WE CAN DO IT!

…OR CAN WE?

A RADICAL FEMINIST ANALYSIS ON THE STRATEGIES AND CHALLENGES OF FEMALE POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN THE 2011 REVOLUTION IN EGYPT

MASTER THESIS IN PEACE AND DEVELOPMENT WORK
AUTHOR: SOFIE BOOD
SUPERVISOR: HEIKO FRITZ
THESIS SEMINAR: 2014-06-13

LINNAEUS UNIVERSITY
FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCE
DEPARTMENT OF PEACE AND DEVELOPMENT
Abstract

The aim of this thesis is to analyse female political participation in the 2011 revolution in Egypt with the help of a radical feminism theoretical framework, which effectively ensures that the female participation is analysed from an intersectional point of view. The research will be conducted as a desk study. In order to do this, the research will specifically look at the means of mobilisations used by female protesters, as well as examine the reasons why women chose to join the protests throughout Egypt between January 25 and February 11, 2011. Furthermore, the strategies used to overcome challenges and obstacles in and after the revolution will be analysed. The main result of this research is that women to a large extent used and benefited from ‘online activism’ on websites such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube both in the lead-up to and during the revolution. The research will show that women gained legitimacy during the protests by not pushing for a gender-specific agenda, but instead joined the protest under the common battle-cry of ‘bread, freedom, and dignity’ as well as taking up traditionally female roles during the protests. Moreover, the thesis will argue that the wide spread practice of female genital mutilation as well as the staggeringly high prevalence of sexual harassment and gender-based violence are severe hindrances for women to access the public sphere, and will show how the post-revolutionary government in Egypt effectively worsened the socio-political climate for women.

Keywords: 2011 Revolution, Egypt, Online Activism, Social Media, Radical Feminism, Women.

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Above all, this thesis is dedicated to all the women throughout the world who continue to fight for gender equality and women’s rights, despite facing political persecution and hostile societies – you have my endless respect and admiration.
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1 Introduction

In recent years, Egypt has experienced tremendous political turmoil. Following the uprising in Tunisia that began in December 2010, the Egyptian people suddenly became aware of their ability to join hands in a protest against the 30-year authoritarian regime headed by Hosni Mubarak. They took to the street in unprecedented numbers on January 25th, 2011, forcing Mubarak to step down less than three weeks later – an event few Egyptian even dared dreaming of. The majority of the first Egyptians to begin protesting on the streets were the youth, both men and women. Many scholars argue that the impact of women was one of the defining parts of the revolution which enabled the ousting of Hosni Mubarak. However, despite attracting significant international media attention, there is little research conducted regarding the participation of women during the revolution and how their participation affected the revolution and their lives in post-revolutionary Egypt.

1.1 Aim, research problem and importance

The purpose of this research is to examine the main causes of the 2011 revolution in Egypt through a feminist framework, as well as the contributions of and strategies used by women throughout the protests. Furthermore, the thesis will analyse both the methods of mobilisation used by female activists to gain access to the public sphere during the revolution and the challenges and obstacles they faced while claiming their space in the political life. The research aims to look at several aspects that have limited the possibility for women to partake

in the political life, both during and immediately after the revolution. These will include the historical issue of the traditional roles of women as well as the current widespread issue of sexual harassment.

This study is important not only because it seeks to shed light on the female participation in the political life, but also because it is aiming to narrow the research gap on strategies used by female activists during the severe political turmoil in Egypt. While much has been written on the subject of female political participation in the Middle East, especially by prominent scholars such as Beth Baron and Margot Badran, not much research has been done from a feminist perspective, connecting the revolution to its aftermath, as well as to the challenges women met and the strategies used to overcome these obstacles. The difficulty in separating the historical context, the socio-political status of women and women’s active participation in the revolution from each other is eloquently expressed by Nadje Al-Ali:

In the current political context, I would argue that the struggle against gender-based inequalities in legislation, the widespread sexual harassment of women, the exclusion of women from decision-making processes, etc., intersect with the prevailing political culture and practices of authoritarianism as well as neo-liberal economic policies and practices that contribute to a profound economic crisis, high unemployment rates, and widespread poverty while also lining the pockets of a small group of economic elite.

Hence, it is the explicit aim of this thesis to narrow this gap and attempt to bring up and explain various crucial parts of the female political struggle in Egypt, focusing on the 2011 uprising but without neglecting the importance of the context leading up to the revolution. This is particularly important since the influence of women is often neglected when discussing and analysing historical events. The majority of research is male-centred and does not do justice to the tremendous efforts women often put into political transformations and revolutions. Neglecting women’s efforts in this way is perpetuating the patriarchal world order, and further limits the possibilities for women to participate in the public sphere on equal terms. By focusing on the women, this research aims to contribute to easing women’s

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5 See for example *Egypt as a Woman: Nationalism, Gender, and Politics* (2005) and *Women’s Awakening in Egypt: Culture, Society, and the Press* (1994).
access to the political and public spheres by highlighting the importance their contributions played during the 2011 revolution.

1.2 Research questions

Firmly anchored in the context outlined above, the thesis will seek to answer the following questions:

- What were the strategies and means of mobilisation used by women’s groups and activists in the 2011 revolution?
- How and why did women join the revolution, and what has been the main contributions of women during the protests?
- What were the main challenges and obstacles for women during the revolution and the post-revolutionary political turmoil?

These questions are instrumental when looking to build an explanation and understanding of the events that have unfolded in Egypt during the past three to four years. The aim is to construct a logical link and to understand the interconnectedness of the means of mobilisation, the types of challenges and obstacles female activists met, and the strategies they used to both achieve their goals and overcome the challenges. Furthermore, the thesis will briefly look at the underlying causes for the Egyptian revolution, to the extent they are of importance for the overall purpose of the research.

1.3 Theory

This research will use the framework of radical feminism as its foundation, and build the research upon this. This means that the research will have a clear gender awareness, and will thus focus on how women participated in the revolution of 2011 in Egypt. Moreover, the Gender and Development (GAD) framework will be loosely employed as a theoretical orientation tool throughout the thesis, as it will assist in explaining the hows and whys of female political participation in Egypt. This will also be explained through the theory of post-revolution marginalisation as well as the theory of self-organisation, which will be explained in detail in chapter two of this thesis.
1.4 Methodology and analytical framework

This thesis will be an analytical and qualitative desk study. Furthermore, it will be constructed as an enhanced case study, and will thus only look at the 2011 revolution in Egypt and the consequences it has had for women and how women have participated during the uprising. A post-structuralist line of thinking will be employed as a base for the entire thesis, as it acknowledges the importance of an intersectional analysis. Additionally, the research will adhere to structure of problem → aim/research → analytical categories/collection of material → analysis → conclusion. This structure will be further explained in section three of this thesis.

The method employed in the thesis is a text analysis. This type of research allows the researcher to find the desired point of departure and build the research around this. To minimise the risk of subjective and premature conclusions, a wide range of sources have been meticulously analysed. The main sources used are scientific articles and research, but some news articles have also been used, especially the increase the understanding of the female participants in the revolution themselves. Such articles are naturally of less scientific value and will hence only be used to reaffirm points that have been made in peer-reviewed research. As mentioned above, the methodology and analytical framework will be explained in greater detail in chapter three.

1.5 Terminology

This section will aim to define the most central notions used in this research, which are crucial for the understanding of the overall purpose of the thesis. It is important to note that the concepts explained here are not always defined in this way; for the purpose of this thesis, the concepts are defined in accordance with the theories and frameworks used.

1.5.1 Feminism and State Feminism

Feminism is a movement in which women and men are equal in all rights, opportunities and responsibilities. There are a multitude of different ideas and opinions about feminism, and in Egypt there are three main understandings: secular feminism, which calls for full equality with no concessions to religious views; Muslim feminism, which basically maintains that there is no clash between Islam on the one hand, and full equality on the other hand; and lastly, Islamic feminism, which argues that there is no such thing as gender equality, but still
call for an end to the wide-spread oppression of women. In this thesis, state feminism refers to the condition where government-led organisations have enforced a top-down feminism where the grass-root movements are all but barred from voicing their point of view. While state feminism is not an inherently negative concept, it has been used in Egypt to repress independent organisations and associations to solidify the state’s power. It is deeply problematic as its main argument is that Egyptian women need to be spoken for, which severely undermines both their capacity and ability to raise their own voices. Furthermore, state feminism is intimately connected to the ‘First Ladies’ of the country, which is explained in further details in chapters 4.3 and 5.4.

1.5.2 Revolution

As one of the central concepts of this thesis, it is important to ground with a firm understanding of what actually defines a revolution. Throughout history, there have been numerous definitions of what actually constitutes a revolution. In this thesis, the words ‘revolution’, ‘uprisings’, and ‘revolt’ are used interchangeably, even though they traditionally might denote different political actions. According to Encyclopaedia Britannica, a revolution is defined as a “major, sudden, and hence typically violent alteration in government and in related associations and structures.” Furthermore, there are four general understandings of the concept of revolution – it is: a) an economic phenomenon, stemming from economic insecurities; b) social, and thus the result of a state’s and society’s failure to “meet the demands put upon [them]”; c) the result of the perceived estrangement between individuals and the society; and d) a wholly political process designed to create a change in political power. Chapters four and five will show that the 2011 revolution in Egypt can be perceived as a mixture of all these four definitions, since there was wide-spread economic and political corruption coupled with a general feeling of inability by the Egyptians to influence the politics of the country.

While there is no established minimum or maximum time frame of a revolution, the word ‘sudden’ in the definition above indicates that it is a limited and finite political convulsion. However, most scholars specialising on the Middle East agree that the political

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turmoil in Egypt is far from over – some argue that the 2011 revolution is still ongoing, while others argue that there was a second revolution in 2013. This thesis will be based more on the former understanding, but without discrediting the latter, mainly due to the fact that the demands of the 2011 revolution are yet to be met by a democratic Egyptian regime. In addition to this, there are typically a number of steps, or defining features, which are essential in deepening and broadening the definition of revolution. These typically do not appear isolated from each other,¹¹ and thus they have to be looked at as parts of a whole.

1. *Defiance of authority.* This is the initial seed of the political unrest normally referred to as ‘revolution’ or ‘rebellion.’

2. *Overthrow of rulers.* According to Calvert, this is one of the most essential features of a revolution, since its root meaning implies that there is a fall of a government, which is then replaced by a new.

