



Cyber-space as a Space of Resistance:

Anti-Sexual Harassment Campaigns and Women's use of Social Media in Post-revolutionary Egypt

by

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Submitted to
Central European University
Department of Gender Studies

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Erasmus Mundus Master's in Women's and Gender Studies

Supervisor: Elissa Helms (Central European University)
Second Supervisor: Aurelia Martin-Casares (Universidad de Granada)

Budapest, Hungary
2015



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Budapest, Hungary
2015



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Education and Culture

Erasmus Mundus

Gemma

Erasmus Mundus Master's Degree
in Women's and Gender Studies

Abstracts

The Egyptian Revolution, described by western media as a 'Facebook Revolution', has been widely discussed and wrote about. At first it was perceived as something positive, Egyptian people all together asking for justice and freedom. The use of social media during the 2011 Revolution has been exaggerated and described in a utopian way. But then, when mob assaults and sexual aggressions started against women, discourses radically changed. The 'Facebook Revolution' was suddenly regarded as shameful and Egyptian men came to be seen as sexual predators. My aim is to show what has been silenced by both scholars and mainstream media regarding what happened as a consequence of those events and implying a different use of social media by Egyptians.

In the last semester of 2012, almost two years after the first protests, various initiatives were undertaken by young revolutionaries as a response to this mob assaults. Young activists started to launch new on-line campaigns denouncing violence against women in public spaces, with a focus on sexual harassment. By using social media in an original way, they helped women to break taboos and started to challenge gender roles and the place given to women in the society. By asking: How women and organizations use social media and cyber-activism in order to fight sexual harassment and also challenge gender norms and patriarchal discourses? I will argue that the use of social media in the new on-line campaigns gave new opportunities for women to challenge gender norms and criticize patriarchy and the state in

Egypt, without openly disrupting gender roles, even if it also put serious limits on how women can interfere in the public sphere and occupy public spaces.

Key Words: cyber-activism, social media, sexual harassment, Egypt

La revolución egipcia, descrita por los medios de comunicación occidentales como una 'Revolución de Facebook', ha sido ampliamente discutida y escrita sobre. Al inicio fue percibida como algo positivo, mostrando al pueblo egipcio unido, pidiendo la justicia y la libertad. El uso de los medios de comunicación social durante la revolución del 2011 fue exagerado y fue descrito de una manera utópica. Pero luego, cuando empezaron las agresiones sexuales contra las mujeres, los discursos cambiaron radicalmente. La 'Revolución de Facebook' fue considerada como una vergüenza y los hombres egipcios llegaron a ser vistos como depredadores sexuales. Por eso, mi objetivo es mostrar lo que ha sido silenciado tanto los académicos y como por los medios de comunicación con respecto a lo que sucedió como consecuencia de esos eventos, lo cual implica un uso diferente de las redes sociales.

En el último semestre de 2012, casi dos años después de las primeras protestas, se llevaron a cabo diversas iniciativas de jóvenes revolucionarios/as como una respuesta a estos numerosos asaltos. Jóvenes activistas comenzaron a lanzar nuevas campañas en internet para denunciar la violencia contra las mujeres en los espacios públicos con un enfoque en el acoso sexual. Mediante el uso de las redes sociales de manera original, ayudaron a las mujeres a romper tabúes y comenzaron a desafiar el papel de

género y el lugar dado a las mujeres en la sociedad. Al tratar de responder al cuestionamiento de: ¿Cómo las mujeres y las organizaciones utilizan los medios sociales y el ciber-activismo para luchar contra el acoso sexual y también desafiar las normas de género y los discursos patriarcales? Voy a argumentar que el uso de los medios sociales en las nuevas campañas ha creado nuevas oportunidades para las mujeres y para desafiar las normas de género y criticar el patriarcado en Egipto sin interrumpir abiertamente los papeles de género, aunque también ha impuesto serios límites sobre cómo pueden interferir en la esfera pública y ocupar los espacios públicos.

