touched on the regime; so, it was a negotiating counter-public, which might communicate with the dominant discourse to make change in it. According to Elsheikh and Lilleker (2019), who studied three feminist networks in Egypt, many women social activists challenged gender norms that did not provoke the state and its security apparatuses by avoiding being part of the polarised political environment. However, this is not to say that these social issues were not considered political issues that were addressed in purely cultural terms.

Ahlam (HarassMap) argues that 'HarassMap emerged to create a social space for women to express themselves and talk about their experiences about SH'. The strategy of the two initiatives was to transform silence into voice in an organised and systematic way – making the invisible visible. The two initiatives employed several methods to do this.

The first method was to conduct anti-harassment activities in public spaces where most SH were committed. Manal says, 'SH insults women, so the initiative is directly engaging with people where women are usually insulted'. Therefore, it was an attempt to integrate part of the public space into the public sphere to address SH as a problem. The second method encouraged interviewees to participate in collective action on the streets. Tadros (2016, p. 237) describes these attempts as successful interventions and an indication that the anti-harassment initiatives, like ISH, 'protect women in crowded spaces in downtown Cairo during feast days'.

The third method involved transforming perceptions of victimisation into monitoring by shifting the focus of control from the offended women to the harassers and society in general. This method is about freeing oneself from control by escaping the normalised and oppressive roles and rules in Arendt's words. The two initiatives sought to undermine the primacy of the dominant discourse, which is to blame the victim. Amar (2011) and Kirollos (2016) also argue that the dominant discourse often relies on the idea of blaming the victim (e.g. women's dress and behaviour). Instead, the two initiatives blamed society and institutions, not women as victims.

As for the interviewees, Nora decided to make her story visible: 'I liked HarassMap's approach because it showed an alternative understanding of SH as a problem that did not blame women but rather society'. Manal previously expressed how her sister shamed her for talking about SH. However, Manal wanted to put her guilt aside and shame society instead. Emotionally, this effort to not blame the victims meant so much to the interviewees because it helped absolve them of the feeling of responsibility for their exposure to SH through their actions and way of dressing.

In this regard, ISH used semantic symbols to encourage people to pay attention to harassers instead of women's bodies. For example, ISH's logo is a large eye (with the Arabic inscription ISH) (Fig. 5), which symbolises surveillance not by the regime or police or other official organisations but by ordinary people who observe the regular harassment of women. Volunteers in the teams wore this logo on their T-shirts, and it was also printed on the leaflet.



**Figure 5.** ISH logo from a leaflet brought from the ISH headquarters in 2014

Accordingly, the transformation of public space into a space of appearance for SH was an attempt to make the public space a contested space, in the sense of Fraser's (1990) term, and a part of publicity in the public sphere through which the interviewees challenged their marginalisation. They were still overly active and sometimes communicated with the police to ensure that their space of appearance was intact. This transformation challenged the cut-off distinction between the public space and the

public sphere. Thus, the interviewees slightly pushed gender boundaries in favour of women, compared to the previous period, to be part of the deliberation in the space of appearance, but without provoking the regime, even if they were critical of state's vision of gender policies.

### *Transforming the private into public*

The second strategy was to transform what people perceived as private or taboo to public for discussion in the public sphere. This transformation intended to make SH a part of the publicity of the public sphere. According to Fraser (1990), there is no guarantee that everyone will agree on an issue to be discussed as a topic or concern in the public sphere. For example, feminists in the United States and other countries struggled tirelessly to successfully highlight domestic violence as a public issue because people considered it as private, and they assumed that it involved a relatively small number of heterosexual couples.

As the interviewees reported, prior to the 2011 uprising, they, and women in general, were very careful about speaking up publicly about SH because people perceived it as taboo and associated it with women who belonged to a private domain anyway. Scholars (Fraser, 1990; Warner, 2002; Pateman, 1989) from different contexts report that many societies associate women with private issues and domains. Women are associated with private characteristics like feminine, secret, silent, apolitical and, invisible, and men are associated with public characteristics like masculine ways of looking and acting, being the voice of the citizen, political, visible and concerned with public affairs. By considering many gendered issues such as SH private, women's voices are marginalised and silenced (Mackinnon, 1993). The extent to which these associations are potent is an empirical question that depends on the meaning of the terms (private) and (public) and how these terms are constituted and used in each context and society.

The study by Mohammad, Shoukry and Abul Komsan (2008, p.10) shows that most Egyptian women prefer to remain silent and do nothing regarding SH because they are ashamed to raise this issue in public. Although SH is perceived as less taboo after the uprising (Langohr, 2013), it was still relatively unspoken among ordinary women their daily lives (Kirolos, 2016). As mentioned in the theory chapter, feminist schools (Pateman, 1989; Fraser, 1990; Felski, 1989) challenge the public/private distinction. Therefore, the anti-harassment discourse has challenged this distinction by contesting the dominant one; it is about making SH a public issue and people accept SH as a public issue. Highlighting SH as a topic increased the possibility of recognising it as an important issue, and thus women were able to overcome their marginalisation in the public sphere.

One of the strategies of the two initiatives was to disclose the stories of the victims and make them an issue for the public. Nora says, ‘When I decided not to stay silent, I found a way to talk to people about my experience with SH through HarassMap. I could not do that in my hometown because people there never talked about such topics, which were perceived as taboo’. So, Nora was able to speak out, but not until she came to Cairo and contacted HarassMap. Manal also spoke out, but only through HarassMap and after the 2011 uprising: ‘After the revolution, it became more acceptable to talk about SH’. Making Nora and Manal’s experiences visible meant transforming their feelings of fear and shame to be shared, collectively and publicly in the outcry against the oppressive society. HarassMap's strategy is to report daily SH incidents on an interactive map with facts and details about each incident. On its website, HarassMap states the following, ‘We map the reports online, and each report appears on the map as a dot’ (HarassMap, 2017c). The website also visually instructs how offending women can report incidents (Fig. 6), and it is updated daily.

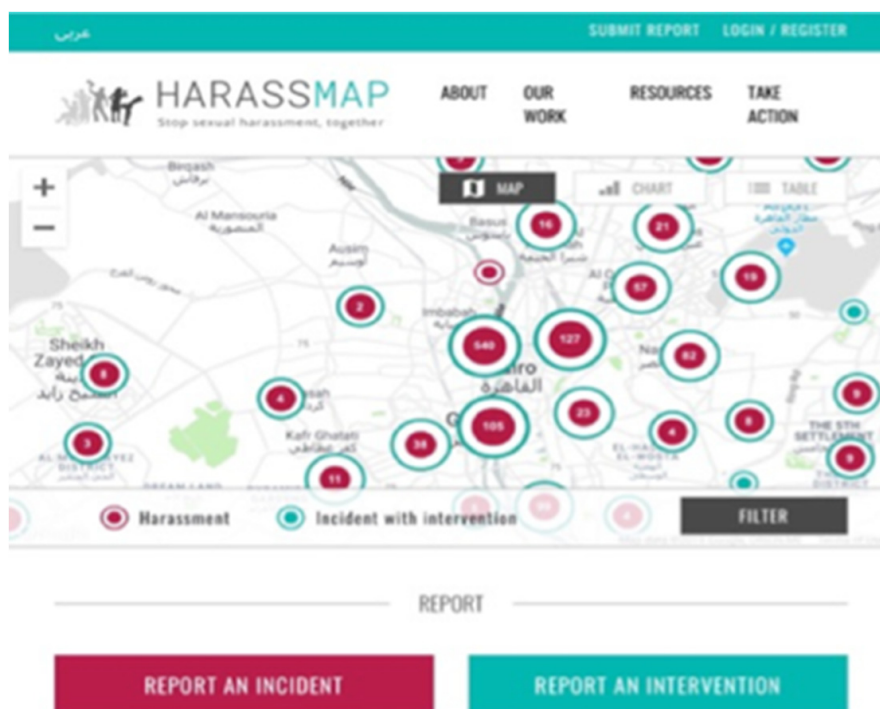


Figure 6. HarassMap (2019)

Furthermore, in 2014, HarassMap launched a campaign called ‘*mesh sakta*’ (I will not be silent) (HarassMap, 2017d) (see Fig. 3), which encouraged offended women to speak out about their experiences of being exposed to SH.

For Youmna, it was almost the same thing: ‘Through HarassMap, I discovered from the statistics we conducted in the survey that SH increased when women remained

quiet. So, I started using a strategy to not remain quiet, but also to fight back when confronted with SH’.

Regarding ISH, Nadja comments, ‘The main reason I joined ISH was to speak up about SH revolt against the taboo set by the political system and traditional people. This taboo has dominated our lives’. Sura says, ‘After the revolution, through initiatives like ISH, people have become more open-minded in talking about SH’.

On the other hand, one of ISH’s main strategies was to encourage women not to remain silent. For example, the leaflets the initiative distributed on the streets (Fig. 7) read in Arabic, ‘Expose the harasser ... Speak out ... Confront ... Do not be afraid’.



Figure 7. ISH (2018)

The strategy of the two initiatives was part of the anti-harassment movement’s extensive efforts to normalise talking about SH, for example, ‘A Carnival Against SH’ in December 2014 to encourage women to talk about their experiences of being subjected to SH.

Furthermore, the anti-harassment movement used the internet to encourage women to speak out. Many blogs, social media sites, hashtags such as (#I'don'tFeelSafeOnTheStreet, #AntiHarassment, and #ExposeHarasser), and YouTube videos (HRW, 2013) were used to report SH incidents in the voice of offended women. Moreover, many human rights and women’s rights organisations that cooperated with ISH and HarassMap have published survivors’ stories in reports to make them available to the public, such as Nazra and the El-Nadeem Centre – it is a movement of movements.

In this way, the two initiatives have transformed the interviewees' private experience of SH and individual voices into a collective, visible and part of the publicness of the public sphere. This is precisely what Fraser (1990) means when she emphasises the contestation rather than the bracketing of dissimilarities in the public sphere.

In summary, by transforming the public space to be a space of appearance and what was perceived as private to be public, the interviewees became visible and thus enlarged their role and slightly pushed gender boundaries to open up a space of appearance for the discussion of SH in the context of the protests, internet and public space.

### **Repressing the anti-harassment discourse**

Until 2014, the attitude of the state and its institutions towards SH was vague, as there was no definite law that criminalised committing acts of SH. Then, SH was included in three articles of the penal code that conflated with committing rape. However, to be proven, SH required additional material evidence (Abdelmonem, 2016), which was almost impossible in practice.

The strategies to challenge these constraints went beyond the capabilities of the interviewees into group efforts, as the two initiatives did. For example, in mid-March 2014, Gaber Gad Nassar (the Dean of CU) and Tamer Amin (a high-profile Egyptian TV talk show host on the independent al-Hayat TV channel) blamed the victim, a female student in CU, for her exposure to SH at CU. They claimed that the incident happened because of what they called her 'inappropriate' clothing (Dream TV Egypt, 2014).

After pressure from the anti-harassment movement, especially ISH, Nassar apologised when Farid (the director of ISH) criticised Nassar in a live broadcast TV programme for his viewpoint of blaming the victim (Hamed, 2014). A few days after this incident, CU signed a protocol with ISH to raise awareness about SH among CU students (Rashwan, 2014).

The two initiatives aimed to change the dominant public discourse about SH by addressing the idea that women's modesty does not relate to their bodies and clothing, shifting the focus from the offended women to the harasser and society. In one leaflet (Fig. 8), it states in Arabic: 'Do not say it's because of her dress ... say that what happened is a crime' (own translation) – the anti-harassment movement, including the two initiatives, conveyed that SH has nothing to do with the woman's clothing. This is based on numerous studies that investigated SH in Egypt.





**Figure 8.** A cartoon by Doaa Eladl on a leaflet from HarassMap headquarters (2014)

The results of the anti-harassment movement's efforts had contributed to legislating the new law against SH – days before interim Prime Minister Adly Mansour handed over power to El-Sisi in 2014 (Kirolos, 2016). These results led to the recognition of SH at the legal level. Thus, the effect and results of the interviewees' visibility was apparent, through which the interviewees overcame, to a moderate degree, their marginalisation after the triumph of the recognition of SH. With a moderate degree, I mean even though they received recognition, in practice, SH still remained a problem to be tackled in the public sphere.

## Summary

Based on their reports, the interviewees overcame their marginalisation in the public sphere – compared to the previous period when they could hardly speak up about SH. They experienced an expansion of their visibility, both as physical persons and through mediation by the anti-harassment discourse. They felt self-empowered because they experienced gender equality and their leadership role, albeit with some constraints of their male counterparts. They enlarged their role to slightly push gender boundaries in the public sphere, in the context of public space and the internet – compared to the pre-uprising period – but without provoking the regime and by staying within the outline of the state's vision of gender policies, while still being critical of that vision.

They negotiated with the patriarchal cultural discourse of the Islamists and the secular state to control women in their struggle against Western cultural hegemony. With a new vision of female leadership, they challenged the old feminist pattern of female leadership.

One prominent pattern was that many of the interviewees reported they belonged to networks associated with old feminist NGOs but had distanced from them and refused to be labelled feminists. The uprising led to the emergence of a feminist consciousness between men and women in the public sphere, for example, the voluntary male and directors of many initiatives, including the two initiatives examined in this dissertation.

The two initiatives facilitated the participation of the interviewees by protecting them and using two strategies to maintain a space of appearance intact: to appropriate the interviewees' visibility and train the interviewees to defend themselves.