3. *Social dissolution* is often the result of the fall of a government and typically severely obstructs the “political power and influence” of ordinary citizens and is thus a situation that all functioning governments by definition aim to prevent.¹²

4. *Revulsion against misused authority and reordering of society.* These differ slightly from the first step, since defiance against authority does not say anything about the nature of the government. Here, it is clear that those in power have exploited it for their own means, and the political uprising are thus rendered more valid in the eyes of the surrounding world. Revolution is thus also treated mainly as a “social engineering or social reform”.¹³

5. *Constitutional change* is necessary, according to Calvert, in order to distinguish insurgencies from revolutions, and deals with the political consequences after an uprising. These political changes are not only the institutional, formal changes, but also “shifts in the informal bargains, understandings and conventions that forms the real constitution of all states.”¹⁴

6. *Inevitable stage of development* is one of the core concepts of the social and societal part of a revolution, denoting the need for a democratisation process in the aftermath of political uprisings.

7. *Psychological outlet.* This is a fairly recent defining concept of a revolution, and typically denotes that the driving revolutionaries have a clear sense of personal

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emancipation which can only be achieved through the revolution. Thus, it is not only about liberating the country from a corrupt regime, but also about individual profit – clearly obfuscating the idealistic perception of revolutionaries as romantic and altruistic ‘helpers’ of the country.\(^\text{15}\)

The above criteria clearly also lends credibility to the opinion that the revolution is ongoing, as Egypt has undergone an extremely limited democratisation process and constitutional change. As will be shown in chapter five, while the constitution has been amended since the fall of Hosni Mubarak and two separate elections have been carried out, there has been significant meddling by those in power and large parts of the population have effectively been barred from participating in the process of democratisation and constitutional change. This also resonates with Gøsta Esping-Andersen’s thoughts when he describes an incomplete, or ongoing, revolution as related to “major disequilibria.”\(^\text{16}\)

1.6 Delimitations and limitations

One of the limitations for this study is that it will rely heavily on secondary sources in English and Swedish. Although there obviously is some research done about this subject in Arabic, many scholars have written their research in English. However, the Arabic research that exists has not been utilised, due to the fact that such high-level academic Arabic lies outside the scope of knowledge for the author.

When it comes to the delimitations, the main part of the analysis will look at the period immediately before the Egyptian revolution in 2011 until the end of June, 2013. The latter date is chosen since 30\(^{th}\) of June that year marked the day when Mohammad Morsi was forced to resign from his post as president. While the time after his resignation is extremely important for Egypt’s future, it is difficult to properly analyse it within the scope of this thesis, mainly because it is hard to know how these recent happenings will affect women in the country. However, the analysis will very briefly look at important events for the women’s movement during the past century, starting off just before the 1919 nationalist revolution. This will be presented as the historical context, since it is essential to form a background understanding to properly analyse the happenings during the 2011 revolution. The year 1919 is chosen due to the fact that the Egyptian feminism as a political movement was born during


the revolution of this year, and thus created the foundation that the modern day female political activists stand on. Additionally, the two revolutions of 1919 and 2011 display many similar characteristics. Hence, the thesis will look at women’s political struggle and activities, and how they have been restricted and furthered throughout the time frame. Any events outside the time frame will only be regarded if they are of specific importance in helping to answer the research questions.

1.7 Ethical considerations

Due to the fact that this research is conducted as a desk study, no interviews have been conducted. Hence, no personal request for privacy or confidentiality has been necessary to take into consideration. However, a text analysis research presents other ethical dilemmas. For example, when analysing a vast number of sources, it is not always easy to distinguish between biased and objective research. Moreover, as the author of this thesis has spent considerable time in Egypt, it has been of utmost importance to continually refer back to the research questions as well as the analytical and theoretical framework to restrict prejudiced or impetuous conclusions.

1.8 Disposition

This thesis is made up by four major parts. Part one is the introduction, which first and foremost outlines the justification of the chosen research topic and defines the research questions, as well as the main concepts used in the thesis. Furthermore, a brief presentation of the theories and methods employed throughout the thesis is given. Part two explains the theoretical point of view in detail, and the analytical framework and methodology is spelled out in chapter three. The next part, chapter four, outlines the socio-economic, cultural and historical events that have laid the foundation to the political situation during the past one hundred years in Egypt. The background will deal with the main events from the start of the revolution against the British colonial power in 1919 up until the lead-up to the 2011 revolution. The most extensive part of this thesis is the fifth part, which is constituted by the findings and analysis. Here, the results of the analysis will be presented and the foundation needed to answer the research questions will be laid. This chapter will be divided into several subchapters, each of which will deal with different aspects of the female political struggle in Egypt. The thesis will be wrapped up in the sixth part, the conclusion. Here, the research
questions will be explicitly answered. Some suggestions for future research will also be presented. After this, the bibliography will be presented.
2 Theory

This thesis will employ various feminist theories to attempt to explain and analyse the happenings during the Egyptian 2011 revolution, and its significance for women. While the Gender and Development (GAD) approach will not be one of the main pillars of the analysis, this research will nonetheless lend some strength from its well-developed framework. Hence, it will work as a tool of theoretical orientation rather than as an explicit framework. The GAD framework argues that women can neither be separated from their socio-economic and cultural context, nor from the patriarchal structures that penetrate all levels of society in Egypt. Moreover, a radical feminist framework will be employed. One of the main arguments in radical feminism is that “women’s subordination is rooted in male control over women’s fertility and sexuality.” This is also one of the most important reasonings of this thesis, exemplified by the wide spread practice of female genital mutilation and the political discussion about it, as will be seen in chapter five.

The theory of radical feminism is the main theory of this thesis, and will facilitate a deep understanding of the role women have played in the 2011 revolution. Moreover, it will ensure a broad contextual awareness of how the revolution in turn has affected women and their political status in Egypt. Radical feminism is typically divided into two specific branches which differ quite substantially. The branch which will be utilised within this thesis is identified as the libertarian approach. Annette Davies outlines this approach as one where “the emancipation of women from their reproductive and domestic roles” are emphasised, which goes in line with the general outlook of this thesis. The other branch, cultural radical feminism, greatly emphasises the superiority of women over men precisely due to women’s reproductive abilities. This approach will not be taken into consideration within this thesis, mainly because this research does not have the objective to pass judgement on which gender is ‘better’, but instead to outline how Egyptian women have struggled to emancipate themselves within their specific cultural, traditional, socio-economic and religious context.

17 Parpart, Jane L., Connelly, M. Patricial, and Barriteau, V. Eudine (Eds.) (2000). Theoretical Perspectives on Gender and Development. Ottawa, The International Development Research Centre. p. 62. Of course this is true for any patriarchal society, but this thesis will only look at Egypt.
20 If there even is such a things as a ’better’ gender, which the author strongly doubts.
Furthermore, Davies describes radical feminism as empathising “the importance of studying and theorizing women’s situations and experiences.”22 This line of thinking also highlights the notion that ‘the personal is political’, effectively bringing out the specific problems and challenges of women into the limelight instead of dismissing them as ‘problems of the home’.23 This also serves to highlight the fact that patriarchy is highly dependent on the unpaid and unrecognised work women do in the private sphere. Feminism as a central concept is described by Denise Thompson as a “social enterprise, a moral and political framework concerned with redressing social wrongs.”24 This will form an essential backdrop to this thesis. The radical feminism framework has been criticised for simplifying the struggles of women, and specifically for taking for granted that all women share a collective identity without taking race, sexuality and class into consideration.25 However, as the radical feminism theory is still highly relevant to this study, the researcher will take measures to eliminate these criticisms and at all times combine the radical feminist thinking with an intersectional framework to avoid falling into the trap of simplifying the diversities of women.

Additionally, this thesis will also use the model of ‘post-revolution marginalisation’ which helps explain how, and to a certain extent why, women often do not benefit from a revolution to the extent expected. The model below showcases how, throughout history, women have participated in revolutionary movements by either promises of increased women’s rights or by simply appealing to a common cause, such as rebelling against the colonial power (as was the case in the 1919 revolution). However, the status of women very rarely improves after a change of power, and a new wave of diminishing women are set in motion. This, according to the model, leads to another status quo and hence continued challenging of the situation, leading to new calls for regime change. Thus, history will essentially repeat itself as long as women are being marginalised – this is shown in Figure 1.

Additionally, the theory of self-organisation developed by Alain de Vulpian is useful when analysing the methods used to enable the popular protests. Basically, the theory argues that when there is an injustice in society there is a with time increasingly high probability that unconventionally structured groups of society will self-organise themselves based on a heterarchial structure. A heterarchial structure is virtually the opposite of a hierarchical one, which means that traditional rules can be avoided. Moreover, there is typically no no clear organisational leadership, something that can be clearly seen in the Egyptian 2011 revolution. Hence, it is extremely useful when analysing the means of mobilisation as well as the strategies used by both the women’s rights activists and the youth groups supporting them during the uprisings.

3 Methodology and analytical framework

The research will be carried out as a case specific desk study. The method employed in this thesis will be a qualitative text analysis research with a post-structuralist base, as will be explained below.\(^{28}\) It is important to note that the author does not believe that it is possible to find one single truth – rather, many different sources will be analysed in order to examine different views on the events during the 2011 revolution, and subsequently build the thesis around this. This method is employed by scholars looking to assess texts and information – both primary and secondary – and to connect their research to the work of other researchers. Thus, it is a highly applicable method which allows any researcher to find their desired angle of research; however, the same usability carries with it a certain risk of subjectivity. It is thus extremely important to seek to find and make use of a wide range of material from different angles – transparency is the key. The sources for this research are predominantly peer-reviews articles, or in rare cases newspaper articles. Published books have also been used to some extent. Thus, there is always a risk that the findings reflect the researcher’s own opinions and thoughts, but great precaution have been taken to minimise this risk by continuously reflecting on the findings and analysis. Furthermore, this method usually does not lead to a stiff conclusion, but one that is dynamic and fluid,\(^ {29}\) and the results and conclusions are thus always open for scientific debate.

The textual analysis method – that is, the method of systematically analyse texts – allows the researcher to critically read and study certain texts to further be able to find the interrelation between them, and hopefully construct a new, hitherto unknown path within the research area. It can be said that a qualitative method is based on several steps, which include but are not limited to, collecting, analysing and verifying material.\(^ {30}\) In this thesis, different texts will be analysed in regards to the female participation in the 2011 revolution in Egypt. Hence, only secondary sources have been used for this thesis.