Palabras Claves: ciber-activismo, medios sociales, acoso sexual, Egipto

Acknowledgments

For my mother, who suffered unjustifiable violence as a child, and whose story is the main reason I choose to do Gender studies

I would like to thank my supervisor Elissa Helms, for relentlessly correcting all my grammatical mistakes and for not getting crazy each time I wrote “the cyber-space” instead of “cyber-space” (I made this mistake at least twenty times). I admire your patience and kindness.

I thank also my husband, Ahmed, for his support and precious help when I was lost in translation between Arabic and English. My sister-in-law, Laila, for leading through the mess and the horrible traffic jam of Cairo. My friend Elodie, who hosted me, and importantly, took care of me in this horrible moment when I broke my ligament in Cairo and couldn't walk anymore, and accepted that I did some interviews at her place. My grandma, Chantal, for her endless support and optimism. And my Dad, Marcou, for all the love he gave me.

Many thanks to my CEU and GEMMA friends for their supports and shared laughs in those moments where we were stressed out by the thesis: Sampreety, Margarita, Iva and Samin. Special thank to Adriana, who taught me how to use Zotero. It was not an easy task.

And finally, I would like to thank all interviewees, women and activists, without whom, I would not be able to write this thesis.

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1. Introductory Chapter:

1.1 Introduction:

The first time I went to Egypt was in September 2011. I went there to complete and finish my Bachelor degree in Arabic literature and language. As a woman, harassment was part of my daily life and the lives of all my female friends too (foreigners or Egyptians) during two years. I have been harassed by old and young, police officers, even soldiers. I had to change my number two times because of people harassing me on the phone. It is hard to imagine the scale of harassment in Egypt and how it can affect your life if you did not experience it yourself. It is always and can happen everywhere: looks, speech, naughty insults and sometimes touching, stalking and grouping. But it does not mean that every Egyptian man harasses women.

Surely there is a difference between how European/white women experience harassment compared to Egyptian women. Clearly if you are a European, and because of the common belief that European women are “free” and “easy to get”, harassment has a strong explicit sexual character, men directly asking you to have sex with them sometimes. At first I thought this was the common story for every woman, but slowly I started to understand that things were much more different for Egyptian women. The experience of harassment is not the same if you grew up in the middle of it your entire life than if you just live it for some time. Because of notions of honor, reputation, and morality, it is much harder for Egyptian women to cope with sexual harassment in general due to strong social pressures. For a long time, sexual harassment was a taboo and women kept silent about it. Being victim of sexual

harassment meant that you were a loose girl, and women were (and still are) the first to be blamed.

And then, in the aftermath of the Revolution, it suddenly became a public issue openly discussed. Many activist groups started to appear in order to fight sexual assaults happening during protests. NGOs rose against this issue as well as the issue of sexual harassment.¹ Official media started to name and speak about the issue. It became somehow a national scandal. I remember in the last semester 2012 when I first discovered Shoft Ta7rosh-I Saw Harassment on Facebook. I felt that at least something was now being done against sexual harassment. Since that date, I kept following at them on Facebook regularly. Since the end of 2012, the scale and actions of all the groups, NGOs, and feminist organizations has not stopped growing.

The case of Egypt is interesting to look at because of the way new technologies and social media are being used in the fight against sexual harassment. Social media gave new insight for NGOs providing an original way to speak about harassment, allowing direct dialogues between them and women; while also resisting the successive political regimes we witnessed in Egypt in the last four years by challenging national and religious norms regarding women and the place given to them in the society and the public sphere. In a sense, all those “on-line” anti-harassment campaigns represent a small female revolution in itself, taking place first and foremost within cyber-space. In this thesis, I aim to analyze the actions and cyber-campaigns made by some of these groups and NGOs.

¹ NGO will simply be understood as any non-profit non-governmental organization based on volunteering. In this thesis, the NGOs looked at (HarassMap and Shoft Ta7rosh) focus on sexual harassment in the Egyptian society.

The main question of this thesis is how women and organizations use social media and cyber-activism in order to fight sexual harassment and also challenge gender norms and patriarchal discourses. More specifically, I ask:

- What are the new opportunities given to activists fighting sexual harassment through cyber-activism and to which extent do these help them to interfere in the public sphere?
- How has Facebook-based activism helped women to break taboos regarding sexual harassment?
- How are new types of discourses on the topic of sexual harassment created and constructed in cyber-space?
- What are the limits of cyber-activism and to which extent can it influence politics and reassert women's bodies as belonging to the nation?

