

Betrayal or realistic expectations? Egyptian women revolting

Reem Wael

Abstract

In the last two years, we have witnessed chain of uprisings in the Arab world, widely recognized as the Arab Spring. This paper will focus on the Egyptian revolution, particularly assessing the chances of women's emancipation as a result of the newly founded 'freedom' and democracy. The gender cause is a threat to national revolutions because it leads about half the population to explore and relate to a major aspect of their identity, gender, which is detrimental to the national cause. This paper argues that, according to the foundation of the nationalism and the technicality of revolutions, there is little chance for women's liberation to occur amidst national struggle, which dismisses and even demonizes any cause distracting people from the national one. National revolutions are inherently male, recognizing male efforts and contributions and reflecting male aspirations. Women are expected to contribute to the national struggle by abiding by the rule of men. This can be seen in many examples in history and also in events taking place in Egypt since the ousting of President Mubarak.

Keywords: Gender, Arab Spring, national revolutions

Introduction

A revolution reflects a general rejection of the status quo. Reasons for the discontent and goals of the revolution vary a great deal. In the last three years, we have witnessed a surge of uprisings across the Arab world, commonly referred to as the 'Arab Spring' calling for the overthrow of dictatorships that had ruled for decades. The goals of those movements centred on democracy, dignity and decent living standards. Even though the fruits of the 'Arab Spring' are yet to be seen, this transitional stage sets the stage for the future division of power among different interest groups. This paper is concerned with the women's share of such power post-revolution, focusing on law, politics and society, which are all somewhat interdependent. The uprisings of the Arab Spring reflected a nationalist stance, calling for the overthrow of tyrants for 'national liberation.' The paper will therefore investigate the gendered component in the nationalist movement, taking Egypt as a demonstrative example.

Nationalism is generally a masculine project which adopts masculine notions and masculine hopes (Enloe, 1990). This means that women are allowed participate in nationalist movements whether political, military or non-violent struggles, as citizens and human beings, but not as interest or pressure groups.

This paper argues that the masculine nature of national movements (adopting men's hopes, desires and dreams) is contrary to a gender revolution and therefore does not lead to women's emancipation. The Egyptian revolution adopted a 'national' agenda characterized by patriotism and called for a set of mainstream goals; bread, freedom and human dignity. Women wholeheartedly participated in the uprising but they were betrayed as soon as the movement left the streets and went into formal politics. Therefore, the Egyptian revolution, which originated from Tahrir Square (Freedom Square) in Cairo, can by no means considered to be the tipping point for the emancipation of Egyptian women.

Considering the novelty of the events, data in this paper was gathered by four interviews with female activists about their experiences in the revolution. All interviewees have been working or volunteering in women's organizations for years and have been familiar with the women's movement long before the revolution. I have selected the interviewees from within the women's movement in order to get a comprehensive overview of the events especially in relation to the status of women prior to the revolution. Sara is the first interviewee, who is the head of a feminist organization. Mona and Hannah also work in women's rights NGOs. The last interviewee is an artist and activist; Miriam. Upon the request of the interviewees, their names have been kept anonymous.

The paper will start with a theoretical review of 'nationalism' and 'revolution,' showing the masculine character of both. The paper will proceed with Egypt as a case study, highlighting the exclusion of women from public and political life and analysing the implication of such relegation on the meaningful recognition and contributions of Egyptian women.

Theoretical considerations

A. Revolution and nationalism

Nationalism is based on one or more aspects of a common identity. Smith explains the different scenarios by which nations arose: all national projects start with a conflict of identities based on cultures and ethnicities that manage to find harmony, whether by closing the gap between individual and community differences or by abandoning one or more set of norms (1994: 148). Similarly, Hutchinson identifies two schools of nationalism; the political and the cultural. While the former is primarily concerned with geographic borders and political structures, the latter recognizes the 'distinctive civilization, which is the product of nation's unique history, culture and geographic profile' (Hutchinson, 1994: 122). With the variety of theories and conceptualizations of the term, the main component of nationalism is a common identity, based on shared history or culture as well as a 'common destiny' (Yuval-Davis, 1997: 19).