Employing a qualitative research method heavily based on secondary material carries a risk with it. However, taking into account the fact that the majority of the resources and scholars that will be used in this analysis are widely accepted as highly scientific, the risk can


and will be minimised. The sources are considered highly reliable. A number of different sources will be used, where the authors have different backgrounds and perspectives, to avoid bias in the analysis. The main sources are various books and articles by scholars within the area, who have researched widely on the subject. Furthermore, using a post-structuralist view as the point of departure, will help ensuring a comprehensive and fair view on the events since no texts are “[dismissed] as ‘inaccurate’ or ‘biased’” – the interesting thing is not searching for one specific truth, but rather “how these texts tell their stories, how they represent the world, and how they make sense of it.”

When it comes to the analytical framework and general methodology, this thesis will take on the structure of an analytical (enhanced) case study. Robert K. Yin defines a case study as

[...] an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon (the “case”) in depth and within its real-world context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context may not be clearly evident. [...] It also] copes with the technically distinctive situation in which there will be many more variables of interest than data points, and as one result relies on multiple sources of evidence, with data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion, and as another result benefits from the prior development of theoretical propositions to guide data collection and analysis.

One important thing to note when it comes to case studies is that one does not start with an assumption or a set of assumptions. Instead, it should be based in a set of inquisitive questions that allows for any researcher to draw similar conclusion from the analysed material, using the same theoretical and analytical framework. It is also important to clearly define the method of data collection and analysis procedure, to ensure academic transparency. Hence, this type of research allows the researcher to utilise a holistic point of view, while at the same time recognising the challenge of compiling a research that is both rigorous and encompassing – all without falling into the trap of generalising or subjectively choosing sources. Another weakness with conducting a single-case study is drawing conclusions from a single ‘experiment.’ However, it is justified and acknowledged as a relevant method in this case since the research is specifically interested in the role of and outcomes for women in the 2011

revolution in Egypt. Hence, it would not be academically possible to design the research in any other way than a single-case study. However, by analysing the findings in a regional, historical and socio-economic context the weaknesses of the single-case study design has been minimised.

Furthermore, the aim of the analysis is ‘explanation building.’ This means, again in the words of Robert K. Yin, that the “goal is to analyze the case study data by building an explanation about the case.”\(^{35}\) Again, to avoid subjectivity, the analysis will rest firmly on a ground of well-developed theories that are applicable to this specific case. These theories are explained in detail in chapter two. This requires a close attention to the analytical process to avoid diverging from the overall aim of the research, and frequent check-backs to the research objectives.\(^{36}\) This research will be conducted in a qualitative order in accordance with Table 1 below. This means that the enhanced case study will not necessarily seek a causal linkage between events, but rather take an holistic view and seek to explain the hows and whys of the case. Additionally, no generality will be claimed, although some parts of the analysis can be adapted to fit similar cases in other circumstances.

Hence, the aim of the study is not only to describe and shed light on women’s political participation in Egypt, but also to seek to explain the level of political engagement of women as well as its whys and hows.\(^{37}\) As per table 1 above, the case penetration is described as thick, allowing for a deep and detailed analysis of the female political participation as well as strategies used to obtain the various objectives of the women activists. At the same time keeping the dimension of time in mind. It is important to remember that for youth, waiting for change is a realistic option as it is possible that their marginalisation is only due to their young age. However, when looking at women, the option of waiting seems immensely less realistic. If the marginalisation is due to gender, there is very slight possibilities of change even with the passing of time. To achieve this, various theories will be used, as already outlined in chapter two above. In order to link the various parts of the thesis together, the structure shown in Figure 2 will be used as a backbone.

Figure 2: The supporting structure of a case study.\textsuperscript{38}

This structure helps to explain the connection between the different parts of the study: The basic, underlying problem is clearly defined to help design the specific aim and research problem. The analytical categories refer to the theories employed, while the collected material obviously corresponds to the findings from the primary and secondary texts analysed. These are then compiled into a comprehensive analysis that will serve as the main logical link between the questions, theory, findings and conclusion.\textsuperscript{39} To assist in this, five basic questions have to be asked:

1) **What?** Which characteristics will be examined?
2) **Who?** Which objects/people will be examined?
3) **Where?** Which cases will be examined, and why?
4) **When?** Which time period will be examined?
5) **How?** How will the material be collected?\textsuperscript{40}

For this thesis, the political participation and political culture (what) of women in Egypt (who and where) during the revolution 2011 (when) will be examined. The material will be

\textsuperscript{38} Denk, Thomas (2002), p. 32.
\textsuperscript{39} Denk, Thomas (2002), p. 31.
\textsuperscript{40} Denk, Thomas (2002), pp. 32-8.
collected from a number of secondary and primary sources, using a text analysis method (how). This study will aim to incorporate this with a combined disciplined-configurative study which is, simply speaking, a study which aims at describing and explaining a historically important case with a firm base in a theory or a set of theories.⁴¹

4 The historical context

Egypt has a long history of feminist and other political movements fighting to improve the average Egyptian’s rights and opportunities. While this thesis focuses on the revolution of 2011 and the events directly related to it, undoubtedly historical aspects before 2011 will also be discussed in the analysis. As all significant events, the 2011 revolution cannot be separated from its context, and it is intimately rooted in the political situation that unfolded, first and foremost, during the past one hundred years. However, as this research is looking specifically at female political participation, this background chapter will only briefly introduce events since 1919, which had specific importance for the women of Egypt. Since the feminist movement of Egypt is widely considered to have been born during the 1919 revolution, special attention will be paid to it. Additionally, female participation during this revolution was both large in numbers and significant for its outcome. The regime of Hosni Mubarak is briefly introduced here, but will be looked at in more detail in the first section of chapter five, since it is essential to understand the root causes of the 2011 revolution.

4.1 1890-1922: Women in the nationalist revolution

In Egypt, Grand Mufti Muhammad Abduh (1899-1905) was a pioneer when it came to certain rights for women. In the late 1800’s, he paved the way for future women’s rights activists by urging the Egyptian society to end the practice of polygyny as well as the veiling of the face in addition to the head by upper-class women. Interestingly, Muhammad Abduh was the teacher of Qasim Amin who became one of the first champions of increased women’s rights in Egypt, as will be explained below.42

There was a considerate amount of lobbying for women’s rights in the beginning of the 1900’s, and the Woman Question43 was high on the agenda for many activists.44 These included issues related to family law, religion, women’s access to the public and political spheres, and the right to education and work.45 One of the most famous faces of the Egyptian struggle for female emancipation was Qasim Amin, who published several books on the

43 The ‘woman question’ refers back to the collective notion of body politics, marriage, and access to the public sphere as well as reproductive and legal rights of women. Generally used to encompass all different aspects of the struggle for women’s rights in a specific geographical and/or historical context.
44 See section 1.6.6.
subject. He also personified the transformation of the traditional Ottoman elites of the country to a more Western-oriented upper class, and as such, his books and outspoken views on the women’s struggle obviously caused considerate debate and outrage.\textsuperscript{46}

The 1919 revolution started after the British forces arrested and deported leaders from the Wafd party,\textsuperscript{47} who were attempting to secure a place for themselves as representatives at the peace talks in Paris. Protests erupted in many parts of Egypt, with people from all spheres of society participating – including women.\textsuperscript{48} Indeed, the female and feminist influence in the protests was “both vocal and powerful”, in part due to the frequent use of the ‘Egypt for Egyptians’ slogan.\textsuperscript{49} During the revolution, the feminist movement was rather successful in voicing their demands. This is believed by the majority of the researchers and scholars to be due to their prosperous merging with the nationalist movement where the nationwide call for reform and modernisation coincided with the feminists demand for improved women’s rights and increased freedoms.\textsuperscript{50}

The nationalists of the 1919 revolution cleverly used the notion of family ties and extended it to a nationwide scale and thus created a sense of relation between all of Egypt’s inhabitants, regardless of gender, class or other differentials. Hence, the nationalist movement utilised the concept of ‘Motherhood’ as one of the central images in the political struggle and women generally tended to label themselves ‘Mothers of the Nation’ in order to gain access to the political arena.\textsuperscript{51} Typically, in most revolutions and nationalist movements in the Middle East, women participated to a certain degree but were subsequently denied their rights in the aftermaths of the uprisings. However, it is important to note that women were not just used as pawns by the male counterparts of the anti-colonial revolutionary movements – instead women often participated on the same premises as men – to achieve independence.\textsuperscript{52} However, as will be seen in chapter five of this thesis, women rarely participate on a gender-neutral basis, even if gender specific issues might not be explicit. Additionally, it is essential to remember that not all women participating in these nationalist movements were feminists – and there was no consensus about how women’s rights should look even among the women.

\textsuperscript{47} One of the biggest political parties in Egypt from 1919 until its forced dissolution in 1953.
\textsuperscript{50} Ramdani, Nabila (2013), pp. 39-40.
\textsuperscript{52} Baron, Beth (2005), p. 8.
who identified as feminists. This is something that also can be found in the 2011 revolution in Egypt.

As already mentioned, an important aspect concerning the female struggle was the use of semantics. The nationalist movement was rather desperate to find common ground between all different sections of the Egyptian society in the early 20th century and in order to achieve this feeling of national belonging, “men became ‘sons’ and ‘brothers’, [while] women became ‘Mothers of the Nation’.” 53 This not only gave them a natural opportunity to express their opinion within the households, but also a possibility to enter into the public sphere and engage themselves to a greater extent in the political life. With the door to the public sphere opened, women from the middle- and upper classes started associations and organisations that functioned as a first step towards political action. 54 There are a multitude of important female activists that were active in the early 20th century – Huda Sha`arawi, Labiba Ahmad, Fikriyya Husni, and others.