While answering these questions, I will argue that the use of social media in the new on-line campaigns against sexual harassment gave new opportunities for women to challenge gender norms and criticize patriarchy in Egypt without disrupting openly gender roles. However, it also put serious limits on how women and activists can interfere in the public sphere and occupy public spaces. The next section of this chapter will be a summary of all the chapters of my thesis made to prove my argument.

1.2. Thesis Structure:

The next chapter will be the theoretical part. Three different types of literatures and theories will be analyzed: gender, nation and the public sphere,

sexual harassment, and the use of social media in cyber-activism and cyber-feminism. These different corpus of literature will help me to define the concepts I will use and also situate my thesis in relation to previous work done by scholars on the same topics I just mentioned.

The goal of chapter 3 is to contextualize sexual harassment in Egypt and understand its prevalence and highlight some challenges we face when we look at the issue nowadays. I will argue that, paradoxically, some of the factors that led to the Uprising are the same claimed to be the reasons for harassment and show that these new campaigns are a direct response to those mob attacks targeting women during protests.

Chapter 4 will be an emphasis and analysis of the new forms of activism the anti-harassment organizations uses in Egypt. In it, I will highlight the reasons for their “success” while also highlighting the opportunities it gives to women to speak and share their experiences in cyber-space. I will argue that on-line campaigns present a safer way for women to discuss and write about sexual harassment, without being afraid of being seen as violating social norms and or of inciting public scandals.

Chapter 5 will look specifically at actions undertaken by activists in order to foster women’s influence and participation in the public sphere. The notion of cyber-space, a space in-between public and private, will be deepened to show how it permits women to learn about some gender issues from their computer, and to which extent it truly allow women and activists to interfere into the public sphere. By showing that, I will argue that cyber-space is blurring the

boundaries between the public and private sphere but that interference within physical public spaces remains limited.

The last chapter will show the paradoxes of cyber-space and those new-campaigns. My goal here will be to show that cyber-space is far from being neutral, but that it is deeply gendered. I will argue that cyber-space, even if safer for women to criticize the state and patriarchy, has many limitations that can affect women negatively in some cases.

1.3. Methodology:

This study is based both on on-line research and fieldwork with interview. Because this thesis focuses on cyber-space and social media, and mainly the use of Facebook by some groups and NGOs to fight sexual harassment, most contact were initiated through Facebook by private messages. It was easy to contact members of a group or NGO as I just had to send a message on their Facebook page. However, to contact and find female respondents was a bit more difficult. I needed to be sure the women were using Facebook and looking at the campaigns. I searched for women following Shoft-Ta7rosh and/or HarassMap and/or Tahrir Bodyguard, I had to look on their Facebook pages, get the names, and then I sent messages to the women. Many of them responded, some not. Some were eager to give an interview but many refused due to the fear to openly speak about the issue, but also because sometimes they just did not want to or did not feel they were the right person to be interviewed. They usually told me that “they didn’t know much on the topic”. Whatever the reasons were, I could not convince them to speak. As

sexual harassment is still a bit of a taboo in Egypt, some women also responded to my emails and messages, thanking me for being interested in the topic but when I asked them if they wanted to do an interview, they didn't answer back. Some, however, while they refused a face to face interview, were sending me various links of Facebook pages, news articles or other data to help me in my research. I also had many discussions on sexual harassment with Egyptians friends in and out of Egypt. However, I decided not to interview them, even if they were willing to, as the knowledge of my thesis topic and some of the results might have influenced their answers.

All this resulted in 15 interviews (4 men and 11 women), aged between 19 and 46 years old, even if I was in contact with many more people. The shortest interview on record was 20 minutes (it was a self-defense teacher who did the interview in between two classes), and the longest 1 hour and 33 minutes. However, the duration might be misleading as in some cases the discussion kept going much longer off the record. It happened once that one interviewee asked me to turn off the voice recorder for personal reasons. I respected his choice, and decided not to speak about what he told me off-record.