The interviewees also reported that they mediated their voices through transforming the public space from a crime scene into a space of appearance and what people perceived as private and taboo to be public through influencing the dominant discourse – for example, the discussion between Farid and the Dean of the CU. They challenged the public/private and the public sphere/space distinctions through which they put forward SH as a public issue and topic for discussion. They did not use the internet as an alternative space, like the interviewees of 6AYM and OPPs but rather as a supplement to the public space, to publish the stories of survivors.

## Conclusion

This chapter shows that the interviewees reported that they overcame their exclusion on the condition of highlighting SH as a topic through the two initiatives because they could not do so as unaffiliated participants. They found another avenue than the 6AYM/MB and OPPs interviewees to participate in the public sphere through bringing social issues to the fore. The interviewees constructed a gendered subjectivity with a feminist consciousness between men and women who refused to be labelled feminists. They distanced from the old feminist groups, even as they collaborated with feminist activism networks. They also challenged the old feminist pattern of female leadership. They developed an agency that invented new forms of action-oriented activism with an alternative narrative that focused on women's bodies and sexuality, which stood apart from the old feminist narrative that focused on women in political parties and human rights organisations.

The interviewees also reported that they overcame their marginalisation in the public sphere as persons and through SH as a topic in the public sphere – compared to the



pre-uprising period when SH was perceived as taboo. They tried to escape the Islamist and state cultural patriarchal discourse as they challenged and negotiated the patriarchal order in the family, dominant masculine gender norms, the denial of SH and the security forces targeting women's bodies in the public space. They tried to redefine the perception of woman's bodies, gender norms and sexuality within the national context. They tried to foreground the issue of women's bodies to be protected and private rather than be public matter. Through the anti-harassment negotiating counter-public, the interviewees tried not to provoke the regime directly by overtly challenging it. Instead, they stayed within the outline of the state's vision regarding gender policies, while still being critical of that vision.

The two initiatives used the internet extensively and skilfully, not as an alternative channel of participation, like 6AYM, but as a complementary platform to the public place to discuss and publish survivors' stories. They also used TV (independent) and spoke to people on the streets.

Based on their reports, the interviewees enlarged their role, and by practising gender equality and leadership, they slightly pushed gender boundaries in the public sphere in the context of negotiating the public space with two initiatives to open up a space of appearance for SH as a topic of discussion. The two initiatives appropriated and coped with the setting of visibility, provided relevant training, and worked with police officers to protect interviewees.

With the two initiatives, interviewees were also able to mediate their visibility through the anti-harassment discourse to transform the silence into a voice, the invisible into the visible, and the public space from a crime scene into a space to combat SH. They challenged the public/private and the public sphere/space distinctions. This led to the passing of a law against SH in 2014, with severe penalties for committing SH. Therefore, precarious achievements and improvements have been made to eliminate SH from society.

## *Chapter 8:*

# Women's participation in the public sphere through graffiti

This chapter sets out to understand how the interviewees ('artists') participated in the public sphere as a counter-public between 2013–2014 through the use of graffiti and how they experienced this participation.

The chapter will show that the artists have artistic graffiti skills that allowed them to access the public sphere by using new forms of public art activism. Their disappointment with the situation of women after the uprising motivated them to construct a gendered subjectivity and develop their agency between 2013–2014. They overcame their exclusion from the public sphere on the condition of joining Women On Walls (WOW). With the emergence of a feminist consciousness between men and women, they brought up women's issues with their alternative narrative of women's bodies and sexuality than the older and more established feminist and women's organisations narrative brought in the previous period. They sought to redefine what was perceived as private to be public; in a way, they revived the public space with new forms of popular activism, feminine figures and themes. Based in their reports, they slightly pushed gender boundaries – compared to the previous period when graffiti was limited – in the context of negotiating the masculine shape of the public space to open up a space of appearance to discuss women's issues.

For background, according to Khatib (2013, p. 299), 'Before the 25 January revolution, visual expression in public space in Egypt was largely the domain of the regime'. Art in general, and visual expression in particular, that expressed a critical stance towards mainstream politics often took place in galleries or cultural centres frequented only by certain individuals. As an example, Rizzo, Price & Meyer (2012, p. 470) refer to ECWR project, which used art to raise awareness of SH, as it was exhibited in the cultural centres where the visitors were upper middle class, experts and expatriates. However, this does not mean that this kind of critical art was utterly absent from the public space.

Abaza (2015), and others such as Khatib (2013; and Smith, 2015) who hold a similar view, point out that public art is seen as a powerful visual medium of expression for

social change in the 2011 uprising and aftermath of it. Abaza (2015) refers to graffiti as the visual public art of a new subculture, such as rap and musicians, who were reinventing public spaces like Tahrir Square. Then, many graffiti groups emerged and displayed graffiti in the streets instead of exhibiting it in galleries (Smith, 2015). Many graffiti artists transformed Tahrir Square and its streets, such as Mohamed Mahmoud Street (one of the main streets leading to Tahrir Square) into public spaces to embrace artistic expression and challenge the power structure (Abaza, 2013). Iveson (2007, p. 136) associates hip-hop culture and graffiti artworks in the U.S. and Australia with counter-publics when the legal and illegal graffiti spilled over into the wider public sphere. He continues to explain that public art, like graffiti, was used to challenge mainstream politics or power structure in general through refashioning the urban space, as marginalised groups reclaimed their right to the city.

The chapter is based on five interviews of women activists and secondary sources. WOW is one (if not the only, as far as I know) graffiti group of men and women activists who use graffiti to draw attention to women's issues. The situation of women includes many issues such as women's rights, the role of women, gender-based violence and SH, and stereotyping against women. WOW was established as part of a negotiating counter-public – like anti-harassment groups – that emerged to communicate and critique the dominant public discourse on the situation of women after the 2011 uprising. Asen (2000) argues that a counter-public could emerge to highlight an issue that is excluded from the mainstream/dominant public in the public sphere.

The WOW project was founded in April 2013 by Mia Gröndahl (author of *Revolution Graffiti: Street Art of the New Egypt*) and Angie Balata to raise awareness about women's issues through graffiti walls in downtown Cairo between 2013–2014. The WOW project, with more than sixty female graffiti artists, aims to challenge the domination of the masculine shape of the public space. They sought to feminise the walls of public space with symbolic feminine features that relate to various issues, such as SH, gender-based violence, and domestic violence. Gröndahl and Balata found that out of 17 000 graffiti on murals in downtown Cairo, only 250–300 featured women or referred to women's issues (Barakat, 2014) (almost 2%, according to Balata in the interview). The WOW website sought to make women's issues a topic and a matter of collective interest and concern to promote discussion in the mass media and social media, and among people in the public spaces that could lead to changing the situation of women for the better (Fig. 9).



Figure 9. WOW (2018)

WOW spearheaded many campaigns, including the project in Cairo with 30 artists and other campaigns in MENA countries that included 60 streets. WOW was funded by CKU (The Danish Centre for Culture and Development). WOW worked with many local NGOs, such as feminist groups like Nazra, to advise WOW on how they would represent women's issues through graffiti.

## Becoming part of WOW's counter-public

This section sets out to understand how the activists became part of the counter-public of WOW. While two activists shifted from being interested in general political issues to highlighting women's issues, others became interested in women's issues immediately after contacting WOW.

### From general political issues to graffiti

Khadija and Nour shifted from being interested in general political issues to that of women's issues when they learned about WOW. Khadija, a university student, comes from a middle-class family in Alexandria, but in 2012 she was drawing graffiti in the streets: 'I started drawing graffiti in 2012, alone and at night. I drew quick sketches on

the walls to avoid people who might harass me'. She felt excluded from expressing herself as an unaffiliated activist through graffiti. Khadija has experience in volunteer activism: 'I used to volunteer with art to teach people calligraphy'. She also participated in the first days of the 2011 uprising, 'I participated in the 25 January revolution to get out of the bubble we were living in. I did not participate as a woman, even though I knew how much society oppressed women, but as a human being and liked everyone in the revolution'.

Later, she started to participate to highlight women's issues: 'After the revolution, I developed my ideas on women's issues when I contacted WOW'. However, this does not mean that Khadija had no interest in women's issues before: 'My mother is a gynaecologist and has many female patients who have been subjected to SH or rape. I come from a family that knows how women are [treated] in society'.

When Khadija approached WOW in 2013, she constructed her gendered subjectivity to advocate for the situation of women: 'Since I contacted WOW, I realised that women needed to be the focus of my artwork on the street. Before, I painted about general themes related to the political situation and the revolution in general'. This shift happened when WOW mobilised Khadija through the internet and provided her with a collective action frame. At this point, Khadija became part of WOW counter-public to draw graffiti in Cairo in 2014 after sharing the experience of disappointment concerning the situation of women.

The second example is from Nour also comes from a middle-class family. She has an education in fine arts, works erratically and is partially dependent on her parents. Nour participated in various volunteer activities related to graffiti before the uprising: 'I started before the revolution in 2010 at a place called *Faggala* in Cairo where there were various artistic workshops and graffiti artworks. Then people asked me, 'What are you doing?'

The uprising inspired Nour to take an interest in politics: 'I was not interested in politics at all, but after 25 January, I started to pay attention to politics after spending a few days participating in the revolution with my family and friends'. Later, when she turned to WOW in 2013, she constructed her gendered subjectivity and developed an agency to highlight women's issues: 'I became interested in women's issues when I saw how WOW supported women in general in 2013. Then I tried to focus on SH because it blatantly spread out and amplified in society after the revolution'. Nour shared with other activists the experience of disappointment in what happened to women after the uprising, such as being subjected to SH. Hatem (2011) explains that the popular support for women who were exposed to violence showed a dramatic change in women's conciseness about women's issues.

In summary, Khadija and Nour reported they felt excluded from participating in the public sphere until the spark of the uprising inspired them to participate in politics. WOW provided them with collective action frame in the wake of the uprising.

### Starting from WOW

Enas and Nada did not participate in the 2011 uprising or other political activities before joining WOW. Enas graduated from the Faculty of Fine Arts at CU. She comes from a middle-class family, her parents are retired, and she is economically dependent on them. Enas has never been interested in politics or anything related to politics, because her family disapproved, but she used to participate in volunteer activities: 'I participated in social activities, like educating children in poor neighbourhoods and developing society as a volunteer in charities'. Enas became aware of WOW's project when she saw a huge graffiti mural that encouraged her to contact WOW in 2013:

I saw a very famous mural from WOW in Alexandria that depicted Amina, the fictional character from the novels of the Cairo Trilogy by Naguib Mahfouz. In this graffiti, Amina was seen with her children, who are an example of the Egyptian people, and she said '*si al-sayyid*' ('enough is enough') to her bossy husband (Fig. 10).



Figure 10. WOW (2018)

This graffiti brought forth feelings as a woman struggling with traditional society: 'As a woman in Egypt, everything I do, to drive a car or walk on the street, is tough. My dream is to achieve respect, dignity and justice for women who are limited in their influence because of this traditional society'. She felt disappointed and tried to make a difference through graffiti: 'I think a woman always has to be confident to prove herself in our masculine society through many things like graffiti'. Enas already has constructed a gendered subjectivity to advocate for women's issues. Enas developed her agency when she connected with WOW in 2013: 'I got involved with SH a long time ago, so when the opportunity came up at WOW, it was good for me'.

The final example is from Nada, who lives alone in downtown Cairo because her parents live in France, which allowed her to not be under the control of her family. She worked in different places to cover her living expenses and studied fine arts at the university. Nada used graffiti to resist what she described as repressive society and police that exemplified power of the regime: 'I chose graffiti because I liked it. I was trying to draw something to express myself or something bigger'. 'Why and was it an expression of a political interest?' I asked her and she replied, 'Me and politics are not friends. I draw graffiti because I feel that something inside me likes graffiti. I do not know why. Also, I was not here during the revolution. My themes in graffiti have to do with life in general'. Of course, not participating in politics does not mean that Nada's graffiti does not have a political impact. I asked her again why she chose graffiti as a form of expression. She replied:

Because when I draw graffiti, I feel like I am doing something wrong on the street. I really enjoyed doing that; it was a kind of rebellion. I feel like I am resisting; I know that the effects could be perceived as political, but I do not draw graffiti about politics. I know that those who draw graffiti would be arrested, so I wanted something that would disrupt society and the police. I want to laugh at the police.

Nada was upset with the system, so she constructed her subjectivity and an agency against both the repressive society and the regime, as she felt that they overlapped. She wanted to move the stagnant waters when she aimed to disrupt society and police. Nada already knew that her graffiti could be perceived as a political act with political impact.

Nada shared with other activists the disappointment of how society oppressed women: 'As a woman, I was always exposed to SH, not when I draw graffiti because I hoped no one would be there, but in my daily life'. I asked, 'Can I ask you why WOW?' She replied, 'I did not see myself as a woman. I perceived myself as a human being first and foremost; I am not interested in drawing gender issues in general'. 'So why WOW, when you knew that WOW was about highlighting women's issues?' I asked her, and she replied 'It was by chance. Someone told me there was going to be a workshop and you were going to learn new techniques of drawing, so I said, "Okay, why not, let's



see". When I found out the workshop was being held by WOW, I said, "Okay, I want to have fun". So, like other activists, Nada became part of WOW, but not to draw attention to women's issues per se; instead, she used the issue of women to fight back against the repressive society and the police.

In summary, Enas and Nada reported they felt excluded from participating in the public sphere until they turned to WOW, which provided them with a collective action frame. Then they became part of the collective concern and action to draw attention to women's issues through graffiti.