4.2 1922-1952: Independence under British supervision

The most defining event for the women’s rights movement of Egypt during this period, when the British Empire was still effectively in charge of Egyptian internal and external affairs, was the formation of the Egyptian Feminist Union in 1923. Headed by Huda Sha’arawi, it attracted mostly middle- and upper class women and due to Sha’arawi’s semi-secular approach, a more religious women’s organisation was founded thirteen years later by Zeinab al-Ghazali. 55 This ‘clash’ between secular and Muslim/Islamic feminists can still be found in the Egyptian society, and the different women’s groups typically stress different elements of female emancipation – where the most radical secular feminists might stress the abolishment of the veil, the extremely religious might emphasise women’s roles as mothers and guards of the family. One of the biggest – and one of the few – victories by the women activists, with help from the nationalist movement, during this time was the decision to allow women to attend primary school and university (1925 and 1928, respectively). 56 Several other women’s

53 Baron, Beth (2005), p. 36.
organisations were established during this time, although all of them were shut down in the early 1950’s when all non-governmental associations and organisations were outlawed.\(^57\)

The 1925 formation of the Muslim Brotherhood was another extremely important, albeit indirect, event for the future of the women’s struggle in the country. The Muslim Brotherhood started out as a religious group looking to incorporate the innovations of the 20\(^{th}\) century into the *Shari’ah*, the Islamic ‘legal’ system, which is derived from the Qur’an and varies greatly between the different Islamic societies throughout the Globe. It is problematic to define and translate it as a legal system, or even a set of rules, since the Qur’an can be, and has been, interpreted in so many different ways. The Muslim Brotherhood has, since its founding, been set on implementing the Egyptian understanding of the *Shari’ah* as the penal code of the country, although the group did not have any clearly defined goals.\(^58\) It quickly became popular in Egypt, and had tens of thousands of members by the end of the 1930’s,\(^59\) drawing supporters from virtually all spheres of society when calling for economic and political reform in accordance with Sunni Islam, as well as being “an athletic group, a cultural-educational union, an economic company and a social idea.”\(^60\) The impact and influence of the Muslim Brotherhood, especially in the aftermath of the 2011 revolution, will be examined more closely in chapter five.

### 4.3 1952-1981: The birth of the Egyptian Republic and the emergence of ‘First Ladies’

Gamal Abdel Nasser took power in Egypt after the complete fall of the British colonial powers in 1952, following bloody protests mainly in Cairo.\(^61\) During the revolution, or coup, women typically did not have a very significant role, and therefore an account of it does not fit within the scope of this thesis.\(^62\) Suffice to say that during Nasser’s rule, a number of important reforms were implemented regarding women’s rights. Among others, with the new constitution of 1956, women were formally allowed to vote and were subsequently represented in the National Assembly in 1957 (albeit only by two mandates out of 350).\(^63\)

\(^{61}\) Cleveland, William L. and Bunton, Martin (2009), p. 303.
\(^{62}\) For those who are interested in an account of the political history of this era, there is a brief but informative summary of it in William L. Cleveland’s excellent, albeit male-centred, book *A History of the Modern Middle East*, pp. 301-8.
1962 saw a new statute that made women and men legally equal, and after this, women had greater access to the labour market.\textsuperscript{64} Additionally, more and more women enrolled in both primary and higher education, although the illiteracy rates of adult women Egypt remained below 30 percent until the 1990’s and below 60 percent well into the 2000’s – roughly thirty percentage points below the literacy rates of men during the same time span.\textsuperscript{65} However, women’s and feminist organisations were banned in 1954,\textsuperscript{66} and instead the ‘state feminism’, with Nasser’s wife Tahia, and later Sadat’s wife Jehan – the ‘First Ladies’ – at the forefront, was given priority. For many reasons, the Egyptian public was sceptic about this development, which was nonetheless continued under the regime of Hosni Mubarak. This will be discussed in greater detail in chapter five.

In 1970, Anwar Sadat took over the presidency after the death of Gamal Abdel Nasser. Up until his death in 1981, much of the political climate in the country revolved around Egypt’s relation or non-relation with neighbouring Israel. One important development for women, however, was the introduction of the quota system in the People’s Assembly (former National Assembly) in 1979. Thirty of its seats were now dedicated to women.\textsuperscript{67} A number of family law reforms were also introduced during Sadat’s regime, laws that are commonly referred to as ‘Jehan’s laws’ due to their obvious connection to the wife of Sadat. While these did in fact improve the situation for women, they did not have a very broad support among the Egyptian population due to their top-down implementation.\textsuperscript{68} When Anwar Sadat was assassinated in 1981, Hosni Mubarak – who functioned as Vice President under Sadat – assumed the role of president of Egypt.

4.4 1981-2011: The Mubarak era

The first decade of Hosni Mubarak’s rule was marked by several regressions on the area of women’s rights. The quotas for the People’s Assembly were abolished in 1986, and five years later several women’s organisations – among them the Arab Women’s Solidarity Association – were forcibly shut down.\textsuperscript{69} However, marking an extremely important advancement in

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{64} Cleveland, William L. and Bunton, Martin (2009), p. 319.
  \item \textsuperscript{66} Keddie, Nikki R. (2007), p. 123.
  \item \textsuperscript{67} Nashat, Guity and Tucker, Judith E. (1999), p. 115.
  \item \textsuperscript{68} Keddie, Nikki R. (2007), pp. 123-4.
  \item \textsuperscript{69} Keddie, Nikki R. (2007), p. 125.
\end{itemize}
women’s rights, female genital mutilation (FGM) was basically made illegal in a ground-breaking ruling of 1997 and later reinforced by the child law of 2008. Continuing on the legacy of the First Ladies of the latter half of the 1900’s, Suzanne Mubarak pushed for several laws improving the status and rights of women in Egypt, including a reinstatement of the quota system for women in the People’s Assembly. However, regardless of these improvements for women, the regime during Mubarak’s rule was extremely repressive, something that limited the freedoms of all people but maybe most of all those of the youth and the women, as

it can be said that women and youth have experienced forms of structural violence engineered by the state (political system) or state apparatus such as the military, the modern economic system, and the patriarchal system in their society (linked as well to cultural violence). For instance, in the politico-economic and patriarchal systems, the role and place of women in society is gendered and limited to the private sphere. In the same systems, youth are seen as irresponsible, immature, and inexperienced and in need of guidance. In effect, this patriarchal and cultural logic excludes the two social categories from most spheres of their society. When they do participate without authorization from the government, husbands, or elders, their actions are considered an obstruction, a threat to law and order, and in direct disobedience to societal norms.

In an attempt to appease the Egyptian people after almost three decades of political oppression, the first competitive elections since 1952 were announced to be held in September 2005. Despite having multiple candidates, the voter turnout was low – less than 30 percent – but Mubarak still won by almost 90 percent. Going behind these numbers, however, reveals a strikingly low support from the general population – only about 12 percent. And even then, evidence shows there were severe irregularities, such as vote-stuffing, intimidation and violence towards voters. Combined with the near-banning of non-governmental organisations (NGOs), extremely repressive political rules and severe economic hardship, it is not surprising that more and more ordinary people would take their refuge in religion – Islam.

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is and has been on the rise during the latter half of Mubarak’s rule. This, and the ever-present discussion about religion and its involvement in the political sphere, forms another extremely important backdrop to the happenings during the revolution and after. This debate has been especially poignant since the largest political Islamist group in Egypt, the Muslim Brotherhood (al-Ikhwān al-Muslimūn, or MB), put forward its presidential candidate after the revolution. When looking at the political situation before the Arab Spring, one can see that the Muslim Brotherhood and its members were continuously in conflict with the regime in Egypt and, to a certain degree, with the more secular part of Egypt’s population. Indeed, this can be argued to be due to the repressive methods of the government(s) towards any person who showed the slightest signs of religious activism, but the group members themselves are not innocent when it comes to un-ethical methods of persuasion. These included assassinations, mass jailing and torture. The tense situation “escalated to the point where the security forces were given standing orders to shoot to kill if they identified any religious militant – whether or not that individual resisted arrest.” However, during the rule of Mubarak, it was not only political Islamists that were subject to persecution from the regime:

While the list of potential opponents did include other secular opposition leaders and activists, its compilers were primarily focused on the religious spectrum, including members of the [Muslim] Brotherhood and its radical offshoots. As a result, the heavy hand of state security once more turned a number of otherwise peaceful individuals and groups into terrorists, in reaction to brutality, torture, and abusive practices.

As a result of the events outlined above, once the spark of unrest was ignited in 2011, people poured in their thousands to the streets of Egypt. This will be elaborated in the next section of this thesis.

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75 Note that here, ‘political Islamist’ is not used neither as a negative nor as a positive term. It is simply used to describe those Muslims in Egypt who have brought religion to the political arena and does not separate the two. A discussion about this lies outside the scope of this research, and hence ‘political Islam’ is used as a neutral concept throughout this thesis.
5 Female participation in and after the 2011 protests

Since the start of the uprisings of 2011, women have been affected by the political climate in numerous ways. As will be shown below, female protesters stated that they felt extremely safe during the 18 days at Tahrir – most scholars even argue that not a single account of sexual harassment or assault was reported. This is particularly interesting since women were typically extremely exposed and unwelcome in the public sphere both before and after the revolution. The sections below will aim to look at the strategies and means of mobilisation used by women – often supported by youth groups – in order to gain access to the public sphere during the revolution of 2011, and the challenges they met during it and after the fall of Hosni Mubarak. It will be argued that social media played an important role in the mobilisation phase, especially in the context of Alain de Vulpian’s theory of self-organisation. Furthermore, sexual violence in the forms of sexual harassment and female genital mutilation (FGM) will be analysed in a separate section as it will be argued that these two practices are especially harmful when it comes to women’s access to the public sphere and the wide-spread male domination over women in Egypt.

5.1 Root causes for the 2011 Egyptian revolution

All of the outlined events in chapter four played a role in the lead-up to the Egyptian revolution of 2011. The people of Egypt had lived through political turbulence, regional wars, and economic policies that caused a large part of the population to fall into poverty. Looking at the bravery of their Tunisian sisters and brothers, the Egyptians quite frankly realised that they had had enough, and took to the streets in unprecedented numbers on January 25th, 2011. Hazem Fahmy argues, in his article from 2012, that there are five main root causes that sparked the Egyptian 2011 revolution – poverty, political oppression, extreme economic inequalities, corruption, and the loss of human dignity. These five issues taken together effectively meant that the rich profited at the expense of both the poor, who got poorer, and the middle class, who were diminished. Furthermore, the complex historical background is an extremely important explanation regarding the frustration that led to the toppling of the Mubarak regime, especially considering the emergency law that was kept in place from 1981 (during Sadat’s regime) until January 2012. Fahmy also argues, as many other Egyptian and

foreign scholars, that the revolution is not yet over.\textsuperscript{79} One can easily see that while the current situation in Cairo and the rest of Egypt might not be a revolution anymore, the political climate is certainly not stable. Many of the issues that led to the Egyptian uprisings of 2011 are still present in the society, especially the exclusion of women, unemployment, and widespread popular distrust towards politicians and the police force.