All respondents without exception are part of the middle-class, and all of them live in Cairo or in some compounds next to Cairo.² All of them except two were regularly taking part in the various protests happening in Egypt since 2011. Of the 15 persons interviewed, 8 are activists (the 4 men, and 4 of the

² Middle-Class is a contested category. People interviewed identify with the middle-class in the sense that they have a good level of education (university degree), live in good areas of Cairo and are from family living without financial difficulties. They usually oppose themselves from people from "popular" area (understand here as underprivileged areas) and the countryside whom they describe as lacking education.

women). All of the respondents are active computer users, be they activists or just followers of the on-line campaigns.

While listening to the interviews again back in Hungary, I was surprised to hear so much laughter. Egyptians have a real sense of humor and are able to keep laughing even in the worst situations. With women, interviews were more delicate at first as they actually live this issue daily, and it was then no surprise that it was harder for them to speak than male activists. However, all of them started to be more confident and started to speak and relaxed more after 10 or 15 minutes. I felt incredible support coming from them and sharing my experience of harassment was a plus, pushing them to speak and share more about their experience with me. I also actually felt that for the first time I could speak about some events freely and without shame. There were also feelings of anger and frustration appearing in the interviews of both men and women due to the feeling of helplessness and also due to the present situation in Egypt where the dreams and hopes of the Revolution have vanished. For some women, I felt it was a relief for them to speak. Some of them, one especially, were like a bomb, exploding after so many years of silence and frustration. It was a really nice and unique experience to see women like that, full of anger and disappointment but still laughing and making jokes.

Apart from interviews, Facebook pages of Shoft Ta7rosh (I saw Harassment), HarassMap, Tahrir Bodyguard, La lel-ta7rosh (No to Harassment) and many others were regularly looked at to see the content and pictures shared on-line by activists. I also read many different newspapers articles written on the subject. I have been interested and looking at the

evolution of the anti-sexual harassment campaigns since its beginning in Egypt. The result is that after two years of regular research for my thesis plus nearly two months in Egypt of active fieldwork and interviews, I ended up with an incredible amount of varied data. I then had to choose from all these materials in order to write something coherent and precise.

On Facebook only, there are now countless pages focusing on the issue of sexual harassment. The same is true of YouTube, Twitter, Vimeo, and similar sites. I had to decide which organizations, groups, Facebook pages, videos etc, I will speak about. The first decision I made was to focus mainly on the use of Facebook, because all female respondents had a Facebook account but not all of them had a Twitter account. Also, according to many of them this is most widely used platform in Egypt nowadays. To focus on Facebook-based activism was then the logical result of my research. Nevertheless, I also chose to use YouTube in some cases, first because YouTube videos can be shared through Facebook, and secondly because it is a big tool used by activists to show their work and actions in the public sphere to followers and “passerby” in the cyber-sphere.

The second decision was made in regard to the organizations I will focus on. I decided to focus mainly on two of them: Shoft Ta7rosh and Tahrir Bodyguard. Shoft Ta7rosh and HarassMap are similar as their main focus is to break taboos and report cases of harassment. But because I have been following Shoft Ta7rosh on-line since its beginning and witnessed all its on-line evolution, I decided to focus a lot on this organization and less on HarassMap. Part of this decision was due to the fact Shoft Ta7rosh was created in October 2012 as a direct consequence of the Revolution, and

created by young revolutionaries with no training and until recently no funding. On the contrary, HarassMap is a well funded and international organization with more means and facility to act and campaign, and existed before the Revolution. As a result, HarassMap do not face the same difficulties than Shoft Ta7rosh, and the situation of Shoft Ta7rosh is then much more relevant for my thesis. I also had the chance to meet some activists of Shoft Ta7rosh that actually spent a whole afternoon with me, showing me how they use Facebook and Twitter, how and why they share this or that kind of support on-line, how they organize themselves in and with social networks etc. Janit (one of the founder of Shoft Ta7rosh) also spend few hours with me showing me some of the messages she receives every day, how she answers, what does she have to do etc. The activists also shared with me some unpublished data and statistics. I will never be thankful enough to them, as they let me enter their world with absolute trust and let me have sufficient knowledge to write, I hope relevantly, on their work and organization which.