## Summary

Like the anti-harassment interviewees, the activists constructed a gendered subjectivity to advocate for women's situation, with the exception of Nada who felt anger towards the state and society. They also developed their agency to highlight women's issues after the uprising, which inspired and mobilised them to join WOW after feeling excluded as unaffiliated participants. They had the ability to draw graffiti because they had already studied art at university or practised art like Khadija, which gave them the advantage of accessing the public sphere as activists and exclusively through WOW.

Some of the interviewees switched from being interested in general political issues to women's issues, which means that the uprising raised their feminist consciousness. Some activists already participated in the uprising, such as Khadija and Nora, and others participated directly to draw graffiti, such as Nada and Enas.

WOW facilitated the activists' access to a wide range of women's issues in a broad spectrum of invigorated civil society.

## Participation through WOW

The activists reported that they overcame their exclusion when they joined WOW because it was difficult for them to draw graffiti in public as unaffiliated activists. Their families supported the activists because they perceived graffiti as non-political activism. The role of WOW was tremendously important in facilitating access the public space and connecting with people on the street.

In what follows, the first subsection focuses on how families supported their activists, and the second on how the activists joined WOW. The last subsection explains how WOW benefited from this invigoration of civil society in the wake of the uprising to provide access to the public space.



## Support inside the family

The artists reported that their families supported them drawing graffiti through WOW, and one reason for some artists was that the families perceived graffiti as non-political activism. I will introduce Khadija and Nour as examples.

Khadija reports, 'I have no problem with my family to draw graffiti and other activities like politics. My family does not interfere with my personal interests except that I come home on time. My father gives me the freedom to do what I want to do'. Khadija has a lot of freedom and the opportunity to make her own decisions about her life. She participated in the uprising in 2011 and was able to travel alone from Alexandria to Cairo between 2013 and 2014 to participate in the WOW's projects. I asked her, 'Did you return to Alexandria the same day?' She said, 'No, I stayed there for a week. My parents never minded'. Khadija was able to act with limits of gender norms, which seemed to be flexible to include her role as an artist.

Nour also was not questioned by her family because of her activity drawing graffiti on the streets, 'My family has no objection to drawing graffiti; they believe I am successful in my studies and work. They respect my personal freedom, as long as I do not fail in my studies'. Similar to Khadija, Nour acted within the boundaries of gender norms, which might best be described as flexible to include her role as an artist. Enas also says: 'My family has no problem with graffiti unless it does not touch on political issues, they mean they do not want any problem with the regime'. In this context, the support of family was associated with the outbreak of the uprising, which mobilised people to address women's issues.

## Joining WOW

The artists reported that they joined WOW when the two parties were compatible on many things, including accessing the public space as artists and highlighting women's issues as a topic.

### *Accessing the public space with WOW*

All artists believed that graffiti was the best way to get their messages across to people in the public space. Cartiere and Zebracki (2016) point out that public art should be accessible and visible in public spaces to affect individuals and community. Nour argues,

There is a wide space to talk to people in the streets through colours on the walls. Basically, the streets belong to people who always ask you, 'Why are you doing this? Or what are you doing here?' So, we need to talk to the [real] owners of the streets [the people] because people there have different backgrounds.

Iveson (2010) argues the assumption is that public spaces primarily belong to people, here and now, those who reclaim the right to the city. Reclaiming the right to the city was enhanced by the shared sense of unequal possession of public space among marginalised people (Smith, 2015). Nour wanted to share her experience as a woman with poor people from the lower and middle class who were exposed to impoverishment through the implementation of the government's new liberal policies (Bayat, 2010). I asked Enas, 'Why graffiti?' She replied,

If we would discuss a certain topic, it is difficult to broadcast it through TV, radio or newspapers because not all people are educated and have access to it. Some people are always on the street to survive. Look, for me, the street is a crime scene where women are insulted, raped, or women's rights are dismissed.

If we take SH as an example, these activists would be in touch with harassers not in a traditional way of talking with them directly but by reaching out to them through colour. Nour argues,

If I were to display my graffiti in a gallery, who would see it? Only the artists and those who are interested in art. Harassers are on the street, and they do not visit galleries. Graffiti on the street conveys a message faster and the harasser sees it when he walks back and forth on the street every day. If you ask him, 'What is that?' He would answer you directly, 'This is graffiti about SH'.

Thus, the activists were aware of the impact their graffiti had on people in the street compared to showing graffiti in galleries. Smith (2015) reports that since the uprising, the new trend showed the widespread forms of public art, such as graffiti on the streets of Cairo, outside the formal channels or traditional ways of showing art like in museums and galleries to reach the largest possible audience.

The role of WOW was crucial in facilitating the activists to access the public space,

Each of the WOW artists brings her own unique stories to the project – each has had different interactions with the street, and the streets have touched each in a very special way. Each has also left their unique thumbprint in the streets and the wider underground art scene. (WOW, 2015a)

In this context, Angie (the co-founder of WOW) told me that 'our job is to protect women, and we strive to take care of them and not put them in an embarrassing situation. We know they need to reassure their families that they are safe'. Angie goes on to explain how this strategy is used in practice:

Also, our groups were made up of men and women; if something happens, men step in and control the situation. They also know the rules and I always remind them that they are on the street and in a conservative society, so they need to be prepared if something happens.

As with the anti-harassment groups, the presence of men suggests that there was an inclination for men to act in a feminist way, with a feminist consciousness, among the men who wanted to highlight women's issues in their graffiti.

Thus, WOW protected the activists in the public space. Furthermore, WOW helps the activists get permission from private property owners to draw graffiti on their walls, which is impossible to achieve as an unaffiliated activists. Nour argues, 'If we want to paint graffiti on public property walls, we have to get prior permission from the Ministry of Interior, which seems impossible to get as individuals. Then, we have to present our sketches before we put them on the walls'. Enas also argues that 'since the government issued a law banning graffiti, I cannot draw alone without my colleagues in WOW. My colleagues are responsible for getting permission'. When I asked Angie, 'How do you work?' She replied, 'The artists first choose the walls, and in the second step, WOW approves them and tries to contact the owners of the walls to get permission. After that, they start drawing'.

So, the activists and WOW were compatible with one goal: to reach people in public space through a new form of public art activism. Raising people's awareness of women's issues would expand and revive the public space with feminine figures; it was an attempt to integrate the walls of a certain public space into the public sphere to be part of its publicity and the deliberative world. This compatibility happened in the framework of the inclusionary environment for various forms of NGOs and networks in a way that did not disturb the regime between 2013–2014.

### *Highlighting women's issues*

Highlighting women's issues in the public sphere was the common interest between the activists and WOW. I asked Enas, 'Why WOW?', and she replied, 'I have long wanted to do something valuable for the situation of women, especially about SH. When the opportunity came up with WOW, I was very enthusiastic about bringing up SH as a theme through graffiti'. Nour also was looking for a group that highlights women's issues, 'Women, like me, were certainly looking for an outlet to express their opinions and perspectives on life against the so-called customs and traditions that restricted them in society'.

WOW's main mission is to draw attention to women's issues. 'WOW uses graffiti to talk about women's issues and rights, to contribute to the empowerment of the Arab woman' (WOW, 2015a). Both the interviewees and WOW were spurred by the impact

of the uprising on the situation of women facing exclusion, marginalisation, gender-based violence and SH. Thus, the activists revived the public space with many women's issues when they challenged the distinction between the public sphere and the public space.

Based on this compatibility between the two parties, WOW facilitated the activists' access to the public space. This was done in the context of invigorating civil society, which served as an assisting factor between 2013–2014.

### **The assisting role of structural enablement**

Abaza (2015, p. 171) describes Tahrir Square in the post-uprising period, 'The walls, fences, buildings, bridges, and empty public spaces of the city were transformed into a playground for graffiti, as well as for displaying insults against the regime and for biting insolent jokes'. The inclusionary environment was part of invigorated civil society after the uprising, where many initiatives and projects were launched. Later, graffiti artists were arrested and graffiti on the walls of public buildings criticising the political system were destroyed. Until 2014, there was no explicit law restricting graffiti on the walls of private property.

With this background, the circumstances of joining WOW in 2013, the same year the project was launched, suggest that the recruitment process took place when the activists contacted or were contacted by WOW through the internet or a social network. Among those contacted by WOW was Khadija: 'WOW contacted me when they saw my artwork on my personal page on the internet'. Enas and others contacted WOW through the internet by submitting their artworks to a competition made by WOW: 'There was an announcement on Facebook about a competition by WOW, I submitted my artwork and was accepted'. WOW did not have a headquarters or a place to meet with the activists. Instead, WOW used the new technology of social media to mobilise activists.

However, Nour and Nada contacted WOW through networks of their friends who were also involved in the arts. Nour says, 'Through a friend, I met Angie, who told me about the WOW project and women's issues'. As mentioned, Nada's friend recommended that she participate in WOW's workshop in 2013, and she later joined WOW. In 2013, during Morsi's reign, she contacted WOW through social networks.

Accordingly, WOW's role was to help the activists resolve the constraints in their collectivity and assist them in taking advantage of the inclusionary environment and invigorated civil society. In this way, the activists dealt with the social structure in multiple ways using the WOW's agency as an intermediary to access the public sphere.

## Summary

The activists reported they overcame their exclusion on the condition of joining WOW because they felt excluded from drawing graffiti as unaffiliated activists. WOW provided them with a collective action frame to express their unique personal experiences, protect them and give their graffiti legal permission. Like the MB interviewees, some activists were specifically contacted by WOW because they matched WOW's requirements for qualified artists.

All activists reported that they had been supported by their families, and for some, that was because they perceived graffiti as non-political activism. They were compatible with WOW in two segments: access to the public space to be in touch with people and to highlighting women's issues in the public sphere as a theme. The activists and WOW acted in the context of the transformation of the media landscape and the inclusionary environment, when many initiatives and projects were launched in the invigorated civil society between 2013–2014.

## Visibility on the walls of downtown Cairo

This section sets out to understand how the activists experienced their visibility in the public sphere.

The section will show that the activists reported they overcame their marginalisation in the public sphere, compared to the previous period of drawing graffiti as unaffiliated activists. They felt self-empowered when they received feedback, especially gendered feedback, on their graffiti, and enlarged their role in the male-dominated space. They slightly pushed gender boundaries in the context of negotiating the masculine shape to open up a space of appearance for their feminine figures.

I will first examine how the activists experienced an expansion of their visibility in downtown Cairo between 2013–2014. Second, I will elaborate how WOW employed strategies to mediate visibility. Finally, I will highlight the constraints of outlawing and removing graffiti and explain how the activists and WOW employed strategies to overcome these constraints.

### Expanding visibility through public attention

All the activists reported they felt self-empowered when they realised that their graffiti received a combination of not only negative and positive responses but also gendered feedback by people in downtown Cairo between 2013–2014.

Nour believes that her graffiti attracted more attention compared to before the 2011 uprising,

Before the revolution, people were surprised when we drew graffiti. After the revolution, when I joined WOW, people got used to graffiti and became more aware of it because graffiti stirred up different issues that are discussed among people and also in the media.

Nada says, 'People looked at me strangely and kept going when I drew. There was negative feedback when some people said to me, "You are making the walls dirty"'. These quotes illustrate the impact of graffiti during the uprising. Melucci (1996) argues that social action is very closely linked to the change of structure and culture, which implies the change of people's minds.

The activists spoke of different reactions between men and women. Enas received negative feedback from men who felt that her graffiti challenged masculine norms in El-Borsa, a neighbourhood in downtown Cairo, in 2014: 'The men especially rejected our graffiti about women. I always told these men that we were drawing graffiti for women to protect their wasted rights, because they were always the victims of harassment, not men'. This was a gendered type of feedback, which meant that this type of graffiti elicited different reflections between men and women.

Nevertheless, some activists like Khadija received a mix of positive and negative reactions in El-Borsa in 2014:

When the walls were still empty, the reaction was often, 'What are you doing?' Later, when they saw the graffiti, they were interested. Sometimes, and because I am a woman, they ask, 'Does your family know what you are painting?' And 'Why are you doing this?' These reactions happened in Cairo, particularly in El-Borsa. Like everyone else, I usually return to my graffiti to see what people have to say about it. Some were upset because they could not accept that a veiled woman would think that way. I found that they began to discuss the issues in my graffiti, and that was a positive reaction for me.

Iveson (2007) argues that public art in the public sphere, as a practice, shapes the audience (spectators) as a public and allows them to participate in a public debate. Abaza (2015) points out that graffiti in Egypt loomed large in the revolutionary events and provoked unspoken questions. Then, the activists gained a sense of self-empowerment and experienced an expansion of their visibility.

The activists also reported that they enlarged their role in the male-dominated space where they placed their graffiti. All activists reported their presence as women had been a challenge to the male-dominated setting of the public space. Nour reports, 'Some people did not care about graffiti, but they frequented the place just to talk to us because we were women painting graffiti'. One activist from WOW describes how her existence

as a woman in this place drew people's attention to her graffiti: 'When a man sees me as a woman, he would say that, aha, she is a woman. So, even though that our graffiti does not get attention, being a woman would bring attention' (unknown activist in WOW, 2014, 'video').

Angie confirms this information: 'The problem lies in how a woman does a masculine job; it looks like the question of how a woman drives a taxi or exists in any male-dominated profession. These professions and fields are thought to be mostly male'. The progression of visibility to enlarge their role suggests that the activists were about negotiating the masculine gender norms in the place to open up a space of appearance for their feminine graffiti.