While promising to only serve as president for one term, ex-president Mubarak held his position for thirty years (five terms) – “among the longest ever by a single ruler in Egypt’s seven-thousand-year history.”\textsuperscript{80} During the entire length of his regime, Egypt embraced the concept of neo-liberalism and its subsequent economic reforms, even though several of the most defining parts of neo-liberalism were not implemented. These reforms – mainly mass-scale privatisations and thus a significant decrease in government employment possibilities – affected nearly all spheres of the Egyptian society, but mostly so on the youth and women.\textsuperscript{81} Indeed, a staggering 83 \% of all unemployed in Egypt are 15-29 years old, and as is often the case throughout the world, this strikes unevenly towards women – translated into numbers, only roughly one of ten females in the age group were part of the labour force, whereas the corresponding rate for men were roughly six out of ten. All of these factors serve to explain the sudden uprising of the Egyptian youth on January 25, 2011.\textsuperscript{82}

When it comes to women specifically, there were many reasons for them to take to the streets to protest against the three-decade long rule of Hosni Mubarak. While some improvement in women’s rights were indeed implemented between 1981 and 2011, women at large were still extremely marginalised. For example, women’s participation in the labour force is remarkably low and has, according to the World Bank, in fact decreased during the last decades. In the early 1980’s, roughly 29 percent of women in Egypt participated in the labour market. Ten years later, this had decreased to 26.6 percent\textsuperscript{83} and reached a low-point in the early 2000’s when barely one of ten women were active in job market. In 2012, the estimate is of female labour participation rate was about 23.6 percent according to the World

\textsuperscript{79} Fahmy, Hazem (2012), p. 350; Taher, Nadia (2012). “”We are not women, we are Egyptians”: Spaces of protest and representation” in \textit{City: Analysis of Urban Trends, Culture, Theory, Policy, Action}, 16:3, 369-376, pp. 369, 375.
\textsuperscript{80} Fahmy, Hazem (2012), p. 369.
\textsuperscript{82} Singerman, Diane (2013), pp. 10-1, 15.
Bank,\textsuperscript{84} and UN Women states that only 16 percent of the country’s full time workers are women.\textsuperscript{85} As mentioned before, literacy rates remained low well into the 2000’s, but has steadily increased throughout the past decades – female literacy is now above 65 per cent.\textsuperscript{86} Egypt was ranked as 101\textsuperscript{th} country on the United Nations Development Programme’s Gender Inequality Index of 2012, with women only holding an astonishingly low 3.7 percent of the seats in the parliament.\textsuperscript{87} Similarly, it is ranked overall as 125 out of 136 countries in the Global Gender Gap Report of 2013 and at 130\textsuperscript{th} place in the same report when it comes to labour force participation. Furthermore, when it comes to both economic participation and political empowerment, Egypt can be found among the bottom eleven countries.\textsuperscript{88} Poverty in Egypt, as in the rest of the world, typically affects women more than men, especially in women-headed households,\textsuperscript{89} making it even more understandable why women to such a large extent participated in the 2011 protests – they potentially had much to win, and very little to lose.

5.2 Means of mobilisation and strategies used

When it comes to the ways women activists mobilised during the 2011 revolution in Egypt, it typically followed a seemingly un-organised order where the people poured to Tahrir Square\textsuperscript{90} without a clear leader or coordinator. This was also the case of the youth activists, who largely supported the call for improved women’s rights. However, it would be a mistake to assume that the lack of leadership indicates an entirely spontaneous reaction by the people. Instead, as will be outlined below, it can be assumed that Egypt’s youth reacted to the worsening of both the political and socio-economic situation of the country in accordance with Alain de Vulpian’s theory of self-organisation.\textsuperscript{91} One of the main implications of this is

\textsuperscript{89} Blaydes, Lisa and El Tarouty, Safinaz (2009), p. 370.
\textsuperscript{90} Its name comes from the Arabic word for ‘liberation,’ Tahrir, which is oddly fitting, given its significance during the Arab Spring.
\textsuperscript{91} de Vulpian, Alain (2005).
that the youth and women activists of Egypt discarded – consciously or subconsciously – the idea of having a hierarchical structure of organisation and instead “formed structured network[s] on heterarchial principles using mainly internet based social networks.”

Hence, several authors bring up the youth – constituting somewhere between 30 and 40 percent of the Egyptian (2008 est.), out of which 77.5 percent are unemployed (2006 est.) – as a key factor of enabling the popular resistance.

Three trends combined to bring down the wall of fear that had maintained Mubarak’s regime: the organic intellectualism of leading commentators and activists; the evolution of civil resistance movements that challenged the barrier of fear; and finally the birth and growth of an information-age generation that challenged the aging regime through rhetoric, methodology, tactics, and ability to mobilize quickly and efficiently.

The younger generation of Egypt had an upper hand in mobilising in large numbers, through an almost exclusive use of unconventional means of communication and organisation (such as social media and word-of-mouth) in the lead-up to the revolution. This ‘online activism’ was conducted mainly via Facebook, Twitter and personal blogs, and ensured not only a wide-spread feeling of inclusion but also a rapid exchange of ideas and news. Furthermore, the ease of sharing, forwarding and accessing updates meant that the world around Egypt was quick in emotionally responding to the situation – it is estimated that between January 10th and February 10th 2011, 93 million tweets were shared and there were 2,313 active Facebook pages worldwide discussing the revolution in Egypt. This largely corresponds to the argument that there was no clear hierarchical organisational line of thinking behind the revolution. However, it seems likely that many of the online activists were extremely aware of the international attention they attracted and it can be assumed that there was an explicit wish from the revolutionaries to sway the international public opinion in

their favour to put Hosni Mubarak and his regime under added pressure – something they succeeded in.\textsuperscript{98} Similar tendencies have also been observed in previous revolutions in various parts of the world, as explained by James Scott:

Some grievances are so deep-rooted and shared by a very large group that when there is a possibility for some political action – a change in the conditions of repression – the revolt spreads like ‘wildfire’ looking like a very organized, coordinated uprising, when in fact, it was not.\textsuperscript{99}

As explained above, social media played a key role in the organisation of protests and in bringing together people from all spheres of society – especially when considering that social media tends to be the dominant means through which oppressed and marginalised people can express their voices.\textsuperscript{100} This is especially true when it comes to female activism, since there is traditionally little to no space in the public sphere where women can express themselves. Throughout the Egyptian 2011 revolution, women demanded space both online and offline. While the role and presence of women have been largely ignored and/or “made invisible” by the western media, at least during the initial year after the revolution, Egyptian media and societal groups paid all the more attention to it.\textsuperscript{101} The use of social media made it easy to reach unprecedented numbers and providing new platforms to raise criticisms of the state.\textsuperscript{102} Moreover, in the context of pushing for positive change in the midst of culturally and historically traditional forces both during and after the revolution of 2011, the women’s rights movement has been forced to find alternative ways to advocate for their ideas. These included a continuation of the online activism that had proved so successful in the lead-up to the 2011 revolution, wide spread Cairene graffiti campaigns, as well as ever-growing anti-harassment activist groups. These street art campaigns have been specifically important to draw attention to both the revolution and the women’s struggle, and the most prominent figure of the graffiti artists is probably the signature Keizer.

\textsuperscript{100} Newsom, Victoria A. and Lengel, Lara (2012), p. 38.
\textsuperscript{101} Newsom, Victoria A. and Lengel, Lara (2012), pp. 32, 35.
Figure 3: Typical example of street art in Cairo.

The caption reads “Fear us, government!” Source: IndependNews
It’s important to note that the anti-harassment groups in post-revolutionary Cairo include both men and women working to increase women’s rights and enable women to participate in public protests, something that might indicate a new, less patriarchal line of thinking of the male youth of Egypt. Some of these groups include HarassMap, working specifically to map occurrences of sexual harassment and to increase awareness of sexual violence through reports from victims. HarassMap was launched shortly before the revolution – in December 2010 – and is a prime example of a successful merging of online and offline activism when it comes to targeting different forms of violence against women. Operation Anti-Sexual Harassment and Assault (OpAntiSH) and Tahrir Bodyguard are also two of the most prominent groups trying to end the culture and social acceptance of violence against women, working on the ground to provide safety for women in general, and female protesters in specific.

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Victoria Newsom and Lara Lengel describe online activism as a ‘third space,’ as it is a space “where traditional rules governing society can be set aside.” Because of this, it provides a forum where otherwise unheard voices can demand an audience and initiate dialogue. Nonetheless, “with the relatively low internet penetration in the Middle East and North Africa, online populations consist mostly of women academics and other privileged women.”

According to International Telecommunication Union (ITU), the percentage of Egyptians who had access to the Internet in 2011 was 39.83% (up from 31.42% in 2010). Hence, the access to the Internet in Egypt was slightly above those in neighbouring countries which also experienced some degree of political turmoil during the Arab Spring, such as Tunisia and Jordan, and well above countries such as Syria, Libya, and Yemen. This means that it is not only important to look at the recent events in a gender-specific framework, but

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also to use an intersectional perspective. Keeping this in mind enables the researcher to avoid falling into the trap of thinking that women are a homogenous group. While it lacks a clear cut definition, it functions as a “broad, open-ended and inclusive tool for feminist analysis.”

It is also important to recognise that “socially constructed local ideologies of gender” are an academically weak description of female activists that relegate them to less important roles in the uprising. The challenge is thus for Western researchers to not portray women as powerless or invisible, but instead emphasise the impact they have in the non-traditional spheres of society. However, it remains important to keep in mind that the significance of female voices on social media and other online activist sites might not always translate into ‘real life.’ In light of this, it is extremely interesting to see that such a high percentage (up to 50 percent) of the protesters in the 2011 revolution were women. This indicates that despite a comparatively low Internet availability among women in Egypt, information about the happenings still reached them – it can be assumed that the first ‘wave’ of female protesters used their offline networks after having experienced the relative safe environment for women at Tahrir first-hand, and brought with them both family and friends to subsequent protests.