Social orders are always at risk of disruption when the socio-political or economic problems become unbearable; collective movements based on a renewed national surge aim to change or redefine such social orders. Samuel Huntington defines revolution as a 'rapid, fundamental and violent domestic

change in the dominant values and myths of a society, in its political institutions, social structure, leaderships and government activity and policies' (1968: 246). Stone explains the technicality noting that revolutions involve the use of violence that results in a change in government, regime or society (1966: 159). Revolutions are triggered by a variety of factors and as such, numerous theories attempt to capture the tipping point where dissatisfaction of a community turns to a collective movement against a system, with a set of goals and demands.

Huntington follows a functionalist approach to the study of revolution, where he explains that stability is maintained as long as there is congruence between economic, social and political institutions. Once the links that tie people together are broken (because of progress in the social order, which the operating system is not keeping up with), chaos and disruption occur (Huntington, 1968: 4). Johnson identifies 'disequilibrium' in society as the main cause to revolutionary movements; revolutions take place when a 'severe disorganization of a socio-cultural system' occurs and pushes society beyond its level of equilibrium (Johnson, 1966: 61). The common factor in all successful revolutions is the dismantling of the operating system and the development of a new one that sees a redistribution of power, economically, politically and socio-culturally. This change should ideally affect the balance of power and the rights of groups that were previously subordinated (Moghadam, 1997: 138).

B. Women and the nation-state

To understand the influence of women in nationalist movements we must first define their relationship with the nation-state. Anthias and Yuval-Davis disqualify the notion of citizenship in the definition of the relationship between women and states because it fails to address the ways in which the state 'forms its political project' and therefore 'does not encapsulate adequately the relations of control and negotiation' occurring between the two (1994: 312). They therefore define the relationship from multiple angles and identifying five areas in which women contribute to nations: women biologically reproduce members of ethnic collectives; women reproduce 'boundaries of ethnic/national groups'; women participate in the reproduction of the collective identity and in the transmission of its culture; women are symbols in the 'ideological discourses used in the construction, reproduction and transformation of ethnic/national categories'; and finally, women participate in 'national, economic, political and military struggles' (Anthias and Yuval-Davis 1994: 313).

The last aspect of the abovementioned relationship is the main concern in this paper, highlighting the role of women as supportive and nurturing 'to men even where they (women) have taken most risks' (ibid: 315). Thus, women as an interest group can strongly influence popular movements whether or not they participate actively. This is because of their size and perceived femininity. Ivekovic and Mostov (2002) state that

Gender identities and women's bodies become symbolic and spatial boundaries of the nation. Women's bodies serve as symbols of the fecundity of the nation and vessels for its reproduction, as well as territorial markers. Mothers, wives and daughters designate the space of the nation and are, at the same time the property of the nation. As markers and as property, mothers, daughters and wives require the defence and protection of patriotic sons... border fantasies develop with this gendering of boundaries and spaces.... With the collectivizing of "our women" and "their women" (Ivekovic and Mostov, 2002: 10)

C. Women in national movements

Women are perceived as 'passive' contributors in a nationalist movement as their participation is based on male terms. Femininity is therefore constructed in relation to men's interests and desires (Mayer, 2000: 17). It is commonly argued within nationalist doctrine that women's emancipation automatically follows national liberation as colonialism, capitalism and other ideologies are blamed for gender inequalities (Suneri, 2000: 145). Historical accounts reflect this commonly-held belief, yet also show that these sequential events are unlikely to happen. This is because gender inequalities are rooted in unequal gendered powers that are embedded in most political and social ideologies that remain untouched with a regime change. Suneri demonstrates this argument with reference to colonialism. 'More often than not, failing to combine a gender analysis with an anti-colonial one can only increase the chances that colonized women's lives will not be improved, as the new male leaders will be reluctant to give up any power they have recently gained' (Suneri, 2000: 145). Similarly, McClintock warns that

To ask women to wait until after the revolution serves merely as a strategic tactic to defer women's demands. Not only does it conceal the fact that nationalisms are from the outset constituted in gender power, but, as the lessons of international history portend, women who are not empowered to organize during the struggle will not be empowered to organize after the struggle. If nationalism is not deeply informed, and transformed, by an analysis of gender power, the nation-state will remain a repository of male hopes, male aspirations, and male privilege (McClintock, 1991: 122)