The activities of Tahrir Bodyguard are different. It was created in November 2012, and its first goal was for the members to patrol the streets during protests and save women from sexual assaults and mob harassment. It was not the only group patrolling Cairo's streets. OP-Anti-SH (Operation Anti-Sexual Harassment) was also created in the last semester of 2012 and aimed at saving women from attacks. Tahrir Bodyguard, has recently been outlawed by the government. Their case is thus interesting to look at to understand what kinds of difficulties are faced by activists and to what extent they can interfere in the public sphere. I met an activist from each organizations but

ended up with more knowledge on Tahrir Bodyguard (history, creation and actions), thus my choice to focus on them and not OP-Anti-SH.

While the discussion in this thesis will revolve around the actions of those two organizations, others will be mentioned because of their relevance and the interest they bring to the topic as a whole.

2. Theoretical Framework

In this chapter I wish to highlight and explain some concepts and theories that are crucial to understand and situate my thesis. By doing so, I will also analyze previous literature on different relevant topics to align my thesis within the work of other scholars. In that sense, three corpuses of theories will be analyzed in this chapter: literature on gender, nation and the public sphere; literature on sexual harassment; and lastly literature on cyber-activism, cyber-feminism and social media.

2.1. Gender, Nation and the Public Sphere:

Before going to one of the main concept of my study, the public sphere, it is important to analyze quickly some theories in relation to gender and nation. How we imagine and conceptualize nation and gender have direct consequences for the way we create the notion of the public sphere and women's exclusion from it.

The place given to women's bodies in nation-states is full of paradoxes. Many scholars have written on the exclusion of women as political agents from the nation; while in the same time, their bodies and sexuality remained essential to nationalistic ideologies. Women have a symbolic role in the nation-state in relation to family and male honor (McClintock 1993, 62-63; Nagel 1998, 244). This symbolic (and limited) role given to women in nationalist construction is primarily the one of mothers, producers of citizens.

Vena Das (1995, 212) argues that because of all codes of conducts and honor attached to women's bodies it "became the sign through which men

communicated with each other” (1995, 212). Basing my analysis on Das’ theory (1995), I will show that a similar fact can be seen through the attacks targeting women during protests, where the army, by shaming women was trying to delegitimize the Revolution by showing the immorality of protesters. Later, when mob assaults and gang rapes continued, they were also aimed at excluding women from the Revolution and the democratic process that should have followed (Hafez 2014; Moghadam 2014; Morsy 2014). Attacks were legitimized by the fact women crossed the barriers assigned to their gender by interfering in the public sphere (Hafez 2014, 173), and this was meant to put them back in their place (the private sphere). Similarly, the same excuse of women crossing gender roles by going in public spaces has been given many times for sexual harassment in Egypt or elsewhere.

In the next section, I will look into some foundational feminist rethinking of the notion of the public sphere before I analyze the role this concept plays in the defining of sexual harassment. The first scholar who historicized and contextualized the concept of public sphere was Habermas (1991). With his concept of the “Bourgeois public sphere”, Habermas states that the public is “a sphere of private people come together as a public” (in Susen 2011, 43).

The work of Habermas has ‘inspired’ many feminist scholars who have written about the notion of the separate spheres, showing that indeed, the public and private are contested and gendered categories. The aim of their work was to criticize the dichotomy of the public and private categories and what was taken for granted (Gal 2002, 78). In that sense, Pateman (1989) states that the public and private distinction is made to serve patriarchal purposes. The work of Susan Gal (2002) is particularly relevant as she

shows that the public and private categories are overlapping, unfixed and working through and with each other. She thus shows that the public and private categories are “ubiquitous feature of everyday life” (2002, 78). Quite similarly Susen states that:

The public sphere and the private sphere can be considered mutually inclusive, rather than mutually exclusive, social realms. Indeed, the public and the private seem to represent two necessary conditions of the social: to the extent that every private person is represented by the foreground performativity of a public persona, very public persona is embedded in the background subjectivity of a private person (2011, 43).