In all of this, the role of WOW in expanding the visibility of the activists was evident. Between 2013–2014, WOW used two strategies to negotiate the masculine norms and open up a space of appearance for their graffiti: They chose the appropriate public place and the right themes.

### *The appropriate public place*

The choice of an appropriate public place for graffiti aims to draw as much public attention as possible to women's issues. Angie says, 'The choice of location is based on its importance, exposure, and controllability'. Based on the interviewees' reports, WOW and the activists choose the location because of the target group, the topic, and the location that is most exposed to passers-by.

First, WOW and the activists looked for places where marginalised and unrepresented groups lived, gathered, scattering and went about their daily lives with a sense of belonging to the place. Smith (2015) points out that the reclaiming the right to the city was reinforced by the marginalised people's shared sense of possessing the public space. The idea of reclaiming the right to the city came up repeatedly in the interviews because of the dynamic role people play in controlling the public space. Nour (WOW) argues, 'We choose the place based on who lives there because the streets are the place that connects people the most'. Adut (2012) points out that, in such a position, 'We as audience and spectators are not just recipients but can be considered effective actors through our participation. We are the actual public when we pay attention to the issues, events, or topics. Events are perceived as public only when we are there as spectators, because our efficacy necessarily constitutes the events'.

By turning people on the margins of society into influential actors, the activists create a space of appearance for a discussion about women's issues, especially between women who have not been able to speak out or have not had the opportunity to do so. Enas told me how a woman passer-by was affected by her graffiti:

I met many women who asked me what I was drawing. I told them, 'I draw pictures that express women's rights'. They responded positively and supported me to keep drawing. One of these women asked me to draw something about domestic violence against women: the violence of husbands against their wives and fathers against their daughters when they force them to marry against their will. She told me that her husband beat her all the time. Then she became my friend and came to me wherever I was painting, and we talked.

The encounter with the woman who followed Enas shows that the two shared similar feelings and that Enas sympathised with offended women. This incident refers how the visibility of the activists opened up a space of appearance for women to express themselves through graffiti.

Second, Nour explains, 'We choose places according to the nature of the issue, for example, if we want to address a social issue, we should paint on the main streets like Tahrir Square or other available and viewable places for people from different classes'. As Angie told me, both the activists and WOW, chose a location closer to where women were regularly subjected to SH or, as Enas calls it, the 'crime scene' to make claims against SH. This made harassers part of the public that supposedly notices the graffiti. This graffiti creates a platform for communication and discussion between people from different backgrounds, including harassers. The strategy shifts control from offended women to harassers and places them under the control of passers-by.

Third, the activists reported they were very concerned about choosing the most symbolic place for their graffiti, and therefore, WOW played a crucial role. Enas says, 'I choose the wall firstly according to the owner's acceptance and secondly according to the importance of the observable site in agreement with WOW.

From my observation of an event by WOW, I could see the walls in El-Borsa just turned into a festival of colourful and feminine figures where the event looked like a beehive of activity. Passers-by became spectators (myself included) as they paid close attention to see what was going on. Many of them watched and then asked the activists what it meant with these feminine figures. They went about their daily lives near a crossroads, near a mosque and a church built next to each other and nothing but a small road between them. While the activists were drawing, two policemen asked what was going on. Angie stood up and explained that they had permission to draw on these walls. The policemen just went on without any problems.

In brief, the interviewees challenged the clear-cut demarcation between the public sphere and the public space through the attempt to reintegrate part of the public space into the public sphere to be a part of its publicity and deliberative world of communication.



### *The right theme in the right place*

The second strategy for transforming the artists' graffiti was the selection of the right themes by WOW and artists with advice from feminist groups, for example, Nazra. These themes reflected three major subjects that emerged in the interviews, including the disclosing of sensitive private feminine items to the public; the representation of women in graffiti that contradicts the mainstream stereotype of women in society; and making female figures symbolic for women.

First, disclosing the sensual private feminine items questions sexuality in what society perceives as private. In her graffiti, Nour (WOW, 2015b) symbolically depicted a naked female body that people perceive as taboo to open the space for public discussion about sexuality. She called her graffiti 'There is no shame' (Figs. 11–12). She noticed a man looking at her lustfully and intrusively, as if she were an object or something that would give pleasure.



**Figure 11.** WOW (2015b)

In the same graffiti, Nour covered the eyes and mouths of a woman to convey the message that society does not allow women to talk about SH because it is perceived as a blemish, shame, or 'haram.'



**Figure 12.** WOW (2015b)

In this way, a woman's body could be recognised in its sincerity and dignity. The graffiti gained greater public attention when it attempted to redefine the notion of sexuality in what was perceived as a woman's private body to make it public. The attempt challenged the Islamists and state secular discourse that sought to control women's bodies by reducing them to honour culture (Pratt, 2020).

Second, some activists portrayed women in the public spaces as powerful subjects, in contrast to the mainstream stereotype of women as submissive objects, docile or probably victims. Khadija drew graffiti with a huge eye for a woman who is aware of what is happening around her (Fig. 13). This graffiti symbolises that women are not objects or victims, as the mainstream stereotype, but subjects who have feelings that could be hurt because others stare at their bodies. Moreover, women are not only being observed, but they are watching, making sense of the place, and controlling the harassers.



**Figure 13.** Author's own photograph (2014)

Khadija says:

My graffiti is a giant eye that alludes to the fact that I am unavailable to your eyes. The goal behind this graffiti is that a woman's body is not available to your eyes, so she does not have to dress a certain way to avoid you. She is free and able to confront you. (WOW, 2015c, own translation).

She explained how she reflects on what she has heard, seen, and felt in her social environment: 'I choose the topics that are most discussed in public, for example, what I heard in the discussion about SH in my university'. Thus, Khadija tried to say women can watch and control harassers. She tried to redefine gender roles by changing the game between harassers and offended women who have to take control.

Third, some activists attempted to encourage women to take their role in political, social and economic life to change gender norms in society. Enas compared women in ancient Egyptian history to women today to inspire women to challenge the traditions of society by reminding them of the role of ancient Egyptian women in public life (Fig. 14):



**Figure 14.** Author's own photograph (2014)

I draw a face in two parts. The first part expresses the half face of a pharaonic woman who enjoyed her political and social rights, like Cleopatra and Nefertiti, who possessed the greatest civilisation in all history. We shall move on, but the situation of women has worsened. The second part expresses the half face of today's Egyptian woman who is oppressed by society. Her face looks like to be broken and hidden behind the *mashrabiya* (traditional windows in old-fashioned Egyptian buildings).

Another activist from WOW also answered the question if her graffiti empowers women, she replied, 'Yes, because of the quote which is written and the message that comes through in the graffiti that women are empowered' (unknown (2) activist WOW, 2014, 'video').

With the support of WOW, the activists reported they were able to choose the themes, and WOW provided its expertise to select these themes and obtain permission. WOW worked with feminist groups, such as Nazra, to bring the most effective feminine features into play. Angie talks about how,

Through our collaboration with Nazra and the Catch a Harasser initiative, we are engaging with the culture of society and addressing what is happening on the street through graffiti. So, they have helped us to choose the right and current gender themes. They accompany our artists on the street to convey gender concepts through graffiti.

Choosing the right themes was an attempt to cross the line between what is perceived as private and public by bringing gender issues into the public discussion.

To summarise the previous two subsections: through the two strategies, and despite the restrictions imposed by the regime between 2013–2014, WOW transformed the visibility of activists in the public sphere to be collective and part of the publicity in the

public sphere. The activists tried to negotiate the public space through WOW to open up a space of appearance for women's issues, to integrate part of the public space (walls) into the public sphere. Angie claims, 'Listen to me, we are still few, but the artworks we do have started to gain more appreciation and respect in society, despite the restrictions by the regime'. They have tried to redefine gender roles and sexuality in such a way that women could take their role in public life. Based on their reports, the activists slightly pushed gender boundaries – compared to the pre-uprising period and also to other forms of the graffiti that exposed to regime's repression – in the context of furnishing the public space with feminised figures and adding new issues to the political and social discussion.

As result, the impact of their graffiti went beyond influencing passers-by and was disseminated through mass media and social media, which brought each new graffiti to Cairo's city walls. Abaza (2013, p. 4) points out that 'professional bloggers-photographers-journalists-graffiti hunters whose daily sport is recording the latest graffiti in the city'. As outlined in the previous chapters, the space of appearance recalls surveillance, so they speak of constraints also.

### **Constraining activists' visibility**

The constraining of the activists' visibility was linked, among other things, to the legal restrictions of the regime between 2013–2014 and to many people who tried to preserve the masculine shape of the public space. Based on the interviewees' description and previous studies, the regime employed, at least, two strategies to control graffiti on walls: banning graffiti in the public space and removing graffiti from walls. However, the activists had their own strategies to circumvent these constraints.

#### *The attempt to outlaw graffiti*

Iveson (2010) refers to several scholars who suggest that graffiti is often viewed as a problem by states; they reduce graffiti to anti-social behaviour and deviance that must be eradicated from the streets. Abdel Samei (2013) observes that since the military coup in July 2013, the state has attempted to ban graffiti by law because 'in the state's view, graffiti represents lawlessness, anarchy, and, most importantly, loss of control over public space'. The Minister of Local Development, Adel Labeed, announced that the government was considering amending a law to criminalise graffiti or writings on state and private buildings. In the issued law, it was proposed that the accused person would be punished with four years in prison and a fine of 100 000 LE (Gulhane, 2013). Meanwhile, the minister referred to another article in the Egyptian Penal Code that prohibits vandalism of public and private property to charge graffiti artists: 'Until this law is issued, governors have been temporarily granted the authority of referring



offenders to prosecution'. This article was enacted to sentence the accused person to three years and a maximum fine of 500 LE (Al Sherbini, 2013).

Considering graffiti illegal may exist all over the world, but in Egypt, the evidence shows that the state abused the law to restrict free expression and control activists who used graffiti to criticise the regime. For example, during the 2011 uprising, SCAF considered graffiti as a threat to the order in the public space because it provoked controversial political and social issues (Khatib, 2013); it was an attempt to separate some of the perceived political content in the public space from its influence on political discussion in the public sphere. In 2013, many graffiti artists were arrested for their graffiti, and others fled the country, such as the well-known graffiti artist, Ganzeer (Jankowicz, 2016). Angie explains that 'the law should be enacted to restrict the messages conveyed by graffiti. The proof of this is that the graffiti law provides for more imprisonment and fines than committing acts of SH, and this fact shows that the state wants to control the public space.'

Consequently, the activists had to obtain permission from the owners of private property to draw graffiti, as the state had not banned graffiti on private buildings up to that point. Khadija said that 'before and after 3 July 2013, graffiti was considered illegal, and anyone arrested was subject to a fine and three years in prison. I know someone who was arrested and paid off the fine'. Enas explains, 'I cannot draw without permission, and my colleagues in WOW are responsible for getting that permission from the private owner'. Khadija and Enas did not want to take the risk if they drew as unaffiliated activists because they could not afford to be fined, even though there was no clear law enacted to sentence graffiti on privately owned walls.

WOW circumvented the legal restriction by getting permission from the private owners of public space, for example, the coffee shops in El-Borsa. WOW, which expected the most transgressions, basically followed the rules but challenged the masculine gender norms. WOW negotiated the public space to keep the space of appearance intact and overcame the socio-legal constraint.

### *Removing graffiti*

There was a struggle between the security forces and revolutionaries over who would control the public space or 'who would have the final word' (Abdel Samei, 2013). Some graffiti artists such as Abo Bakr wrote a message on the walls after the security forces erased his graffiti, 'Erase, even more, you cowardly regime [...] Erase and I will draw again' (Jankowicz, 2016).

The activists refer to both the police and people who intentionally remove or deface their graffiti. Nour says, 'Since the government issued a law banning graffiti, I could no longer draw alone without having my colleagues with me. As soon as I drew graffiti, some police officers came and removed it'. 'Can I ask you why?' I said. She replied,

‘Because graffiti is always against the government’. Enas also refers to the police removing her graffiti: ‘This happened to us when we painted graffiti and the day after, the graffiti was removed by someone whitening the wall’. ‘Who did that?’ I asked, and she replied, ‘The occupants, those who were responsible for controlling the area, police officers or official people from the government’. Smith (2015) says that SCAF painted over the graffiti on the walls with white paint as a sign of restoring control over the public space. The artists came back and painted over the walls again. So, there was a struggle between control and escape from that control by the activists.

From my observation, I saw a lot of graffiti on the walls of a church in downtown Cairo in 2014. Some people intentionally defaced this graffiti. I think that this defacing was not done by a bunch of messy and inconsiderate people because they only destroyed the eyes of those portrayed. There was a message that it was El-Sisi's turn, hastily drawn but left alone. There was an announcement for apartments and houses. A few other things I could not really make out, but the layers turned the wall into a space of contestation between different political actors. The graffiti depicted the martyrs of the Maspero Massacre in October 2011, including Mina Danial, a Coptic Christian activist who was killed in the Maspero protests. This situation suggests that they would hide the identities of these portrays on the walls (Fig. 15).



**Figure 15.** Author's own photograph (2014)

According to Smith (2015), it is a struggle between perceived order and disorder. The order set by those who have power and the disorder set by those who resist this power. The wall on Mohammed Mahmoud Street was never wholly appropriated in the

struggle over painting and erasing graffiti between the police and graffiti artists. The activists challenged the state's order and its dominant discourse on women's issues.