This can be witnessed in the behaviour and speeches of male leaders and politicians as they translate the national project into collective action. For instance, 'nationalism' is commonly used to trigger collective action by emphasizing the 'need to make a sacrifice for the nation' (Guibernau, 1996: 63). In the Indian struggle against colonialism, Nehru urged women to participate in the national struggle by abandoning their gender cause, where in 1931 he stated, 'in a national war, there is no question of either sex or community. Whoever is born in this country ought to be a soldier' (Jayawardena, 1986: 98). Nehru commended women who took part in the nationalist movement, acknowledging that they were fighting against imperialism and oppression by men at the same

time. He believed that those oppressions were interlinked and through several statements made in 1960s, he urged women to dedicate their efforts to the national struggle so as to rid themselves from all kinds of oppressions; imperialist and gender (Jayawardena, 1986: 89). Similarly, Ghandi urged women to use their coping strategies against discrimination in the passive resistance movement. He argued that this method is 'familiar' to women, since they face oppression in their personal lives that they have to silently endure it and subtly resist it (Jayawardena, 1986: 97). Because of the strong emphasis on the national identity, 'a revolutionary feminist consciousness' was never developed to recognize the common suffering of women within the national liberation movement and therefore gender issues were not prioritized as part of the political agenda (Jayawardena, 1986: 97). The Indian example demonstrates the restrictions of women's participation in a national movement that were dictated by men. As such, it seems that a woman's gender and national identities are in conflict. They can either direct their efforts to the male dominated national movement, or invest it in women's interests, because 'the double blind situation makes one necessarily a traitor to one half of her double identity' (Ivekovic and Mostov, 2002: 10).

Nationalist movements do not only fail to recognize women's interests, but they deny women's efforts. After achieving their primary goals (usually a regime change), women's contributions are only considered in relation to the success accrued by men. Using the example of slavery, Mcfadden argues that although women were always at the forefront of national struggles and resistance to forms of oppression for decades, they are absent from the written history of these events. In such movements, 'women are seen as either holding the fort for men when they are not in the limelight, or simply being mothers and wives and extensions of leaders' (1991: 4). Similarly, during the Cuban independence movement, Jaquette notes that the three most important women in Cuban history are significant because they are 'closely linked to important male leaders' (1973: 346).

The abovementioned examples illustrate the critique of nationalist movements in feminist scholarship (Ranchod-Nilsson and Tetreault, 2000; Moghadam, 1997). The masculinity of the public sphere means that men control both international and domestic politics. This means that states' formal norms recapitulate the male point of view' (Makinnon 1991: 162). The maleness extends to the 'national project' that takes place in the public sphere from which women have been sidelined (Yuval-Davis, 1997: 2).

This trend can be seen in the Arab Spring where women are commonly referred to in their positions as mothers, daughters, wives and sisters. Men are therefore urged to respect and protect women because of their association to a man. The national project is therefore clearly a masculine one. Women's emancipation is never prioritized and consequently, national liberation does not lead to women's emancipation. The next section will demonstrate with the example of Egypt.

Egypt: a case study

The Arab Spring was not the first occasion in which women in the region took to the streets. Al-Ali lists some instances of women's activism: 'the Egyptian anti-colonial and independence movement at the turn of the twentieth century that gave rise to the Egyptian women's movement; the Algerian war of independence in the time of French colonialism; and the Palestinian struggle against Israeli occupation' (Al-Ali, 2012: 28). Since these movements were based on nationalist ideologies which failed to prioritize women's emancipation, the result was that gender issues were ignored and women were denied basic rights in the reformed political and legal systems. For example, in Egypt, the women's movement at the turn of the twentieth century 'helped widen the base of support throughout the country and rendered vital services. Nevertheless, the electoral law restricted the right to vote for men despite the equality provision in the 1923 Constitution (Al-Ali, 2012: 28).