Going back to Habermas’s theory (1991), the concept of the “bourgeois public sphere” is essential to understand some challenges we face when applying this concept to the Egyptian society. First of all, the public and private distinction is a bourgeois ideology that might reveals itself to be irrelevant when looking at the experience of working-class women or women of color in the public sphere (Bargetz 2009). Going further, Davidoff (2003) states that the public/private distinction is a western concept, a “Western cultural division” (in Landes 2003, 32); we thus have to be very careful when using those concepts in non-western countries. Following Davidoff’s theory (2003), Kadivar writes that:

What demarcates the Public from the Private undoubtedly depends on a complex set of cultural, political and economic factors, and as a result of the interaction between such factors the line of demarcation inevitably has had to shift. From among the cultural factors, religion stands out as one of the most decisive components in delimiting the two spheres (2003, 659)

According to Kadivar (2003, 660), the terms private and public do not exist in the Koran, neither in the Islamic doctrine. However, this does not mean that

the idea of separate spheres is not present in Muslim societies. Similarly Göle writes that:

the idea of the public is Western” but nevertheless it “circulates and moves into contexts other than the West. The way in which these concepts, ideas and institutions travel and are adopted in non-Western context depend on local agencies and cultural fields (2002: 174).

In the Islamic doctrine, men are considered responsible for earning the livelihood of the family, while women are considered responsible of the house (Orakzai 2014, 49). Then, the confinement of women in the domestic sphere is also present in Muslim ideologies. Orakzai also writes that “[t]he division of the sphere not only stereotypes the role of women but also puts barriers and limits their ability in the society to perform as human beings” (2014, 43). While there is nothing in Islam that clearly prevents women’s access to the public sphere, the “natural” role given to them, as mothers and/or wives, combined with cultural practices is used in Muslim societies as a way to exclude them from the public sphere, and also imposes on them codes of conduct in relation to male honor.

Regarding women’s presence in the public sphere and codes of conduct in Muslim societies, the veil has been subject to numerous debates. Often described as oppressive by western feminist scholars (Ahmed 1992; Abu-Lughod 2002, 784), it has also been described as a compromise for women to go in public “while still observing the basic moral requirements of separating and protecting women from unrelated men” (Abu-Lughod 2002, 785). While I can agree that the veil symbolizes modesty, I do not agree with Abu-Lughod (2002, 785) stating that the veil can prevent women from being harassed. Women’s appearance in public was often used to justify sexual harassment in

public spaces, but my findings show that veiled women are harassed as much as unveiled women, hence my choice not to deepen this topic.

Göle's theory (2002), based on Castoriadis' theory (1987), gives an interesting insight on how to use and apply the concepts of public and private sphere in modern Muslim societies. She states that the public sphere is an ideology, a "social imaginary" (2002, 176) and explains that "an analysis of the public sphere as a social imaginary can illustrate the circulation of a universal code of modernity as well as the particular significations and practices" (2002, 176). Later she states that:

Social imaginaries are embedded in the habitus of a population or carried in implicit understandings that underlie and make possible common practices (...). As a social imaginary, the public sphere works in a social field and penetrates and blends into cultural significations" (2002, 176).

The public sphere, being a set of cultural beliefs and practices thus becomes "a stage of performance" (Göle 2002, 177). In this thesis, I will base my analysis on Göle's theory of the public sphere as a social imaginary and construction. That is to say, even if the public sphere is a political category, I will consider that first and foremost it is created and maintained by all citizens of a society regardless of their gender, specific to each society and/or nation in which factors such as religious and/or cultural beliefs play a role in what is considered public or not. As a result, I will align my study with Gale's theory (2011) by stating that the category of the public sphere is never fixed and stable, but changing over time and space.

Then, the term 'public sphere' in my thesis, will refer to an ideology that aimed at confining women in the private sphere. Similarly, the private sphere

will be also considered as an ideology/social imaginary based on religious beliefs and cultural practices. It will be symbolized by the house and the family, in which women are confined in order to maintain a patriarchal control over them through familial duties. To refer to women's physical presence in the streets, or public transports, I will use the term 'public spaces'.