Regarding people's attitudes toward graffiti, the activists reported that people removed their graffiti for a variety of reasons, such as vandalism or to destroy society. Many perceived women's graffiti as a threat to the masculine gender norms and national culture in the public space. People shaped a substantial part of the public space because they were concerned with maintaining its shape through their control of public order (Adut, 2012).

Enas encountered resistance in public spaces mainly from men who did not accept women's graffiti on walls: 'They enjoyed ruining it. They are insignificant persons who have a spray to do that'. For Nour, the graffiti was removed because it presented a particular challenge to the masculine norms in that location: 'It depends on the neighbourhood. Some people did it out of habit and tradition or pretending to be religious, and they did not accept female features on the walls'.

The idea of removing graffiti is also related to the claim that such projects are linked to foreign organisations that pursue a Western agenda. They believe that this agenda is aimed at destroying Egyptian society, especially cultural and religious identity. Enas comments, 'We have been criticised because we always have foreign members painting on the street with us. A passer-by asked our foreign colleagues, "What are you doing in our country? Do you want to destroy our country?"' This accusation reflects the conflict over the identity of Egyptian society between different political currents and ideologies and how some political actors believed that Egyptian society was under cultural attack from the West (Elsadda, 2011).

Other graffiti was painted in a mocking or threatening manner over other graffiti because they might carry a Western agenda. In a mocking way, I found a graffiti in Tahrir Square that depicted Gröndahl, one of the co-founders of WOW. The graffiti alluded to the connection between WOW and Western agenda, as this graffiti had 'CKU' written on Gröndahl's portrait. CKU is an acronym for the Danish Centre for Culture and Development (UNESCO, 2016), from which WOW receives its funding (Fig. 16). The same graffiti included other aspects of the slogan, for example, it mocked Islamists in their use of Sharia.





**Figure 16.** Author's own photograph (2014)

Thus, removing graffiti might be intended to separate some of the perceived political content in the public space from integration into the public sphere by marginalising certain issues such as feminine figures in a public space; it represented the dominant cultural discourse that the Islamists and the state had in their struggle against Western cultural hegemony.

However, the activists and WOW had their strategy for avoiding the removal of the graffiti to appropriate their graffiti to cope with the situation. This strategy did not work for the police, but it influenced the people on the ground. Enas reports,

We have to use residents' acceptance of painting on the walls of a neighbourhood to cooperate with what people think are social norms. Many people rejected our graffiti for various reasons. Once I met one of the graffiti artists; she told me that she was prevented from drawing a girl. She was only allowed to draw a picture of a boy.

Khadija confirms this strategy when she says, 'I adapt my graffiti to the social environment to be accepted and not removed'. Nour also says, 'Before we draw, we talk to the residents about the history of the neighbourhood and who lived there to build a good relationship with them'.

To appropriate the graffiti was used to cope with the setting of visibility in this place, even as these graffiti artworks critiqued the status quo of women's situation. Similar to how the interviewees from the anti-harassment initiatives reasoned, this type of strategy is seen as a form of negotiation of masculine norms in the public space to open up a

space of appearance. It was about negotiating the intersecting socio-political/legal and cultural constraints. Abaza (2015) argues that graffiti had lost its momentum in 2014–2015 due to the regime's repression. Abaza may be speaking of graffiti in general that touched on and bluntly criticised the political regime. However, the findings of this chapter show that by the end of 2014, the activists still retained their space of appearance space through WOW to inscribe their ideas and opinions and express their emotions and imagination to challenge the status quo regarding women's issues.

## Summary

Based on their reports, the activists overcame their marginalisation in the public sphere, compared to the previous period as unaffiliated activists, when they received mixed feedback from the public for their graffiti, especially gendered feedback from many men who rejected female figures. They reported an expansion of their visibility between 2013–2014 through their presence as physical persons and mediating their voices in graffiti. The activists felt self-empowered and expanded their role in a male-dominated space. They slightly pushed gender boundaries to open up a space of appearance for the discussion of women's issues. They tried to redefine what was perceived as taboo and private to be public women's issues, for example, SH and domestic violence, through which they challenged the public/private distinction. This expansion was reflected in the virtual world as graffiti spread out on the internet.

WOW negotiated the public space to keep the space of appearance intact by choosing an appropriate place and the right theme in the right place. WOW sought to integrate part of the public space into the public sphere, challenging the demarcation between the two. Like the anti-harassment initiatives, WOW worked with networks of feminist groups to use their expertise in women's issues, even though none of the activists called themselves feminists. Many men, including those with feminist consciousness, participated in WOW's activities.

Between 2013–2014, the activists faced the legal restrictions of the state, which tried to ban graffiti. They carried out their activism within the outline of the state's vision of gender policies but still criticised the status quo of women's situation. However, WOW obtained permission from private property owners. They also encountered constraints from many people who removed their graffiti. The removal of graffiti was also linked to accusations that such projects were linked to foreign organisations and the Western agenda. The activists were thus negotiating with the dominant cultural nationalist discourse that sought to control women's bodies (feminine artistic figures) in their struggle against Western cultural hegemony.

## Conclusion

The chapter shows that graffiti was one of the main avenues for participating in the public sphere in the aftermath of the 2011 uprising. Through the use of graffiti, the activists reported that they overcame their exclusion on the condition of joining WOW between 2013–2014. Like the anti-harassment counter-public, the activists became part of a negotiating counter-public that communicated with the dominant public on one platform. They were thus critical of the dominant discourse, but far from provoking the regime, they carried out their activism within the outline of the state's vision of gender policies while remaining critical of that vision. The activists brought to light another narrative regarding women's issues that set itself apart from the old narrative brought by state feminism and women's organisations. They sought to redefine the notion of sexuality in what was perceived as taboo and private in order to make women's issues public. They sought to change the perception, representation and understanding of women's issues by opening a space for discussion and challenging the distinction between what was perceived public and private.

Like the anti-harassment groups, the activists constructed a gendered subjectivity and developed agency due to their frustration with the situation of women, which deteriorated during the uprising. Their families supported them because they perceived graffiti as a non-political activity. They wanted to be in touch with marginalised people on the streets to make them pay attention to women's issues. They were inspired and promoted a feminist consciousness between men and women who were enlightened about women's issues. They worked with feminist group networks but refused to be called feminist activists, so their agency was far from liberal feminists based on Western notions of women's liberation.

Based on their stories, the activists overcame their marginalisation, compared to the previous period as unaffiliated activists, in the public sphere by being visible as physical persons and mediating their voices through their graffiti. They still participated in the public sphere but with improved and precarious achievement due to the restrictive public sphere in 2014. They slightly pushed gender boundaries in the context of negotiating the masculine shape of the public space, compared to the previous period. Their expansion was also reflected on the internet after they spread out their graffiti in the virtual world, which they used – like the anti-harassment groups – as a supplement rather than an alternative site of activism.

Like the anti-harassment groups, WOW negotiated the public space through appropriate graffiti to fit the situation and keep their space of appearance intact when they challenged the distinction between the public sphere and the public space. They confronted the structural constraints of outlawing graffiti and removing their graffiti – because they were accused of having a Western agenda – by seeking permission from

private owners. They tried to escape the control of the cultural nationalist dominant discourse of the Islamists and the secular state in their struggle against Western cultural hegemony.



# Discussion and conclusion

This dissertation sets out to understand women's participation in the public sphere in Egypt between 2011–2014. The background ideas of the dissertation lie in two stories presented in the introduction chapter. The first story is the widely held view among scholars – with varying explanations as to why – that women in Egypt faced systematic and historical exclusion and marginalisation in the public sphere before and after the 2011 uprising. As shown in the introduction and background chapters, the situation and rights of women had deteriorated in the transition period following the 2011 uprising. The findings of this dissertation also confirm this.

The second story is about the high presence of women in the 2011 uprising. While women were weakly represented in formal political participation before and after the uprising, compared to men, women participated mainly through opposition groups of informal political participation that formed the core of several counter-publics before and after the uprising, such as the interviewees who joined 6AYM, MB, anti-harassment and graffiti groups. The discrepancy between the two stories was reviewed in the introduction and background chapters and is consistent with the dissertation's findings.

The dissertation seeks to understand how women participated in various counter-publics from their personal stories as revolutionaries to challenge the power structure and many aspects of domination. As stated in the introduction chapter, this dissertation attempts to add new knowledge and overcome the limitation of understanding women's role in shaping public communication in the public sphere. The dissertation attempts to cover different ways of participation as much as possible. Choosing participation through social movements, OPPs, and civic engagement gave us broad insight into the experiences of many women who have had little or no previous experience with public activism and leadership.

The use of qualitative methodology illuminated the unique experiences of the interviewees as first-hand data from a subjective perspective. The data addressed women's corporeal performance in everyday interactions, which should not be overlooked when emphasising only women's participation at structural level in the public sphere, as discussed in theory chapter.

The use of critical realism, as a critical emancipatory epistemology – which has recently been used in feminist studies (Ingen, Grohmann & Gunnarsson, 2020), as explained in the theory chapter – viewed the interviewee's experience in the context of the interaction between subjectivity, individual and group agency, and structure. Critical realism offers several alternative explanatory avenues through which the interviewees' actions challenged, negotiated, or circumvented the structure directly or in multiple ways when they were constrained from participating as unaffiliated participants (6AYM, MB, and OPPs chapters) or as a group (all chapters).

The use of critical realism was compatible with the application of the empirical model of public space. The juxtaposition of the various interviewees' experiences with public activism was fruitful and productive; it was consistent with Negt and Kluge's (1993) and Fraser's (1990) understanding of women as a marginalised group that participates through various counter-publics. The empirical model provided a satisfactory explanation for many counter-publics that occurred depending on the person (public figures in the OPP chapter) and issue (in the anti-harassment and graffiti chapters) in the sense of Asen's (2000) conceptualisation of counter-publics, as stated in the theory chapter.

In addition, the empirical model helped to tease out different forms of counter-publics that emerge from the relationship with the dominant/mainstream public/politics in the public sphere, such as challenging counter-publics (6AYM and MB), critical counter-publics (OPPs), and negotiating counter-publics (anti-harassment and graffiti groups). The empirical model helped us understand how interviewees reported that they pushed gender boundaries – in different contexts and compared to the previous experience of the interviewees – in the public sphere. They challenged the demarcation between public space and the public sphere and the public/private distinction, as discussed in all chapters.

The results show that the empirical model gave satisfactory explanations to understand the dynamics of women's situation before and after their access the public sphere. Therefore, I discarded Habermas' model, as a normative model of the public sphere, as discussed in theory chapter – which many scholars have used in the Egyptian context – because it does not cover many different forms of activism in the public space and civil society.

As stated in the introduction chapter, while scholars mention that women face various structural constraints, none (as far as I know) distinguish between exclusion from the public sphere and marginalisation within it. They conflate the two, or rather, place one before the other. As Asen (2002) argues, the meaning of exclusion is a process that occurs at multiple levels. He distinguishes between direct and indirect exclusion, but this was not sufficient to be applied in the analysis. The goal of the dissertation goes

beyond Asen's distinction and emphasises the distinction between exclusion (the process of participation) and marginalisation (the content of participation).

Therefore, the two research questions aimed to understand how the interviewees participated in the public sphere and how they experienced that participation after gaining access the public sphere.

The answers to the research questions in all chapters confirm the idea of distinguishing between exclusion and marginalisation, as they drew from the empirical evidence to paint a clear picture of how the process of participation took place and what happened to the content of that participation afterwards. Moreover, the findings give us a new perspective on how women used different strategies to overcome exclusion and marginalisation to confront different structural constraints. To make this distinction, I had to redefine the term 'participation' in the theory chapter to distinguish between the collectivity of participation, which is related to exclusion, and the visibility of participation, which is related to marginalisation.

In what follows, I will review the common differences and similarities in the collectivity and visibility of interviewees' participation, as well as the central arguments in the analysis in all chapters.

## The process of participation (collectivity)

Based on the answer to the first research question (how did women activists come to participate in the public sphere in Cairo as counter-publics during the period from 25 January 2011 to November 2014?), the interviewees participated in the public sphere through a process of constructing subjectivity and adopting/developing individual and/or corporate agency to overcome exclusion. Like many ordinary people, all interviewees participated in everyday politics (in various ways). Using Bayat's (2010) theory of everyday politics, this increased the potential to continue to participate as regular activists in the public sphere. This finding challenges the notion that politics is detached from everyday interaction – which is overlooked in Habermas' theory, as discussed in theory chapter.

Many of the interviewees participated in some kind of voluntary activism before joining their groups. This finding confirms the previous research elaborated in background chapter that voluntary activism provided activists with the necessary skills and knowledge to make their voices heard.

Thus, the participation of the interviewees in the uprising was not a spontaneous action but rather occurred as part of a long process of participation in everyday politics, on the internet and through voluntary activism, even if they perceived many of their



activities as non-political. Participation in the uprising was only a new manifestation of their participation in various forms of public activism prior to the uprising. These findings are consistent with Bayat's (2021) portrayal that the revolutions referred to as the 'Arab Spring' as constantly evolving, process-oriented, and unpredictable rather than something with fixed characteristics. These findings contrast with those from many Western media outlets, policymakers, think tanks, and those who described women's participation in the uprising as new and exceptional, as Pratt (2020) and Hafez, S. (2016) elaborated and refuted this claim.

The interviewees participated in public affairs/politics because they had feelings of frustration, grief, and anger towards the situation in general, the regime, and the oppressive patriarchal state and society in particular. The findings confirm the role of emotions, explained in the theory and background chapters, when many counter-publics emerged for different reasons against successive regimes before and after the uprising. However, some groups shared additional specific motives, for example, Islamist ideology for the MB interviewees and exposure to SH for the anti-harassment and graffiti interviewees in the post-uprising period.