2011 witnessed a wave of nationalist movements across the Arab world starting with Tunisia, followed by Egypt, Yemen, Libya and Syria. The Egyptian uprising was inspired by Tunisia's movement and triggered by the Facebook group that was dedicated to the memory of 28 year old Khaled Saeed who died as a result of torture by the police. The group called for the demonstrations to take place on January 25 2011 calling on an end to police brutality that had persisted for decades and a change in the regime. The movement was popular online and it significantly grew bigger when it was joined by the 'offline' community. The initiative became the largest uprising in Egypt's modern history. Tahrir Square in downtown Cairo hosted 18 days of pressure on the regime to step down. Hosni Mubarak, who had been president for 30 years was ousted on 11 February 2011, after mounting pressure from the people, and appointed the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) to temporarily take control of the country.

A. Egyptian women in the uprising

Women from different social, political and religious backgrounds actively participated in the 2011 revolution (see generally Sholkamy, 2012). Such fervent activism in the public space, albeit for a short while, refuted a common stereotype that Middle Eastern women are passive and submissive (Jamal, 2011). Therefore, a sense of optimism about women's future in Egyptian politics and society briefly prevailed. Subsequently, the transitional phase triggered questions about women's involvement in the public and political sphere as a result of their contribution in the popular movement, which will be discussed in this section.

Tahrir Square provided safe space for women in which they could participate in public life free from fear of sexual harassment, which is an endemic problem in Egypt. Women were present alongside men in remarkably volatile and crowded areas without being prey for harassment (Ali, 2012: 27). Therefore, Tahrir Square became a utopia where respect and unity prevail. Miriam, one of the interviewees stated that Tahrir 'felt like a place where you can be yourself and

engage with others.' Moreover, women felt safe enough to take their children and sleep in Tahrir (Sholkamy, 2012: 95). At this point, with a patriotic ambiance, women joined the uprising to demand bread, freedom and human dignity, led by the slogan of the revolution. However, they were not organized as an interest group and did not have specific demands.

Accounts from the street however show that Tahrir was not the utopia it was perceived to be. Mona traced the presence of women in public space prior to the revolution. She explained that women are free to mingle in public as long as they maintain a specific code that she identified as 'passive'; women should not have a loud voice, specific demands and they should abide by men's rules. She related these conditions to women's presence in Tahrir; women played by men's rules. Koning similarly reflects on the rules by which women can be present in public space: women can stay indoors, but the streets are 'largely characterized by male entitlement... where they could spend time, observe and interact with passers-by, comment and flirt' (2009: 547). In fact, claiming (partial) ownership in public space is a hurdle that women across the world had to overcome. Hickey wrote about the presence of women in the public sphere in the beginning of the twentieth century in the context of the United States of America. She reviewed the guidelines by which women were expected to behave so as to have a 'pleasant and respectable' experience (Hickey, 2011: 79). Etiquette manuals promised women a 'significant range of rights and privileges' if they followed rules such as 'not to walk arm in arm, laugh too loudly, snack, spit, or smoke when in public' (Hickey, 2011: 80). Similarly, women were always present in the public sphere in Egypt under certain rules.

Critically looking at Tahrir days, one finds the dark side of the revolutionary story: the presence of women in Tahrir Square was conditional. They were criticized if they did not abide by the social code of conduct, which was imposed by men. The first rule was to have a gender neutral agenda, which echoes the statements made by Ghandi and Nehru in the Indian liberation struggle decades ago. This conditionality prevailed even after the 18 day sit-in in Tahrir Square. Over one year after the Egyptian revolution, the Altrus (football fans) of Al-Ahly (a major football team in Egypt) had camped to protest outside the hall in which the committee assigned to draft the Constitution convened. Sarah explained that the organizers of the demonstration were mostly males and therefore they imposed rules regarding female participation. Most importantly; girls were not allowed to smoke or stay in the area past 1am, nor were they provided with an explanation for this.

B. Exclusion

When people put aside their differences and unite for a single cause in nationalist movements – the ousting of a person or a regime – this unity is not necessarily genuine and is therefore jeopardized as soon as the main goal is accomplished. At this moment, national movements which call for freedom turn into a political struggle (Guibernau, 1996: 63) in which different groups are

hungry for power. When the movement reaches this stage, the unity of women as an interest group is extremely challenging to maintain. This is because gender is only one part of a woman's identity; one that patriarchal societies try to repress. This means that women may prefer to prioritize other issues based on political or economic ideologies rather than gender; this is more likely to happen in the absence of an organized women's movement. Women are therefore welcomed in the national movement as long as their participation is needed; however, they are 'discarded or pushed to the margins during later periods of state consolidation' when their services are no longer needed (Ranchod-Nilsson and Tetreault, 2000: 4).