Some of the most important online campaigns that helped spark the revolution were the April 6-movement (formed in 2008), the Kefaya group (formed in 2004) and the ‘We Are All Khaled Said’ campaign which were formed after the murder of the young man in Alexandria after he allegedly failed to show the police officers his identification card fast enough. These groups consisted almost exclusively of young women and men, and all of these social media groups had a few things in common – to open up the political scene to new, younger voices and thus pave the way for an opposition that was both more varied and more autonomous. Because these online activists and their groupings were all so loosely organised, the repressive government before Mubarak’s fall struggled to quieten them, something that was also essential in creating the prerequisites needed for the revolution. Moreover, they were driven by a sense of mutual respect towards each other despite their differences. As these groups were loose platforms, they enabled the youth – including women – from virtually all spheres of the Egyptian society to come together at Tahrir square and unify under the motto


of ‘bread, freedom, and dignity’. Here, it is important to realise that dignity in this specific context is a so called ‘gendered concept’\textsuperscript{114}, meaning that when the battle calls of the 2011 Revolution are finally enforced, women will have “personal autonomy to voice their opinion, become part of the body politic, and engage in public debate.”\textsuperscript{115} As a continuation of this, the extremely patriarchal sphere of the police- and armed forced needs to be reformed to end the current context of sexualised and hierarchal violence that penetrates them.\textsuperscript{116} This will be elaborated in section 5.4, about the challenges women face when demanding access to the public and political spheres.

The Egyptian regime clearly understood and appreciated the power of social media. In an unprecedented and surprising move, the government completely shut down the Internet and limited the cell phone coverage for roughly five days from January 28th until the 2nd February, 2011. While not unheard of, it was a bold act by Mubarak, especially since so much of Egypt’s economy relies on Internet connections to the rest of the Globe. However, it was a futile attempt to contain and limit the protests, as the regime not only failed to control the wide-spread protesting – if anything, the Internet shut down only served to make people more prone to take to the streets – but the move was also ineffective when it came to actually restricting the access to the Internet. Egyptians as well as international allies worked quickly to provide the people of Egypt with alternative ways to communicate with each other and the rest of the world, through various methods such as fax-to-email, speech-to-text and older methods of Internet connections such as dial-up ISP’s.\textsuperscript{117} While it is difficult to know whether the move would have been successful if enforced earlier when the protests was in its initial phases, this events shows how wide-spread the international support for the Egyptian uprisings were, and how inventive the Egyptians were in working around the ban.

\textsuperscript{114} Note that it can also be considered to be a generational concept, but since the focus of this thesis is to explicitly examine the women of the revolution, it is not considered to be a central theme to investigate further.
\textsuperscript{115} Singerman, Diane (2013), p. 20.
5.3 The how’s and why’s of female participation explained

Nadine Sika and Yasmin Khodary argue that the 2011 revolution were instrumental in bringing attention to the women’s struggle in Egypt, as well as that the women who bravely joined the protests at Tahrir Square symbolises Egypt’s post-revolutionary women’s rights movement and women’s empowerment.\(^\text{118}\) This is most evident when looking at the, in a Middle Eastern context, large numbers of women who functioned as ‘inspirers’ and leaders on social media.\(^\text{119}\) Asmaa Mahfouz is widely regarded as one of the first and most important voices on the Internet who as early as the 18\(^\text{th}\) January 2011 called out to the younger generation of Egypt to join her at Tahrir Square, after closely monitoring the developments during the uprisings in Tunisia.\(^\text{120}\) Several other women activists were very active in pushing for further engagement from both youth and women from all age groups, both on Twitter, Facebook and YouTube.

“While women may not have been motivated by concerns of gender equality, the ways in which they participate are rarely gender neutral”,\(^\text{121}\) the 2011 revolution in Egypt was a defining moment for the women of Egypt in in more than one way. Indeed, during the protests women defied the traditional dangers of the public sphere and refused to be shut out from the popular protests. Not only did they participate, but they were also essential in both the lead-up to the revolution, and during the actual protests. In fact, more often than not, women would stand in the first rows of protesters,\(^\text{122}\) and it is believed that women formed up to 50% of the protesters at Tahrir square.\(^\text{123}\) However, as has often happened in past revolutionary movements across the world, women were all but forgotten after the fall of Mubarak despite being praised for their active participation during the eighteen days at Tahrir square.\(^\text{124}\)

Interestingly, during the 2011 revolution women themselves – most likely in a conscious attempt to gain increased legitimacy – adopted the same kind of semantics that were common during the nationalist 1919 revolution against the British colonial rule – firstly as mothers and later, differentiating slightly from the revolution of 1919, as daughters and sisters. In the 2011 protests, again similar to the 1919 dissent, women went to the streets not

\(^{118}\) Sika, Nadine and Khodary, Yasmin (2012), p. 91.
\(^{119}\) Note that ‘leaders’ here are used as a very loose concept, as the revolution per se did not have leaders or organisers in the traditional and conventional sense.
to pursue their own specific goals but rather as ordinary residents trying to achieve political change through remove Mubarak and his corrupt government, something that was crucial when ‘justifying’ their participation. During the revolution, they did not only participate in the actual protests, but also served as guards at the entrances to the square and distributed food, medicines and other essentials to their fellow protesters. It is extremely interesting to note that in order to strengthen their justification of being present at Tahrir Square, women also assigned themselves traditionally female roles during the protests. When women, for various reasons, could not themselves participate in the protests, they urged friends and relatives to go, or provided the protesters with food, medication or other supplies. However, even this did not help them achieve improved women’s rights in the post-revolutionary Egypt. As so often before, women did not gain much from the efforts they put in. Middleton-Detzner et al. eloquently describe the situation:

[I]n the post-revolution transition period, issues such as women’s rights, equal political representation and family law are relegated to the feminine sphere and overshadowed by more important (i.e., masculine) causes such as national self-determination or democratic governance. What results is a cycle of post-revolution marginalization […] in which women are mobilized to join revolutionary causes, galvanized by rhetoric of increased rights and political participation both as women and as citizen, and subsequently pushed out of the emerging political space that was presumably created on their behalf.

This inability to achieve improvements for women’s rights is also connected to the weak women’s movement of the past. Indeed, the inefficient organisation of the pro-women’s movement in Egypt coupled with the top-down control of the regime and the state feminism headed by the ‘First Ladies’ of Egypt has undoubtedly affected the ability for women to push for real and lasting changes in post-revolutionary Egypt.

The revolution was largely made possible by the overwhelmingly strong participation of the youth and the women (who together constitute over 60 percent of the Egyptian population), and by the fact that it was an inherently peaceful movement. Even though this

128 Tadros, Maris (2013), p. 187. Some would even go so far as to say that the organisation of the women’s rights movement were not only inefficient during the modern history of Egypt, but nonexistent. See section 5.4 for more elaborate discussion of this.
129 Central Intelligence Agency (2014); CAPMAS (2009).
might not have been an explicit strategy for many of the protesters, due to the anger and frustration having been built up during the last three decades, it can be assumed that the informal ‘leaders’ and ‘organisers’, as well as previous events in Tunisia, inspired others to non-violent protest. This also resonates back to the fact that people from virtually all spheres of the Egyptian society came together during the 18 days at Tahrir square – regardless of any discrepancies within the different groups. The main causes that served to ignite the protests as well as the feeling of belonging and intergroup understanding are decade-long “corruption, the gap between the rich and the poor, and lack of access to basic resources.”

In a nutshell, the uprising was a good opportunity for all Egyptians, but particularly for women who had been victims of oppression for over 30 years. For instance, the civil resistance gave women an opportunity to break through the ceiling of fear and silence, which are the two greatest threats to freedom, dignity, peace, and social justice. During the uprising, women expressed themselves in the public as demonstrators, mothers, breadwinners, and victims of social injustice. Unfortunately, women still faced different forms of abuse during the protests from the military. This did not deter them, however, from making their voices heard. They remained persistent in expressing their defiance of a system that violated their rights and stripped them of their dignity.

One of the strategies employed by women to ease their access to the public protests was to invoke a feeling of national pride in their fellow (male and female) protestors. Many women would dress in clothes in the national colours, or wear the national flag draped across their shoulders or as a makeshift hijab. Using the collective sense of belonging to the same nation enabled women from all spheres of society to take place in the revolution, and practically eradicated the differences between people during the 18 days at Tahrir Square.

5.4 The main challenges and obstacles during and after the revolution

During the 2011 revolution, women from all societal backgrounds came together to join the protests at Tahrir Square. However, as so often throughout history, women were poorly rewarded for their engagement and were not allowed to partake in the reform process after the

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132 Refers to a headscarf that is popularly used among Muslim women in Egypt. Can be found in a multitude of different styles and variations, but usually covers both head, neck and the upper part of the chest. Not to be confused with the niqab, which covers the face as well. The latter is only used by a minority of women in Egypt, and is typically not considered to be neither compulsory nor recommended in Islam.
133 Kuhlow, Sasha J. (2013), pp. 64-5.
fall of Mubarak. Practically all spheres of power – the army, the Islamic authorities and the Coptic Church – worked together to maintain the old patriarchal line of thinking.\textsuperscript{134} Several scholars point to the fact that there is a wide spread institutional sexism which, coupled with a strong social and cultural patriarchal tradition, effectively severely limits women from accessing the public sphere. This in turn also hinders women from achieving self-fulfilment and pursuing their dreams.\textsuperscript{135} Due to this, the women’s rights movement in the Middle East have fought (and continue to fight) to shift the general control over women’s rights from religious institutions to governments.\textsuperscript{136}

To a certain degree, this has almost backlashed in Egypt in the sense that the question of women’s and children’s rights have been patronaged by the so called ‘First Ladies’ of Egypt since the 1950’s. This was evident especially in the 1956 abolishment of the Egyptian Feminist Union (formed by Huda Sha`arawi in 1923) in favour of state sponsored organisations. From there on, it was difficult for independent organisations to push for change and it became more and more common to see the so called First Ladies in the forefront for the, at times misguided, struggle for increased women’s rights.\textsuperscript{137} Suzanne Mubarak, ex-president Hosni Mubarak’s wife, was well-known in Egypt and the Middle East for advocating women’s rights, albeit from a supremacist position and with clearly corrupted access to jurisdiction.\textsuperscript{138} For example, the only legal way for engaging in feminist activism during the latter part of Mubarak’s regime was through the state-sponsored National Council for Childhood and Motherhood (NCCM, founded in 1988) and National Council for Women (NCW, founded in 2000). Both of these organisations were of course directly answerable to Mrs. Mubarak, and thus intimately connected to the ruling party and Hosni Mubarak.\textsuperscript{139}