The interviewees constructed different forms of subjectivities in a long process before and after the 2011 uprising, for example, anti-ideological (6AYM), Islamist ideological (MB), critical political (OPPs), and gendered subjectivity (anti-harassment and graffiti groups). These differences point to several issues. First, the uprising not only produced a new subjectivity but also renewed different subjectivities in the new national context. Second, subjectivity was able to evolve from one situation to another as many interviewees' changed modes of participation from informal to formal (OPPs) or from political to gendered subjectivity (anti-harassment and graffiti respondents). Final, although the majority of the interviewees participated with a sense that they were participating primarily as citizens, they often felt that they were women with the added burden of challenging not only the repressive regime but also the oppressive society, the patriarchal family, community and the state, and the masculine norms in the public space. There was always something to remind them they were women, and not only citizens and activists. They were very sensitive about their surroundings, as a way to make sure they were safe and protected. In particular, they were often concerned about being subjected to SH and collective harassment or at least being discriminated against because they are women. Thus, the majority of the interviewees from all groups incorporated gendered feelings into their political subjectivity, including MB, and acted with a kind of feminist consciousness, as many of them defended women's issues or supported each other as women.

Based on the understanding of subjectivity as a process, as explained in the theory chapter, the manifestation of different subjectivities could explain why the interviewees set multiple foci for counter-publics and differed in their compatibility with multiple

groups. For example, Islamist subjectivity channelled into MB, while gendered subjectivity channelled into anti-harassment and graffiti groups. The interviewees also developed individual and group agency before and during the uprising. They invented various individual strategies to resolve socio-political, cultural and/or legal structural constraints that overlapped and were embedded in their families, communities, and society.

In all chapters, the interviewees challenged or negotiated the patriarchal order rather than being submissive to it, as many interviewees could redefine their roles to include the role of being political actors. Of course, there was a patriarchal order, but not in absolute form, because the patriarchy had been slightly eroded, as the findings of scholars such as Al-Ali (2012) and Kandiyoti (2013) called the 'patriarchal crisis' in chapter 4. The findings in all chapters reveal a strong connection between patriarchy in the family, community and the state. Evidence of this was that interviewees were able to challenge and negotiate patriarchy in their families when regime's repression became temporarily fragile, for example, during the first eighteen days of the uprising, as described in chapter 4 of 6AYM. These findings confirm what scholars (e.g. Hafez, 2012) mentioned in the introduction and background chapters.

The interviewees' personal situation played an important role (with variations) in choosing a particular strategy to cope with their constraints. Married women, for example, were more likely to negotiate their situation by dividing their time and prioritising their roles between work, household, and politics, as discussed in chapter 6 of OPPs. Education, work, experience in voluntary activism were other factors that facilitated many of the interviewees to challenge or negotiate their situations in their families.

Scholars often emphasise the patriarchal family and its negative role in constraining women, as mentioned in the introduction chapter, but they do not pay enough attention to the positive role of the political family (with the exception of McLarney (2015) and Raouf, (1995) in the MB chapter) in driving women to participate in politics, for example, by socialising (MB) the interviewees to view the domestic role as political one and a form of worship, or the families whose members are members in certain OPPs. In addition, those who came from middle-class families were more likely to have access to resources and political discussions and had less to contend – compared to working-class families – with in terms of patriarchal order, which (not necessarily) increased opportunities to participate in the public sphere.

The role of opposition groups was necessary to create potential participants and help them become aware, in some cases, of their exclusion and marginalisation – otherwise, the majority of the interviewees were already aware of the historical exclusion of women. The opposition groups raised political awareness when many interviewees

joined their groups in public seminars, conferences and election campaigns, as discussed in the OPP chapter.

Although many of the interviewees participated as unaffiliated participants at the beginning of the uprising, they had to join a group to continue to access the public sphere. Thus, overcoming their exclusion was conditional upon a variety of reasons discussed in each chapter. The interviewees from 6AYM needed protection and effectiveness, those from MB needed an Islamic context to participate, those from OPPs needed protection and integration into institutional/formal politics, those from anti-harassment groups needed expertise and discourse, those from the graffiti art groups needed supplies and expertise. The common reason between all the interviewees was that they needed protection to deal with regime's repression, SH and gender-based violence.

Among other methods, the groups used three primary methods reported by the interviewees to deal with repression and oppression. First, the groups in all chapters have provided virtual platforms for activism as an alternative strategy to on-the-ground activism in the streets and public space when they were subject to repression. However, participation on the internet could not stand alone without activism on the ground, as explained in the 6AYM chapter, for example. This finding confirms the ideas elaborated in the theory chapter that the internet cannot be an alternative to public space when it comes to launching and sustaining collective actions. Instead, the anti-harassment initiatives and the graffiti group used the internet as a supplement to their activism on the street, the dissemination of information, activism, and communication. This result confirms the idea of mutual influence between the public space and the virtual world on the internet discussed in theory and background chapters.

Second, social networks played a significant role in recruiting and mobilising the interviewees from all groups, but with differences in purpose and manner, as they mainly helped to avoid repression. Unlike other groups, MB relied heavily on social networks to cultivate, recruit, and mobilise supporters. 6AYM mostly used social networks to recruit and mobilise some of the interviewees. The anti-harassment initiatives used the old feminist networks to gain support. However, the graffiti group and OPPs rarely used social networking as means to join their groups. Instead, they used public figures and held public seminars and conferences to mobilise respondents.

Third, while some groups carried out their activism in isolation, such as MB (sometimes MB was part of broader manifestations of a particular counter-public), other groups engaged in a large network of movements or movements of movements, as Della Porta (2006) suggested, to increase their influence on the regime or mainstream politics in general. 6AYM and OPPs were part of the pro-democracy movement before, during, and after the 2011 uprising. In addition, 6AYM and OPPs worked with other NGOs to provide logistical support, such as training and information. The anti-

harassment initiatives, and to a lesser extent, the graffiti group, have a close working relationship with prominent feminist groups that covered their activism and provided them with expertise and logistical supplies, for example, locales, computers and stationary.

Structural enablement(s) facilitated the participation of the interviewees but the role of this enablement was not more than a way to initiate the interviewees' personal project. As Archer (2000) describes in the theory chapter, the interviewees have their own personal projects, for example, their desire, motivation and agency to participate. The findings in all chapters confirmed the effectiveness of the structural factors discussed in the background chapter. The implementation of neoliberal policies prior to the uprising prompted many of the interviewees, who were well educated and many of them economically independent, to take an interest in politics, and this was also a reason for many to work and become more independent from their families and to challenge or negotiate the patriarchal order.

The uprising had a significant impact on women's participation because it raised a feminist consciousness and political awareness between men and women; it brought the interviewees into contact with opposition groups and established different forms of public activism. In addition, many families had changed their attitudes towards the interviewees during the uprising to allow them to participate.

These findings challenging the patriarchal family, in all chapters (except for the graffiti groups chapter) are consistent with how many scholars (Moghadam, 2004; Al-Ali; 2012; Kandiyoti, 2013) have described the weakening of the patriarchal family in the decade before the uprising and how the increasing number of educated and working women had more potential ability to challenge the patriarchal family, as many of the interviewees did.

The transformation of the media landscape, which is described in background chapter, was common to all interviewees from all groups. The relaxing of control by successive regimes, for example, the alliance between MB and SCAF in 2011–2012 played an important role in facilitating participation. The invigorating of civil society between 2011–2014, through which NGOs, projects and initiatives were established, for example, the graffiti groups, ensured a sustainable political process in an assumed democratic system. Collaboration (not co-optation) between the two anti-harassment initiatives and state institutions within a limited framework facilitated the participation of the interviewees.

## To speak up (visibility)

Based on the answer to the second research question (how did women activists experience their participation in the public sphere in the same period?), all the interviewees reported that they experienced, to varying degrees and extents, an expansion of their visibility to overcome their marginalisation in the public sphere. The variation depended on the relationship between, on the one hand, the interviewees and their groups, and the groups and the regimes on the other. The interviewees had made progress in making their voices heard compared to the previous period. They felt self-empowered and enlarged their role when they brought (challenging) transgressive gender practices and their roles as leaders into play (6AYM, MB and OPPs), went beyond their complementary roles to break through the women-only space to the male-dominated space (MB); felt they were treated equally through the application of transparent democracy (OPPs); and brought women's issues into the public sphere for discussion through discourse and topic (anti-harassment and graffiti).

Many interviewees redefined the notion of female leadership, attributing it to ordinary women who had little to no prior experience with public activism. The interviewees led men and women in movements as shown in the 6AYM, OPPs and anti-harassment groups chapters. However, the interviewees from MB were severely restricted from leading positions and completely restricted from leading men because of MB's gender ideology based on Sharia and traditional social norms. However, the interviewees from MB reported that women made progress in taking leading roles outside the movement, for instance, with the Rab'a sit-in. In addition, many interviewees redefined what was perceived as private to be public through bringing up challenged practices, women's issues, and topics to be for public discussion in the contexts of public places in the downtown Cairo.

In general, all the interviewees challenged, on the one hand, the public/private distinction, and the public space and public sphere demarcation on the other. They slightly pushed gender boundaries in the context of different public spaces and domains, compared to the previous period, for short or long periods of time, as discussed in detail in chapter 4 regarding 6AYM and on social and cultural issues in chapters 7 and 8. These findings do not contradict what other scholars describe about new constructions of gender (Abouelnaga, 2015), rupturing the familiar when women challenge the status quo (Wahba, 2016), or shift gender roles (Hafez, 2012; Kamal, 2016). Instead, it offered a novel explanation based on critical realism relating women activism in the public sphere.

The use of critical realism offered a different explanation for the change in gender relations than the scholars mentioned above, namely that this change occurred within the interaction between agency and structure. The slight pushing of gender boundaries

occurred in the context of the supportive role of many men who showed feminist actions and consciousness in all groups (with the exception of MB). This also showed the supportive, if insufficient, role of some groups – for example, in promoting female leadership in 6AYM, in anti-harassment groups, and in some OPPs – as well as the political inclusionary environment in the wake of the uprising. Thus, this novel explanation requires an examination of the new vision of women's agency in the public sphere (as I will discuss in the final section of this chapter).

Nevertheless, visibility through being part of a group was more fruitful and effective than visibility as unaffiliated participants (despite them using several individual strategies), as discussed in all chapters, for example, in the 6AYM chapter, when the interviewees could not continue to participate as unaffiliated participants due to the regime's repression. In addition, due to a lack of expertise in addressing the issue in focus, the anti-harassment and graffiti interviewees also could not participate as unaffiliated participants.

Many interviewees also mediated their visibility through a particular discourse, for example, the anti-harassment discourse, through graffiti or through informal communication, like the MB interviewees. All the cases involved a willingness to speak out, and most of the interviewees were eager to take courses to train in self-defence in case of harassment or to use their skills to speak up, such as in one graffiti group. Many interviewees also used their courage to challenge SH and gender-based violence by turning constraints into opportunities, as described in several chapters, but mostly in chapter 7, which describes how the interviewees used anti-harassment initiatives as vehicle to make their demands.

The role of the group was essential in transforming the visibility of the interviewees into a collective and attempting to improve the situation of women. The OPPs (with differences between parties) applied transparent democracy, informal quotas (ESDP), and offered courses. However, these kinds of support were insufficient to increase women's representation in decision-making, as discussed in OPPs chapter. The 6AYM, OPPs, anti-harassment and graffiti groups provided (with variation) an inclusionary environment in which the interviewees practised gender equality and women's leadership. However, the interviewees from MB struggled with the deliberate diminishing of women's roles within the movement due to its gender ideology.

In addition, all the groups negotiated the public space to open up a space of appearance through which the interviewees displayed their visibility. They sought to integrate part of the public space into publicity of the public sphere by challenging the regime's strategy of disconnecting part or selective contents in the public space – suppressing some social categories, like women activists or political groups, like 6AYM – from the public sphere. Thus, these groups challenged the demarcation between the public space and the public sphere, as discussed in the theory chapter.

On the other hand, through their visibility, all groups sought to reinforce the contestation in the public space to overcome their marginalisation, as Fraser (1990) mentioned and discussed in the theory chapter about the dimension of the publicity between contestation and bracketing. MB used its Islamist visibility to contest secular culture and Western cultural hegemony. The anti-harassment and graffiti groups brought women's issues and topics into play to challenge mainstream society. The interviewees sought to challenge gender inequality through contesting the status quo with gender equality in practice.

Interestingly, there were gendered efforts in all groups to improve the situation of women. While the anti-harassment and graffiti groups already had policies in place to improve the situation of women, the women in 6AYM and two OPPs supported each other in overcoming gender discrimination and marginalisation. In MB, the interviewees were part of a new generation that also wanted to improve the situation of women but still within the MB gender ideology.

A common phenomenon among all groups in all chapters was the emergence of a feminist consciousness without a feminist organisation to practise gender equality and female leadership rather than theorise about it. The interviewees refused to call themselves feminists but rather 'citizens' who participated together with men. They distanced from the state feminist and old feminist groups that followed the traditional path of activism. For example, the anti-harassment initiatives used action-oriented forms of activism to combat SH instead of only focusing on changing laws and documenting incidents. The graffiti group replaced the exhibition of art in museums and galleries with their graffiti as popular art on the walls of streets. Both groups developed an alternative narrative of gender issues about gender-based violence and SH than the old feminist groups that usually talk about women's rights, gender equality, women's political participation, as discussed in the background chapter.