The exclusion of women in the transitional political process in Egypt illustrates the feminist critique of national movements and confirms male control over such movements. Women were needed during the 18 days of Tahrir; the bigger the number of participants, the more the pressure was created by the movement; also, women's participation reflected national unity and validated the popular movement particularly to the international community. When Mubarak stepped down, public pressure was no longer deemed necessary and the battle turned into a political one. Women were therefore ordered to 'go back home.' This is indicated in both, the public attitude towards women, and the exclusion from the political transition process.

1. Exclusion in public space

The 'women friendly' atmosphere in Tahrir started to change on the day that Mubarak stepped down. This is demonstrated with a sexual attack against Dutch journalist Lara Logan in Tahrir Square¹ on 11 February 2011. Violence against women in venues of protests gradually escalated, perpetrated by both the civilians and state agents. A participant in the uprising, interviewed by *BBC News* confirmed that peace and harmony that was prevalent during the 18 day sit-in was no longer felt. This is because the harmony during the uprising reflected the common goals of protesters: 'now we are back to our differences, you are a man, you are a woman, we are told we should not be mingling, and not talk about everything as before.'¹ On the 8th March 2011, several hundred women joined by some men marched in downtown Cairo to commemorate International Women's Day, calling for equality and the end to gender discrimination. Crowds of men and women followed them with a counter demonstration chanting Islamic slogans indicating that Egyptian women should abide by Islam.² Women present at the scene reported that they were grabbed,

¹ Bill Law (14 April 2011) 'Egypt's revolution through the eyes of five women' BBC World News <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-13056685> (accessed 12 December 2012)

² Ekram Ibrahim (8 March 2011) 'Egyptian million woman march ends with a gunshot' Al-Ahram Online <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/7292/Egypt/Politics-/Egyptian-million-woman-march-ends-with-a-gunshot.aspx> (accessed 12 December 2012)

intimidated, assaulted and even molested by a group of men.³ Miriam, who participated in the International Women's Day march, explained that they were a small group of men and women mostly foreign or 'westernized' Egyptian women with minuscule support from the public, which made the group an easy prey. The women 'were attacked and hounded out of the square that was supposed to be the 'labour ward' in which democracy had been reborn in Egypt' (Sholkamy, 2012: 95).

Expressions of dissatisfaction with women's presence in demonstration venues were commonly reported. People started asking, 'what are women and girls doing in the street anyway?' particularly as a response to the growing incidents of sexual harassment. However, the real question is '*why are women in the street when they were told to stay home.*' Women's presence was not questioned during the 18 days because it was needed. However, the women's day march was the first occasion in which women were united as an interest group having gender specific demands: freedom and equality. Miriam explained, 'it felt like I was pushed out of Tahrir square for being a woman.' Sarah recalls a field doctor in Tahrir Square who repeatedly wondered why her family allowed her to participate in politics. This indicates the gender power dynamic with which men control women's presence in both private and public spheres; men enforce rules for female family members on leaving the house; once women leave the house, they are subject to rules of men in society. It also reflects and reinstates the relationship between women's behaviour and family honour, which restricts women's movement globally. To demonstrate, Miriam reported that she was never bothered in Tahrir Square in the company of males, out of respect for the friend and not for her. Similarly, when women engage in protests, whether through demonstrations or organized marches, they are surrounded by literally man-made chains of men for protection. This was the case in the demonstration for the International Women's Day, as Mona confirmed. The chains aimed to fend off harassers by labelling women as 'protected.' This echoes Tetreault's depiction of the gender roles in which women are supposed to serve men's interest for the national cause in return for protection (1994: 4).