Somewhat understandably, given the close connection to Suzanne Mubarak and by default to the corrupt regime, in the aftermath of the 2011 uprising, many different groups in society moved to discredit the women’s rights movement. There were even some female activists that called for a reversion of certain laws that were protecting women’s rights only based on the fact that it was the president’s wife that enabled them in the first place,\textsuperscript{140}

\textsuperscript{134} Hatem, Mervat (2011). “Gender and Revolution in Egypt” in Middle East Report, 2011: 261, 36-41, p. 36.
\textsuperscript{138} Elsadda, Hoda (2011), pp. 86, 93.
\textsuperscript{139} Tadros, Mariz (2014), pp. 205, 207.
although most of them went to great lengths to defend them.\textsuperscript{141} Most Egyptian female activists have clearly shown their disregard to the so called ‘state feminism’ while at the same time “seek[ing] to solidify their institutional accomplishments, the result of many struggles against an aggressive authoritarian state, through coalition politics that allow different groups to work together without undermining the diversity of views, expertise, interests and agendas.”\textsuperscript{142}

In the light of the unprecedentedly large number of female protesters during the revolution of 2011, one can assume that gender, as a concept, is essential when analysing both the revolutionary and counter-revolutionary processes as well as the post-revolutionary societal development in Egypt. Furthermore, the female presence at various protests and demonstrations increased more and more during and after the initial spark of protests on 25 January, 2011. A march to commemorate the International Women’s Day the same year was announced, after which the harassment and violence became even more pronounced.\textsuperscript{143} The call was for “a million-person women’s march,” although the actual number of participants were much lower – they could be counted in their hundreds.\textsuperscript{144} While Tahrir Square was considered a safe space for women as well as men during the actual days of the 2011 revolution – from the start of the protests on 25\textsuperscript{th} January until the fall of Mubarak eighteen days later, on 11\textsuperscript{th} February –,\textsuperscript{145} not long after it became increasingly dangerous for women to partake in public protests.

Whereas rates of street harassment of women are close to 90 percent in Egypt [i.e. 90 percent of Egyptian women have been subject to street harassment, according to Hafez], not a single known case of harassment were reported from Tahrir Square during the days of the uprising. Yet, only a few days after the revolution, women were being harassed in Tahrir, the scene of liberation.\textsuperscript{146}

The atmosphere of these protests was vastly different from the popular uprising a just under a month earlier. Not only were the women taking part in the protests subjected to harassment and sexual heckling, but they were also accused of ‘treason’ in that they allegedly followed a Western agenda which aimed to destroy the cultural and traditional values of their country.\textsuperscript{147} Especially when taking the safe environment at Tahrir during the 18-day revolution, the

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{141} Hatem, Mervat (2011), p. 41.
\item \textsuperscript{142} Hatem, Mervat (2011), p. 41.
\item \textsuperscript{143} Al-Ali, Nadje (2013), p. 312.
\item \textsuperscript{144} Elsadda, Hoda (2011), pp. 84-5.
\item \textsuperscript{145} Sika, Nadine and Khodary, Yasmin (2012), p. 97.
\item \textsuperscript{146} Hafez, Sherine (2012), p. 40.
\item \textsuperscript{147} Elsadda, Hoda (2011), p. 85.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
extreme hostility with which the women of the 8th March protests were met was astonishing, to say the least.

It is also interesting to compare the demonstrations to mark the International Women’s Day in 2011 with those that took place one year later. While the protests of 2011 were a ‘failure’, as described above, the 2012 demonstration was far more successful both in terms of the amount of people participating and male patronage of the protests and protesters. One explanation for this might be the fact that the women’s rights movement turned to both the secular and Islamic youth movements, who encouraged their ‘members’ support the call for improvement of women’s rights. The youth, both the religious and non-religious, knew what it meant to be marginalised, so they came to the 2012 International Women’s Day demonstrations in large numbers. During the period in between the two demonstrations, many significant events took place that affected this slightly surprising outcome. Among those was the vicious attack by military men on the ‘woman in the blue bra’, where a group of men were caught on photo undressing, beating and stomping on a, seemingly unconscious, unidentified young woman. The girl happened to wear a blue bra under her black abaya (a long, loose-fitting and usually black dress which is commonly worn on the Arabian Peninsula, but also increasingly frequent among Muslim women in other parts of the Middle East), which spawned her ‘nickname’, and the incident sparked significant outrage among the Egyptians and led to additional protests calling for increased protection of women as well as demanding an apology from the military – which was subsequently, and unprecedentedly, released.

There had also been a significant increase of other attacks on female protesters, which all together seems to have sparked a new wave of protests for the International Women’s Day in 2012. However, the one major difference between this demonstration and the one preceding it was how the women chose to represent themselves – in 2011, women protested as women, and were met with a ‘this is not the time’-attitude from male counterparts, whereas in 2012, women protested as mothers and daughters. Clearly, women had taken to heart the lessons learned from the failed demonstrations of March 8, 2011. It appears that this change of semantics has a vast importance in the way the protests were received amongst men, since the

149 Al-Ali, Nadje (2013), p. 312;
2012 demonstrations were not only endorsed by men, but men also joined the women in calling for the need to protect the ‘mothers and daughters of Egypt’.150

One of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces’ (SCAF) strategies to attempt to control and discourage young people, especially women, from partaking in the protests that have rattled the country since the 25th January 2011 has been to subject them to various degrading practices. This effectively means that women from all spheres of the Egyptian society are severely hindered in their access to any kind of public spaces due to extremely widespread sexual harassment which is reinforced by males in every level of society, from the military, army and other state security apparatuses to colleagues and family members. The fact that it has become a “political tool of repression” makes the issue even more serious, and extremely difficult for women to take legal action against the perpetrators.151 Maybe the most striking account of this is the forced ‘virginity’ testing that women reported having been subjected to during and after the protests at Tahrir. Not only were women forced, by means of coercion such as electrocution and extreme violence, to comply to this testing, but they were also conducted by a male military physician “in full view of the passing by soldiers and officers.”152 However, some positive change could be seen when the practice of ‘virginity’ testing was made illegal by the State Council Administrative Court in December 2011153.

When it comes to the reform process in the aftermath of the 2011 revolt, women were practically excluded from it. This was especially true when it came to the drafting of the new constitution.154 The constitution was meant to be drafted by men only but the committee was pressured into accepting a female member, and the language in the constitution and subsequent amendments to it were severely gender biased towards men.155 Furthermore, women had no place whatsoever in the interim government appointed by the Supreme Council to lead the country after the fall of Mubarak until the general elections.156

[W]omen have played a central role in bringing about the success of the revolt that toppled Egypt’s 30-year-old Mubarak regime and dismantled its ruling apparatus. Although women made up 20 to 50 percent of the protesters in Tahrir Square, not

surprisingly, the events immediately following the uprising of 2011 revealed that women would not be part of the political deliberations between various contending parties and the Supreme Military Council (SMC) in charge of the country.\textsuperscript{157}

The above confirms the facts that women were all but barred to participate in the political discussion after February 11\textsuperscript{th}, something that is also manifest in the even higher number of women who chose to participate in the protests that resulted in the fall of Mohammad Morsi.\textsuperscript{158}

5.5 Women in post-revolutionary Egypt

When it comes to women’s rights in the general society, Egypt quite seriously lags behind on an international scale, and as mentioned before, it is ranked at a mere 125\textsuperscript{th} place out of 136 countries when it comes to the Gender Gap Report by the World Economic Forum.\textsuperscript{159} The issue of women’s empowerment is not helped by the soaring level of sexual harassment – over 99\% of women in Egypt reports having been sexually harassed.\textsuperscript{160} It is interesting that to this background, women have reported that they felt extremely safe during the 2011 protests.\textsuperscript{161} However, immediately after the fall of Mubarak, the sexual violence started again with full force,\textsuperscript{162} as explained in chapter 5.4 above. In post-revolutionary Egypt, women’s health – including everything from female genital mutilation, sexual harassment, gender based violence and non-gender specific illnesses such as hepatitis or diabetes – is not treated as a priority issue, and it is believed by some researchers that the issue has in fact gotten worse during the rule of the Muslim Brotherhood,\textsuperscript{163} as will be shown below.

After the fall of Mubarak, there was severe political turmoil leading up to the elections of June 2012. The Muslim Brotherhood was recognised as a political party (the Freedom and Justice Party), after having existed as an organisation since the late 1920’s, and put forward a candidate to the presidential elections\textsuperscript{164} – a decision that sparked vast discontent since they

\textsuperscript{157} Hafez, Sherine (2012), p. 38.
\textsuperscript{158} Tadros, Mariz (2014), p. 214.
initially stated that they would not participate in the election. Roughly 47 percent of the eligible voters chose to participate in the election and the Muslim Brotherhood’s candidate, Mohammad Morsi, won the presidential seat with 57 percent of the votes. It’s interesting – and important – to note that the Muslim Brotherhood initially disapproved of the revolutionary movements in Egypt, but still benefited so immensely from it. The fact that the Muslim Brotherhood’s candidate won the presidential election had many implications for women in Egypt, which became obvious when the new constitution of 2012 stated that women are only equal with men insofar this equality is compliant with the Egyptian understanding of the Shari’ah. It was said limiting freedoms in this way was needed to “protect Egypt from international treaties and pressures seeking to normalize ‘alien’ practices such as homosexuality, contraception, abortion and female sexual freedom in the believing nation.”

In order to draw more attention to this, as well as their overall cause, women’s rights activists in post-revolutionary Egypt issued statements to the SCAF (Supreme Council for the Armed Forces) as well as called for a cancellation of funding by international donors until the National Council and the SCAF (responsible for drafting the constitution) was restructured to become more democratic, transparent and inclusive of women. These initiatives, coupled with attempts to establish “an independent union for Egyptian women”, clearly marked a move away from the ‘state feminism’ that had been prevalent during Mubarak’s regime and suggests that women had been at least somewhat successful in challenging the state’s monopoly on women’s issues. This is also evident when one takes the SCAF’s crackdown on female activists in particular on and after International Women’s Day 2011, indicating a worry over the possible impact of these activists on society. Indeed, one of the keys to the relative success of the revolution was that women and men came together for a single greater cause without letting their intergroup differences affect the struggle for ‘bread, freedom, and dignity.’