The feminist consciousness also emerged among a range of men and women who believe in gender equality, as discussed in 6AYM, OPPs, anti-harassment and graffiti chapters, except for the MB chapter. Many male-led activities involved women's issues, as discussed in the anti-harassment chapter. This finding underscores what has been overlooked about men's supportive role for women in their efforts. Scholars often write about how many men apply patriarchal power, through which, they discourage or constrain women from participating in the uprising, as discussed in the background chapter. Of course, this is true, but they did not give enough attention to the supportive role many men played for women, as many of the interviewees reported.

However, the interviewees' visibility and their enlarged role were subject to structural constraints. OPPs and MB had intentionally or unintentionally marginalised the role of women because of gender ideology and predominant gender norms. Some male leaders and even women themselves marginalised women, as discussed in OPPs chapter.

The women of MB could be behind their marginalisation because they did not believe in gender equality, even if they led demonstrations at the universities.

In summary, drawing a line between collectivity and the visibility of participation opens a new avenue for gaining insight into the many differences between participating as an unaffiliated participant or through a group, the situation before and after access to the public sphere, and the role of the group in promoting the quality of women's participation.

## Differentiation in the public sphere

In the introduction chapter, I proposed to understand the notion of public sphere in the context of time and place, based on the empirical material. The findings were highly consistent with my view. These findings spell out the differences between the various counter-publics that emerged and evolved over time with different focuses; they contested each other and manifested in different forms of relationships with the dominant public and various levels of the repression.

The challenging counter-publics of 6AYM and MB were restricted in their participation, if not stalled, and the critical counter-public of OPPs was almost without significant results. However, the negotiating counter-publics of the anti-harassment and graffiti groups could negotiate the dominant discourse through new forms of action-oriented activism and public art. They contributed to forcing the state to enact legislation against SH in 2014 and cooperate with universities to combat SH.

Graffiti groups, in particular, could question the masculine shape of the public space to raise awareness and change perceptions, representations, and understandings of women's situation. This was clearly linked to gendered feedback, which angered men at the place and the regime. The anti-harassment and graffiti groups did this within the outline of the state's vision of gender policies, with an attempt to not provoke the regime, while still critical of it. The interviewees from anti-harassment and graffiti groups continued to critically debate the long-standing taboo but with some improvement and precarious achievement in their desire for change. This finding is consistent with what Abaza (2012) claimed about the impact of graffiti in the post-uprising period but partially contrary to what Abaza (2015) claimed three years later – that graffiti in Cairo has lost its momentum. The findings suggest that graffiti which addressed social and cultural issues, like women's issues, was still effective even if it faced drawbacks because of the state's strategy to restore order to public space.

All in all, although the interviewees from all groups adopted a new vision of agency, which made slight gender changes in norms and roles, it was nevertheless far from



dismantling the patriarchal structure and masculine form of the state and society. These findings are consistent with what many scholars (Abouelnaga, 2015; Wahba, 2016; Hafez, 2012) argue about gender change, but not about undermining patriarchy and masculinity. This change requires an understanding of the new vision of agency that the interviewees represent.

## A new vision of women's agency

Throughout all the empirical chapters, the general view was that the interviewees developed their agency in such a way that they were neither heroic nor victims of their society but rather citizens who acted together with men to make their demands. As discussed in chapter 5 regarding MB, their agency developed not primarily as a reaction/resistance to the structural constraints of an oppressive society or the repressive regime but as an action embedded in the broader context of national demands and discourse. The slight pushing of gender boundaries in the public sphere, and redefinition of gender roles and leadership went beyond the binary of understanding women's agency between Eurocentric and Orientalist epistemology that draws a line between the 'West' and the 'Orient' or Arab world (Said, 1978). That required a new epistemological understanding which could go beyond the current liberal and poststructuralist understanding of women's agency, which associated agency with resistance to the assumed potent patriarchal Arab/Muslim culture and religion, as Mahmood (2001) points out. El Said, Meari and Pratt (2015, p. 2) argue that narratives about gender during the 'Arab Spring' tended to homogenise women's experiences of activism across time and space, ignored issues of class, nationality and many social differences, or did not explain the [shift] in gender norms, identities and relations.

On the one hand, the findings of the empirical chapters show that many feminist groups that supported anti-harassment initiatives and graffiti groups underscored CEDAW as a standard for their activism in general. El Said, Meari and Pratt (2015) contend that many feminist scholars, including those who are local, and commentators depart from the Western understanding of women's agency in the Arab world as limited to the backwardness of culture and religion. However, the interviewees would escape that by refusing to call themselves feminists or associate themselves with a feminist organisation.

On the other hand, the vast majority of the interviewees were aware of their historical exclusion and marginalisation in the socio-political transformations, which had its roots as early as the 1919 Revolution, in the name of unifying the nation (Bader, 2016; Al-Ali, 2012). As discussed in chapter 4, scholars (Hafez, 2015; Abouelnaga, 2015)

deliberate that the state's national discourse attempted to submit women to its political agenda by controlling their bodies for political purposes. El Said, Meari and Pratt (2015) argue that the gender shift also sought to escape the cultural nationalist discourse of secularists and Islamists that historically controlled women in its struggle and resistance to Western colonial hegemony.

The findings of this dissertation, however, challenge both views. The interviewees refused to align themselves with Western liberal feminist organisations that portrayed them as agents of liberal/secular Western discourse or to submit to the secular nationalist and Islamist cultural discourses that treated them as victims of anti-colonial nationalist discourse. Instead, they tried to reconcile their alternative context and framework during the uprising to find a way between the two views. Thus, they went beyond the binary of West–East, nationalism, Islamism and colonialism. They developed a new vision of women's agency, through which they called themselves citizens and women simultaneously. They made no distinction between women's rights and the national demands of a democratic country.

In line with this, the interviewees invoked their local culture of heritage as a driving force for their activism, albeit with critique. They were proud of women's place in ancient Egyptian history (portrayed by graffiti interviewees), of their religion as Muslim or Christian (the interviewees expressed that they were Muslims or Christians), of their identity as Egyptians (all interviewees), to improve their country with democracy, social justice, an egalitarian state and society, and to provide for equal citizens. They did not break with their culture but critically engaged with it through their participation in the uprising and its demands. They created an identity and placed it in the national context as an overarching framework for their activism.



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# Appendix

## The interviewees from 6AYM

| PSEUDONYM    | AGE RANGE | ORGANISATION/GROUP | DURATION OF INTERVIEW (min.) | DATE OF INTERVIEW | ADDITIONAL INFORMATION          |
|--------------|-----------|--------------------|------------------------------|-------------------|---------------------------------|
| Maya         | 35-45     | 6AYM               | 50                           | 2 June, 2014      | Recoded and transcribed in full |
| Reham        | 20-30     | 6AYM               | 52                           | 30 May, 2014      | Recoded and transcribed in full |
| Samar        | 20-30     | 6AYM               | 63                           | 16 June, 2014     | Recoded and transcribed in full |
| Maha         | 20-30     | 6AYM               | 46                           | 5 June, 2014      | Recoded and transcribed in full |
| Heba         | 20-30     | 6AYM               | 53                           | 1 June, 2014      | Recoded and transcribed in full |
| Shereen      | 20-30     | 6AYM               | 59                           | 2 June, 2014      | Recoded and transcribed in full |
| Ansam        | 20-30     | 6AYM               | 58                           | 3 June, 2014      | Recoded and transcribed in full |
| Nael (staff) | 30-40     | 6AYM               | 49                           | 8 June, 2014      | Recoded and transcribed in full |

## The interviewees from MB

| PSEUDONYM                                     | AGE RANGE | ORGANISATION/GROUP | DURATION OF INTERVIEW (min.) | DATE OF INTERVIEW | ADDITIONAL INFORMATION              |
|---|-----------|--------------------|------------------------------|-------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Jasmine                                       | 20-30     | MB                 | 45                           | 10 June, 2014     | Handwritten and transcribed in full |
| Houda   | 20-30     | MB                 | 50                           | 12 June, 2014     | Handwritten and transcribed in full |
| Khawla  | 20-30     | MB                 | 45                           | 15 October, 2014  | Recoded and transcribed in full     |
| Fatima (a high official leader of MB and FJP) | 50-60     | MB                 | 56                           | 7 June, 2014      | Recoded and transcribed in full     |
| Amira (a high official leader of MB and FJP)  | 50-60     | MB                 | 61                           | 9 September, 2014 | Recoded and transcribed in full     |
| Abdul Galil Sharnoby (ex-member of MB)        | 40-50     | MB                 | 64                           | 13 October, 2014  | Recoded and transcribed in full     |

**The interviewees from the three OPPs**

| <b>PSEUDONYM</b>             | <b>AGE RANGE</b> | <b>ORGANISATION/GROUP</b> | <b>DURATION OF INTERVIEW (min.)</b> | <b>DATE OF INTERVIEW</b> | <b>ADDITIONAL INFORMATION</b>   |
|------------------------------|------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Nadeen                       | 30-40            | ESDP                      | 62                                  | 31 August, 2014          | Recoded and transcribed in full |
| Mona                         | 30-40            | ESDP                      | 59                                  | 11 August, 2014          | Recoded and transcribed in full |
| Nedhal                       | 30-40            | ESDP                      | 57                                  | 26 August, 2014          | Recoded and transcribed in full |
| Shaima                       | 30-40            | ESDP                      | 79                                  | 8 August, 2014           | Recoded and transcribed in full |
| Neven                        | 20-30            | ESDP                      | 101                                 | 24 August, 2014          | Recoded and transcribed in full |
| Abrar                        | 20-30            | ESDP                      | 80                                  | 9 August, 2014           | Recoded and transcribed in full |
| Hoda Elsadda (staff)         | 40-50            | ESDP                      | 46                                  | 9 Jun, 2014              | Recoded and transcribed in full |
| Reema                        | 20-30            | CP                        | 80                                  | 12 August, 2014          | Recoded and transcribed in full |
| Samma                        | 30-40            | CP                        | 61                                  | 8 October, 2014          | Recoded and transcribed in full |
| Hala                         | 30-40            | CP                        | 53                                  | 8 October, 2014          | Recoded and transcribed in full |
| Ebtisam                      | 30-40            | SEP                       | 114                                 | 4 August, 2014           | Recoded and transcribed in full |
| Eman                         | 30-40            | SEP                       | 49                                  | 19 October, 2014         | Recoded and transcribed in full |
| Sana                         | 30-40            | SEP                       | 60                                  | 11 August, 2014          | Recoded and transcribed in full |
| Amena                        | 20-30            | SEP                       | 70                                  | 15 October, 2014         | Recoded and transcribed in full |
| Hind                         | 20-30            | SEP                       | 33                                  | 19 October, 2014         | Recoded and transcribed in full |
| Ream                         | 30-40            | SEP                       | 50                                  | 17 October, 2014         | Recoded and transcribed in full |
| Mohammad El-Mohandas (staff) | 40-50            | SEP                       | 19                                  | 29 October, 2014         | Recoded and transcribed in full |

### The interviewees from two anti-harassment initiatives

| PSEUDONYM                 | AGE RANGE | ORGANISATION/GROUP | DURATION OF INTERVIEW (min.) | DATE OF INTERVIEW | ADDITIONAL INFORMATION              |
|---------------------------|-----------|--------------------|------------------------------|-------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Ahlam                     | 20-30     | HarassMap          | 69                           | 4, August, 2014   | Recoded and transcribed in full     |
| Manal                     | 20-30     | HarassMap          | 80                           | 27 August, 2014   | Recoded and transcribed in full     |
| Nora                      | 20-30     | HarassMap          | 68                           | 27 August, 2014   | Recoded and transcribed in full     |
| Younna                    | 20-30     | HarassMap          | 48                           | 10 August, 2014   | Recoded and transcribed in full     |
| Hussein El-Shafei (staff) | 20-30     | HarassMap          | 89                           | 11 August 2014    | Recoded and transcribed in full     |
| Nadja                     | 20-30     | ISH                | 56                           | 5 May, 2014       | Recoded and transcribed in full     |
| Nermen                    | 20-30     | ISH                | 66                           | 26 April, 2014    | Recoded and transcribed in full     |
| Sura                      | 20-30     | ISH                | 41                           | 17 April, 2014    | Recoded and transcribed in full     |
| Faten                     | 20-30     | ISH                | 56                           | 21 April, 2014    | Recoded and transcribed in full     |
| Sara                      | 20-30     | ISH                | 30                           | 21 April, 2014    | Handwritten and transcribed in full |
| Azza Kamel (staff)        | 40-50     | ISH                | 45                           | 1 May, 2014       | Recoded and transcribed in full     |
| Fathi Fared (staff)       | 30-40     | ISH                | 60                           | 17 April, 2014    | Recoded and transcribed in full     |

### The interviewees from graffiti group (WOW)

| PSEUDONYM           | AGE RANGE | ORGANISATION/GROUP | DURATION OF INTERVIEW (min.) | DATE OF INTERVIEW | ADDITIONAL INFORMATION          |
|---------------------|-----------|--------------------|------------------------------|-------------------|---------------------------------|
| Nour                | 20-30     | WOW                | 38                           | 9 August, 2014    | Recoded and transcribed in full |
| Khadija             | 20-30     | WOW                | 61                           | 21 May, 2014      | Recoded and transcribed in full |
| Enas                | 20-30     | WOW                | 70                           | 8 May, 2014       | Recoded and transcribed in full |
| Nada                | 20-30     | WOW                | 40                           | 3 August, 2014    | Recoded and transcribed in full |
| Engi Balata (staff) | 20-30     | WOW                | 70                           | 15 June, 2014     | Recoded and transcribed in full |



### Researchers, experts and professional activists

| PSEUDONYM        | AGE RANGE | ORGANISATION/GROUP   | DURATION OF INTERVIEW (min.) | DATE OF INTERVIEW | ADDITIONAL INFORMATION          |
|------------------|-----------|--|------------------------------|-------------------|---------------------------------|
| Nevine Ebeid     | 30-40     | New Women Foundation   | 67                           | 17 May, 2014      | Recoded and transcribed in full |
| Bothina Kamel    | 40-50     | Activists and first ever female candidate to presidency after the uprising of 2011 | 39                           | 4 May, 2014       | Recoded and transcribed in full |
| Ghada Lutfy      | 40-50     | Egyptian Center for Women's rights   | 97                           | 5 August, 2014    | Recoded and transcribed in full |
| Omaima Abou-Bakr | 50-60     | Women and Memory Forum   | 64                           | 29 May, 2014      | Recoded and transcribed in full |
| Selma El-Nakash  | 20-30     | Nazra for Feminist Studies   | 60                           | 11 May, 2014      | Recoded and transcribed in full |
| Naglaa al-Adly   | 40-50     | National Council for Women   | 63                           | 4 August, 2014    | Recoded and transcribed in full |

### Coding the data

My strategy for coding the data consisted of three steps: (1) identifying initial codes in each individual interview; (2) figuring out initial themes emerging from the interaction between initial codes and the theoretical framework in each group of interviews; and (3) figuring out secondary themes emerging from the interaction between initial themes and the theoretical framework in each group of interviews. In these three steps, I identified various analytical concepts, themes and topics for analysis in these three steps. I have created a scheme to illustrate how I developed the initial codes for initial themes and secondary themes for each group of interviews.