Women were also driven out of the square by violence on part of state agents, including the police and the military. 'Egyptian female protesters have been strip-searched; pictures have been taken while they were without clothes; they have been accused of prostitution and in some cases forced to undergo virginity testing' (Al-Ali, 2012: 29). This violence escalated until the blue bra incident⁴ during rallies in November 2011. One can therefore see how all forces, civilians

³ Jumanah Younis, (9 March 2011) 'Egypt's revolution means nothing if its women are not free' The Guardian <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2011/mar/09/egypt-revolution-women> (accessed 30 November 2012)

⁴ Michael Higgins (Dec 20, 2011) 'Police beating of 'girl in the blue bra' becomes new rallying call for Egyptians' National Post <http://news.nationalpost.com/2011/12/20/beatings-of-blue-bra-woman-reignites-egyptian-protests/> (accessed 25 November 2012)

and officials were telling women 'this is enough, you need to go home.' When women challenged this order, they were subjected to violence.

2. Exclusion from law and politics

Women were similarly excluded from the political decision-making process that followed the uprising. In March 2011 Tariq el Bishry, an Egyptian Judge, was appointed by SCAF to head a committee to draft constitutional amendments to regulate the first elections post-revolution. El Bishry appointed experts in law and politics including members of minority groups such as a Coptic Christian and a member of the Muslim Brotherhood, but did not appoint a single woman. Additionally, women were not part of the political negotiations between different parties and the SCAF. The first ministerial cabinet formed following the ousting of Mubarak included one woman and the parliamentary quotas for women were scratched (Al-Ali, 2012: 28). The first parliamentary elections put 8 women in the people's assembly, both as independent candidates and on party lists. As part of the women's movement, Mona explained that this exclusion was aimed at silencing women who have gender-specific demands. Such demands were met with: 'this is not the time for women's issues because priority is for the national interest.' As Mona pointed out, the only representation that women have in both the ruling party and the opposition is in the 'women's committee' in some political parties. The creation of such committees confirms that women's issues are not perceived as social issues, but as group-specific.

The absence of women's voices was accompanied by a curb on women's rights which were gained in the last few decades. Citizens of the Mubarak era has witnessed the enactment of progressive laws for the protection and promotion of women's rights, strongly supported by the National Council for Women (NCW), which was led by Suzanne Mubarak, the former first lady. The association between such rights and the ousted regime has a negative impact on women's gains during this period as they were considered part of the corrupt regime who wanted to impose western principles on Egyptian women. This argument is commonly used in the 'South' as a political means of curbing women's rights, as Jayawardena (1986) argues. There tends to be resistance to women's rights particularly feminist principles that are viewed as western ideas, not only alienating women from their cultures and families, but also distracting women from the 'revolutionary struggles for national liberation' (Jayawardena, 1986: 2). Consequently, the revolution may result in a reduction of legal rights that were previously gained. This is exacerbated by the limited political participation which makes women passive recipients of rights and freedoms that men decide to grant. One of the most common repercussions of the absence of women's voices is their rights under family law (Moghadam, 1997: 139); this is evidently demonstrated in the case of Egypt as discussed below.

Members of the first elected parliament (predominantly political Islamists) proposed the repeal of rights such as 'the rights to mobility, political representation as a fixed quota, unilateral divorce, and the criminalisation of

female genital mutilation' (Sholkamy, 2012: 95). Other issues discussed in parliamentary sessions included lowering marital age for women, the repeal of the right to unilateral divorce and the return 'beit el Ta'a' provision, with which a husband can legally force his wife to live with him (ibid: 96). Some parliament members deemed these rights to be unnecessary and imposed by the corrupt western ideologies. At this point, the new regime was seen as rebalancing the corrupted and western influenced gender power that was promoted by the Mubarak regime. Jayawerdena criticizes this view and argues that the assumption that feminism is a western influence is utterly wrong. Throughout her book *Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World*, she investigates movements of national liberation, highlighting activism for women's rights by local women free from Western Imperialism. Similarly, Davis and Anthias argue that women are active agents in the modification and reproduction of their image in society (1989: 11). This was demonstrated in the 18-day Tahrir sit-in when women took to the streets.