Even more worrying, the widespread practices of both female genital mutilation and domestic abuse are severe hindrances to women’s empowerment in Egypt\textsuperscript{174} – especially considering that freedom from sexual oppression and governmental despotism are two sides of the same coin\textsuperscript{175} – and although significant efforts (in the cultural and traditional context of Egypt) have been made during the last three decades to come to terms with these issues, the political climate in Egypt after the revolution shows clear tendencies to revert the improvements on women’s rights that has been implemented. The Freedom and Justice Party (the Muslim Brotherhood’s political wing) together with Al-Nour Party (the Salafi Movement’s ditto) continued to work ferociously to revert the women’s rights that had been established during Mubarak’s rule. Although the Al-Nour Party is generally more ‘extreme’ than the Freedom and Justice Party, they tend to work towards the same goal when it comes to the role and rights of women.\textsuperscript{176} Amongst others, both groups lobbied for the abolishment of the divorce laws as well as the laws which, at least on paper, protests women from street- and sexual harassment. Moreover, they pushed to once again make it impermissible for women to travel without the consent or company of a wali (male guardian) and to legalise female genital mutilation.\textsuperscript{177}

This last point is particularly important since the Mubarak regime, with considerable help from the feminist movement, made significant progress towards ending this abhorrent practise – in the 1970’s, almost 100 percent of the girls were genitally mutilated, compared to 75 percent in the last years of Mubarak’s presidency.\textsuperscript{178} While the number remains shockingly high, a drop of 25 percentage points in less than forty years is still significant, especially when considering the socio-economic conditions in a country where ‘traditional’ values are still highly regarded and held on to. Female genital mutilation is a complex issue in the Egyptian society, and a practice with its roots in the times well before Islam was introduced in the country.\textsuperscript{179} In combination with extremely limited sexual education,\textsuperscript{180} this makes it understandable – albeit not acceptable – that the rural population in particular still adhere to the practice of female genital mutilation. Here, the government has an even bigger

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{175} Penny, Laurie (2013). "With Tasers and Placards, the Women of Egypt are Fighting Back Against Sexism” in \textit{New Statesman}, Feb. 15-21, 2013, 20, p. 20.
\textsuperscript{176} Tadros, Mariz (2014), p. 212.
\textsuperscript{177} Sika, Nadine and Khodary, Yasmin (2012), p. 98.
\textsuperscript{178} Sika, Nadine and Khodary, Yasmin (2012), p. 95.
\end{footnotesize}
responsibility to educate the population and push for an end to the practice, but as has been shown, leaders in Egypt has not been willing or able to step up to this challenge – instead, pushed for legalising genital mutilation. Moreover, both the FJP and the Al-Nour Party pushed to decrease the minimum age of marriage for girls from eighteen to fourteen,\textsuperscript{181} making the socio-political climate for women even more hostile. Furthermore, the Muslim Brotherhood issued a statement regarding the United Nation’s proposal from the Commission on the Status of Women, claiming that the proposal

\begin{quote}
gives girls sexual freedom […]; raises the age of marriage; calls for the provision of contraception for adolescent girls and their training on its use, besides legalizing abortion to get rid of unwanted pregnancies; calls for giving equal rights to both the wife and women who commit adultery, and gives their offspring equal rights (legal vs. illegal children); calls for giving homosexuals rights, protection and respect, and also the protection of women in prostitution; calls for giving the wife the right to take legal measures against her husband in the cases of marital rape, and the punishment would be similar to that given to a stranger who rapes or harasses any women; calls for equal inheritance […]; calls for equal rights in family laws […]; withdraws the husband’s authority of divorce and refers it to judiciary […]; denies the husband’s right in being consulted and asked for permission for: travel, leaving the house-going out, and using contraceptives.\textsuperscript{182}
\end{quote}

The issues outlined above are just a few of the concerns the women’s movement has had to face in the post-revolutionary Egypt, but describes some of the most poignant problems in the contemporary society – especially when looking at it from a radical feminist point of view. Female genital mutilation and sexual harassment/abuse forms the very foundation of the body politics that essentially prevents women from assuming control over their own bodies – and as an extension, their lives – and from entering the public sphere.

This clearly shows the intentions of the Muslim Brotherhood to all but revert the positive improvement of the last decades when it comes to female empowerment, and speaks loudly of the aim to relegate women to the ‘property’ of men. Although women’s rights were technically guaranteed in the draft constitution (article 33 stated that “citizens are equal before the law, with no distinction based on gender […]”), women were still met with extreme opposition from many members of parliament, resulting in an amendment of the draft, which


\textsuperscript{182} Morsy, Maya (2014), p. 220.
cut out the list of prohibited grounds of discrimination. The post-revolutionary constitution was suspended following the 2013 ousting of Mohammad Morsi, and it yet remains to be seen how the political climate of women will look in post-Mubarak and post-Morsi Egypt, under the rule of yet another military man, newly elected General Sisi. While this is an extremely important and interesting development for Egypt and the women’s rights in the country, it lies outside the scope of this thesis; further research is needed to fully comprehend the effect of the happenings since the resignation of Mohammad Morsi in July 2013 on the women’s movement.

6 Conclusion and thoughts about the future

The aim of this study has been to examine and explain the female participation in the 2011 revolution in Egypt. Moreover, the research has explicitly sought to analyse the means of mobilisation and strategies used by women during the revolution, as well as the reasons why they chose to participate in the protests. Furthermore, it has aimed to look at the contributions of women and the challenges and obstacles women met during the revolution and its aftermath. In the light of the analysis outlined above, it is easy to see that social media has had a huge impact on how the 2011 Egyptian revolution was formed and how it developed until the fall of Hosni Mubarak on February 11, 2011.

When it comes to the means of mobilisation and strategies used by women during the revolution, they benefited vastly from the wide spread use of social media. It is widely believed that Asmaa Mahfouz, one of the founders of the 6 April Movement, was one of the first Egyptians to voice her detestation towards the repressive regime of Mubarak, after having closely monitored the events unfolding in Tunisia. On January 18th, 2011, she used her video blog to call out to her peers to join her at Tahrir Square to demand social justice, an end to the economic corruption, and increased personal freedoms. The immense success of both the way social media was used in the Tunisian uprisings and the response Asmaa Mahfouz got from her video blog was reflected in the way other Egyptian activists – mainly youth and women – took to social media to promote and urge others to join the revolution. Slogans and mottos were created and easily shared via Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, and everything was easily accessible for the world to witness. A repressive regime which previously had counted on being able to hide its ‘ugly face’ from the world, was suddenly confronted with increased pressure from the world around it. The more the regime moved to silence the dissident voices on the Internet, the more ingenious ways to work around it were found by the Egyptians. Hence, social media played a huge role in the mobilisation of female activists during the 2011 revolution.

During the almost three decade long rule of Hosni Mubarak, women (and youth) had suffered disproportionately from the wide-spread economic corruption and the oppressive limitations to their personal freedom. In the socio-historical context, women were more often than not completely barred from participating in the public sphere. Women suffered from higher unemployment rates than men, even though they many times had better qualifications. Hence, women had many reasons to defy the cultural restrictions and join the protests, and very little to lose from it – they were already at the figurative rock bottom of political life in
Egypt. This serves to explain why women to such a large extent decided to join the protests during the 2011 revolution. Women contributed during the uprisings through both calling out to their formal and informal networks to bring family members, relatives, friends and co-workers to the scene of protests. The first women who joined the protests testified to the absence of sexual harassment and other forms of threatening male dominance, and thus incited more and more women to arrive at Tahrir Square. During the uprisings, women demanded to be seen as equal to men, and most scholars and Middle Eastern activists recognise the fact that had not the women participated to such a large extent, the revolution would probably not have been as successful as it was. Women took on themselves traditionally male roles, such as guards at the entrance to Tahrir Square, as well as traditionally female duties, such as providing the protesters with food, water and medical aid. They also took roles of public leadership, exemplified by Asmaa Mahfouz above.

Nonetheless, the thesis has shown that women encountered many challenges and obstacles during the revolution and its aftermath. Women were traditionally barred from participating in such political actions, and had to work extremely hard to justify their presence at Tahrir Square to some of the male protesters. Even though the Square itself was considered a safe space for women, with no single incident of sexual violence reported during the eighteen days of revolution, the armed forces and polices were not always as ‘lenient’ towards female protesters. Hence, women did not only have to fight against the ‘glass ceiling’ of fear and socio-traditional values working against them, they also had to struggle against the sexual violence of the very people who were supposed to protect them. In post-revolutionary Egypt, women also had to face the disappointment of yet again being barred from participating in the political life and from partaking in the monumental decisions that would dictate the future of the country, both figuratively and literally. After the fall of Mubarak, the presence and input of women were no longer wanted, especially not when drafting the new constitution. Moreover, the incidents of sexual violence all but rocketed after February 11th, showcased by the ‘girl in the blue bra’ who was stripped and beaten unconscious by military men in the aftermath of the revolution. The full extent of the anti-women climate became obvious on March 8th, 2011, when women who demonstrated to mark the International Women’s Day were met with extreme hostility and sexually motivated violence from hoards of men surrounding their demonstration. Despite having committed themselves to such a large extent to the revolutionary movement, women were told to wait when trying to push for increased women’s rights and gender equality. However, the female activists did not give up on their
dream – instead, they posed the question ‘if not now, when?’ and went on forming new alliances with first and foremost the youth movements. The success of this move was evident one year later, on International Women’s Day of 2012 – the women’s and youth movements demonstrated together, and women were protected by the men in the demonstrations.

The political climate in Egypt is rapidly changing, and as has been argued in the thesis, the revolution is still ongoing as the demands for ‘bread, freedom, and dignity’ have not yet been met. Not enough research has been done on the implications of the brief presidency of Mohammad Morsi for the women’s movements in Egypt, especially not in relation to the political unrest that his ousting resulted in and the subsequent elections in May, 2014. In addition to this, there is a wide research gap in relating women’s participation in both the revolution and post-revolutionary Egypt with sexual violence and the extremely intense understanding of masculinity in the cultural context of Egypt. This is beyond the scope of this thesis, but is an area that acutely needs to be researched, in order to shed more light on the implications of the female political participation in the socio-cultural context of manliness and ever-increasing sexual violence. In fact, Sherine Hafez argues that “masculinity built on hate and deprivation” is one of the most important factors when trying to understand the prevalence of sexual violence in all its forms in the post-Mubarak society.184 Furthermore, additional research on how the events during and after the 2011 revolution, coupled with the recent fall of Mohammad Morsi and the election of General Sisi as new president, affects the women’s movements ability to organise and mobilise themselves in the future.

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