(1) The first step began with identifying initial codes for each interview report. After reading and rereading the raw English material, the coding process was done manually using the colours available in the Word program. I marked crucial moments, ideas, information, facts, events, incidents, date, experiences, interactions, phenomena, history and statements and bracketed the most important of them to be used later as quotations. I found different types of initial codes, as shown below in the shortcode scheme.

| Profile | Data items   | Initial codes  |
|---------|--|--|
| 1       | "The thing was very simple; I was young when the <b>murder of Khalid Said affected deeply me</b> . I saw the video about his murder on the <b>Internet</b> . Then, <b>I got out</b> to the street in a black dress with some from <b>Kefaya</b> and <b>April 6 Movements</b> and many <b>ordinary people</b> . I would just read the Quran for him, but <b>I was beaten</b> , and my clothes were torn off when <b>police attacked</b> us and <b>arrested some protesters</b> ." (Ansam from 6AYM)   | Negative emotion<br>Khalid Said<br>Information<br>Pre-uprising<br>Internet<br>Collective action in the street<br>Frame of collective action<br>Social movements<br>Kefaya<br>6AYM<br>Ordinary people<br>Repression<br>Violence |
| 2       | "My father wanted me to <b>engage in politics but not to give up the real task</b> of taking care of my <b>family</b> and <b>Islamic practices</b> . Me too, I did not think to minimize my role at home. The problem was with my <b>mother</b> and <b>grandmother</b> , who were <b>against my participation in politics</b> . They demanded of me to <b>stay at home</b> like any woman in our <b>community</b> . They told me that <b>I had to get married</b> , have children and serve my husband instead of politics. They thought, like what women in our rural <b>community</b> were thinking, that politics was <b>only for men</b> who decided almost everything. They thought that politics was <b>an inappropriate place for women</b> ." (Houda from MB). | Father/mother<br>Islamic practices<br>Family's attitude<br>Traditional norms<br>Perception of women's role in politics<br>Community<br>Male-dominated<br>Predominant gender norms  |
| 3       | "The revolution was an <b>opportunity</b> that you could show up and <b>exist, not just numbers</b> ."<br><br>I asked then, were women not existed there? She replied,<br><br>"Yes, they existed, but they were <b>invisible</b> or existed to be <b>harassed, to serve others</b> or existed like <b>fortunate without influence</b> . Did you see a female minister do something? You feel they were like <b>each other</b> as they came out from one box of carton." (Neven from SDP)   | Opportunity<br>Moment of the uprising<br>Mass mobilization<br>Voice<br>Pre-uprising<br>Visible/invisible<br>Harassment<br>Pre-post uprising  |

An example of initial codes scheme 1

(2) The second step began by identifying general patterns, concepts, terms and categories that were conceptualised as initial themes in all interviews within each group. This process emerged using theories to fulfil the functional relationship between the initial codes (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996, p. 27). A comprehensive and extensive review of the initial codes of all interviews in each group determined how the information in the raw data could be organised and prepared for development into initial themes. Initially, I used data-driven coding, in which the raw data served as the initial reference point for the coding process (Boyatzis, 1998, pp. 37–51). The initial theme's context is revealed by matching the initial codes. Second, I used the theory-driven code to structure the interview information and identify the common patterns and themes. Many questions, themes, issues, matters and problems appeared as patterns from the emergent initial themes. I will give two examples: one from visibility and the other from collectivity, and I will use the same examples to show how the third step proceeded.

The first example from visibility was that the initial codes presented in scheme two were coded according to how the interviewees became visible in the public sphere. In theory-driven coding, I considered many theories and concepts (in the scheme) as context to understand these initial codes. This coding process led to new initial themes (in the scheme). Thus, many initial themes emerged in each group.

In the second example from the area of collectivity, the initial codes (in the scheme) were coded according to how the interviewees constructed their subjectivity and represented their ideas, ideologies, feelings, thoughts and desire for change. In addition, the coding process elaborated on how they adopted their individual agency as they participated in politics and public activism. As for the theory-driven coding process, I considered many theories (in the scheme) as context to these initial codes. This coding process generated new emerged initial themes (in the scheme). In this way, the initial themes that emerged from the interweaving of different initial codes in the interviews in a single group were outlined.

(3) The third step of the coding process was to find analytical concepts and apply them in different situations to answer the research questions. This step was done by understanding the relationship between the different initial themes for each group. I also considered the theories of managing the huge amount of information and data to find a structure between the initial themes for each group. In this step, new analytical concepts and topics are developed as an analysis model. Thus, I have moved from the concrete to the abstract level. I will continue with the two aforementioned examples, visibility and collectivity.

Regarding the example of visibility, by matching the initial themes between the reports of one group in the interviews and using different theories, new secondary themes were developed (in the scheme). New analytical concepts of visibility were extracted, such as socio-political- and cultural constraints and enablement(s). This visibility was measured through the sense of marginalisation and overcoming of this marginalisation in the public sphere.

Regarding the example of collectivity, by matching the initial themes with the accounts of one group in the interviews and using different theories, new secondary themes were developed (in the scheme). New analytical concepts of collectivity were extracted, such as socio-political- and cultural constraints and enablement(s). This collectivity was measured by examining accessibility and overcoming exclusion from the public sphere (see below for a scheme of the development of the initial codes on themes and analytical concepts for both collectivity and visibility. The similar colour means that there is a connection between the codes).

| <i>Initial codes in each single interview</i>  | <i>Emerged entail themes in interviews for each single group(s)</i>  | <i>Emerged secondary themes in interviews for each single group(s)</i>   | <i>Extracted analytical concepts</i>   |
|--|--|--|--|
| <p>ideology, thoughts, emotions, proximity</p> <p>when and where engaging in politics, contact a group,</p> <p>events, incidents and public figure,</p> <p>fear, frustration, anger, proud, satisfying and other motions,</p> <p>political family, expertise in public activism, voluntary activism, education, class, working, training courses, age, professions</p> <p>addressed discourse,</p> <p>uprising of 2011 and other events,</p> <p>social media, public place, e.g. Tahrir,</p> <p>the situation inside the family,</p> <p>tradition and conventions in the family</p> <p>exposing violence and Sh</p> <p>participation in collective action, mass mobilization</p> | <p>regime's repression, targeting women's body</p> <p>family's attitude towards women's role in politics,</p> <p>focus for a counter-public</p> <p>individual strategies of dealing with family's attitude,</p> <p>group's strategies in dealing with repression</p> <p>formal and informal networks</p> <p>place and time of affiliation</p> <p>motives</p> <p>constructing subjectivity</p> <p>personal situation,</p> <p>collective experience</p> <p>adopting individual agency</p> <p>structural constraint and enablement(s)</p> | <p>first steps of collectivity,</p> <p>second step of collectivity,</p> <p>paying attention to a common focus,</p> <p>shared collective experience,</p> <p>socio-political and -cultural constraints and enablement(s),</p> <p>facilitation of collectivity,</p> <p>strategies of dealing with constraints and enablement(s), collective actions frame,</p> <p>mobilization and compatibility,</p> <p>patriarchal bargain,</p> <p>primary and corporate agent and agency (individual and group's agency)</p> | <p>Collectivity</p> <p>socio-political and -cultural constraint, Enablement,</p> <p>Exclusion</p> <p>Accessing the public sphere and overcoming exclusion (measure and assessment)</p> |

A scheme for developing the initial codes to themes and analytical concepts (collectivity)

| <i>Initial codes in each single interview</i>   | <i>Emerged entail themes in interviews for each single group(s)</i>   | <i>Emerged secondary themes in interviews for each single group(s)</i>   | <i>Extracted analytical concepts</i>   |
|---|---|--|--|
| dress,<br>appearance,<br>performance,<br>voice,<br><br>public space,<br>Tahrir Square,<br><br>violence,<br>SH, demonstration,<br><br>challenge, avoid and negotiate regime's repression<br><br>visible through graffiti on walls,<br><br>leadership,<br>inside and outside group,<br>gender equality,<br>discrimination,<br><br>communication and interaction, speak up, group's role<br><br>alternative place, online activism and Internet,<br><br>visible through discourse,<br><br>feeling of enlarging and restricting of role,<br><br>tradition and conventions in public space | gender-based violence and regime's repression<br>predominated gender norms,<br>control,<br>recognition,<br>space of appearance and surveillance,<br>individual and group's strategies of dealing with repression and predominated gender norms,<br>subjective experience of expanding and constraining,<br>personal situation<br>individual and group's agency, | visibility,<br>socio-political and -cultural constraints and enablement(s),<br>primary and corporate agency,<br>transformation of visibility by a group,<br>mediated and unmediated visibility,<br>expansion and constraints of visibility,<br>group's strategies to expand and protect visibility,<br>subjective experience of expanding and constraining of visibility through a group | visibility,<br>socio-political and -cultural constraints, enablement(s),<br>expansion and constraints of visibility,<br>marginalization<br>feeling of marginalization and overcoming of marginalization (measure and assessment) |

A scheme (2) for developing the initial codes to themes and analytical concepts (visibility)

While the initial themes were created based on the information provided by the interviewees, the new secondary themes were created based on the researcher's interpretation, explanation and understanding of the initial themes.

## The interview guides

### General questions to all interviewees

Tell me about your background?

(Age, education, job, residence, parent's job, economic situation, etc.)

Can you tell me how you got started in political/volunteer activities?

Why did you choose this form of participation and not another?

What were the motivations and inspirations that led you to become involved in public activism?

Did you participate in the revolution?

(If not, why? And if so, how did you participate in the revolution?

Did you join as an individual or through a group and why, for both?

Did you participate in demonstrations or attend seminars, conferences, and public events and why?

What kind of constraints did you encounter and what were the facilities?

What was the situation in your family when you decided to participate in politics (voluntary activism)? (What did you tell them? What about the members of your family? Were they worried about you because you were a woman?)

Describe how your family perceives women who are politically (or civically) active?

Was there a difference in your family between men and women who participated in politics?

How did you react to your family's attitude, and how?

Can you describe your community?

What about your friends and neighbours?

When did you join the organisation/group, and why this particular organisation (social movement, political party, initiative or project)?

How did you find out about the organisation? How did you contact them?

Describe the process of joining your group/organisation?

Can you describe the situation of women in this organisation?

Can you describe the nature of communication between women and men in the organisation?

Can women hold positions? Can women lead both men and women?

How did the male members treat women in the organisation?

Was there discrimination or marginalisation of women in the organisation?

What kind of constraints did you encounter in the organisation and how did you deal with them?

Were there any restrictions because you are a woman?

Have you been exposed to violence and sexual harassment? When, where and how?

How did you react to sexual harassment and violence?

Did you feel that the harassment prevented you from participating in public activism?

How long have you had access to the internet?

Have you commented or participated in discussions on the internet?

What do you think about women's participation in the revolution?

### **Specific questions for anti-harassment interviewees**

How do you perceive SH as a phenomenon?

Why did you participate in the fight against SH? (Was it because you were exposed to SH? Did you care about SH and women before the revolution?)

What did you do to help combat SH? I mean, what kind of activities?

Do you think SH prevents you from participating in public activism, and how?

### **Specific questions to the interviewees from graffiti groups.**

Why did you want to express yourself through graffiti and not in other ways?

Why did you choose to draw attention to women's issues through graffiti?

How did you choose the place and theme for your graffiti?

How did people react to your graffiti?

### **Specific questions to the interviewees from MB**

Did you participate in any voluntary Islamic activities before joining MB?

Did you participate in religious education classes in mosques or public lessons before and after joining MB?

How do you communicate with the men in the organisation?

How does MB see the role of women as political actors (I mean from your experience)?

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