3. Gendering the revolution

Women's activism is often resisted because it is a threat to the national cause. Stone (1966) shows that in the course of a revolution, the focus shifts from the dissatisfaction with the institutions, to the labelling of 'evil men' (1966: 175). In the case of Egypt, the 'evil man' was Mubarak. This label served the silencing of women as society failed to recognize the gendered institutions that contribute to women's oppression and instead focused on the despot. Therefore, welfare rights granted to women post the revolution do not promote agency or equality (Moghadam, 1997: 140) because the right and the institutions of the state remain gendered. This was the case in Egypt: the 2012 Constitution was generous with women's welfare rights and stingy with gender equality and women's empowerment. Article 10 stated that 'the State shall provide special care and protection to female breadwinners, divorced women and widows'. This provision enjoined the state to protect the women of deceased and absent men; otherwise, married women are protected by their husbands. These provisions were hailed as protective measures where in fact, they emphasized the gendered division of labour, restricting women's identities to mothers, daughters and wives.

4. Using nationalism for women's rights

Even though national movements do not usually emancipate women, they can provide a platform for women's mobilization for the gender cause (Suneri 2000, 145). Suneri cites examples where women's movements were created simultaneously with national movements such as Algeria, South Africa, Palestine and some Latin American countries. In these examples, women became politically active and at the same time have succeeded to develop men's awareness of the oppressive gender relations (Suneri 2000, 145). Therefore, 'revolution' is a great opportunity for women to change their position in social

and political space (Al-Ali 2012, 28). This is because revolution creates a vacuum of power which could be pursued by women if they are well-organized. El Saadawi rightfully predicted that, 'women will not be emancipated without organizing politically' (Graham-Brown, 1981:24). Therefore, unless women are persistent, 'gender-specific needs, rights and problems... will be sidelined, ignored and swept under the carpet' (Al-Ali, 2012: 28).

Egyptian women were neither united as an interest group nor organized as a political one. They joined the national movement for a gender neutral cause. Mona explained that women's rights groups are torn between advocacy and outreach. However, the current situation of disunity and scattered efforts is very dangerous. She stated that 'rights groups are not nagging hard enough.' This disunity is reflected in several instances post the 18 days in which the women's movement did not mobilize. For example, during the parliamentary elections, women's organizations could have supported candidates or worked collectively on lobbying and organizing a voting bloc particularly because some organizations are strongly connected to women from different areas and classes across the country. Furthermore, in the drafting process of the 2012 Constitution, pressure from women's organizations was almost nonexistent, although the drafting committee made very worrisome suggestions regarding women's position in the Constitution. In addition, the meagre participation of women in the Constitution Committee - only six percent of this committee was female⁵ - was addressed only by a few public figures. During presidential elections, Bothaina Rashwan, the only female candidate, wanted to run for elections to set a precedent, fully aware that she did not have a real chance of winning. She was not able to secure 30,000 signatures to register herself as a candidate. This is a number that would have been easily collected if she had the support of some women organizations that have access to the masses. Mona explained that women can have voting power because the number of women is big enough to force politicians to include their interests in agendas. They are simply not well organized.

Conclusion

Revolutionary movements stimulate hope in society particularly among minority groups. As females and as citizens, women contribute full-heartedly to national revolutions, hoping to gather the fruits of the revolution. This paper showed why this is an unrealistic expectation; the national project is masculine, it speaks to men and serves their interests. Egyptian women did not learn from history; they did not seize the opportunity to mobilize for their specific goals and instead, they degenerated their agendas and followed men's lead. On 30 June 2013, the Islamist-led government was overthrown by the Egyptian military, instituted a temporary government and provided a road map for a

⁵ Hussein, A (25 March 2012) 'The constituent assembly nominees dissected' *Egypt Independent* <http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/constituent-assembly-nominees-dissected> (accessed 5 December 2012)

Constitution and elections, providing another opportunity for women to mobilize. Only time will show if Egyptian women will seize this opportunity.

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About the author

Reem Wael has been working on gender issues in the Middle East and Africa for the last 10 years focusing on a variety of topics including gender-based violence, migrant domestic workers and refugee issues. She holds a Doctorate Degree in law from the School of Oriental and African Studies in London, for which she focused on legal pluralism and gender-based violence in South Africa. Reem also holds an MA in International Human Rights Law from the American University in Cairo, an MPhil in Development studies from Cambridge University and a BA in Sociology from the American University in Cairo. She can be contacted at reemwael AT gmail.com