2.2. Sexual Harassment:

Sexual harassment as a way to control women's bodies while outside of the private sphere has been discussed widely by feminists (Bowman 1993; Crenshaw 1991-1992; Crouch 2009; Kissling 1991; Rotundo et al. 2001; Walkowitz 1998). The Lewisham's website, based on the VAWG definition defines sexual harassment as an:

Unwanted verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature. It can take place anywhere, including the workplace, schools, streets, public transport and social situations. It includes flashing, obscene and threatening calls, and online harassment.

Sexual harassment has many forms (physical, verbal or not) and occurs in many places (public spaces, work place, on the phone etc), therefore it is hard to define which precise behaviors constitute harassment (Rotundo et al. 2011, 914). Adding to this difficulty is that "men and women differ in their judgments about what constitutes sexual harassment" (Rotundo et al. 2001, 914). This difference of perception is important to take into account, especially in the Egyptian context, as it shows that men sometimes are not aware that they are harassing women as they do not perceive some behaviors as harassing. I will also add that the perception of sexual harassment also differs from one cultural context to another.

In this thesis, I will mainly focus on sexual harassment occurring in public spaces in Egypt, that is to say, what Cynthia Bowman (1993) describes as 'street harassment'. Bowman writes that street harassment has:

some defining characteristics: (1) the targets of the street harassment are female; (2) the harassers are male; (3) the harassers are unacquainted with their targets; (4) the encounter is face to face; (5) the forum is a public one (...) to which the public generally has access; but (6) the content of the speech, if any, is not intended as public discourse (1993, 523-524).

In a similar way, Eve Aronson (2015) describes street harassment as "a normalized and gendered heterosexist practice, where men harass individuals they perceive as women" (2015, 1). However, this definition is not enough when we want to analyze sexual harassment in Egypt as it does not take into account the notion of class and the consequences it has on mainstream discourses.³ When it comes to Egypt, sexual harassment has often been wrongly framed (by NGOs and media) as an issue related to "boys radiating explosive indiscipline" (Amar 2011, 315) thus misrepresenting the reality and extent of sexual/street harassment in Egypt (more will be said on this particular issue in chapter 3).

Sexual harassment in Egypt has been analyzed by some feminists and/or organizations long before the Revolution (Ebaid 2008; Ilahi 2009, Zayed 2010, Amar 2011; FIDH 2014; McRobie 2014). While there exist broad literature on the topic of sexual harassment in Egypt, it is surprising that nothing has been written on the recent campaigns launched by young revolutionaries who aim to fight sexual harassment. While many feminist organizations have long been working on this issue, these new groups and campaigns gained much more

³ Both definitions also do not take in consideration that men can also be harassed in public spaces. On this precise topic, and with regards to the Egyptian context, more will be said in chapter 6.

support and respect than feminist organizations in only three years. Why? While trying to answer this question, I will focus on these young activists' efforts and analyze the strategies they have developed to encourage women to speak and help them, but I will also examine to which extent they are successful in their work.

2.3. Cyber-activism, Cyber-feminism and Social Media

2.3.1. Cyber-Space

Before defining the meanings of the cyberspace/cyber-activism/cyber-feminism, it is worth looking at the prefix 'cyber'. According to the Oxford Learner's Dictionary, 'cyber' is everything "related to electronic communication networks and virtual reality."

Following the previous definition, anything derived from cyber, implies an idea of something non-physical. In this thesis, I will base my analysis on this Oxford definition. Anything derives from this prefix 'cyber' will define something that is virtual and not physical, taking place within the internet realm. However more needs to be said on some concepts: cyber-space, cyber-activism and cyber-feminism. All three terms are hard to define because they challenge traditional dichotomies we have on many things.

In her essay *A Cyborg Manifesto*, Donna Haraway (1991), discussing the relationship between gender and technology, invents a cyborg capable of transcending the public and private sphere. The same can be said of cyber-space. Cyber-space, while being virtual and non-physical, is both private and public. Since recently, and the rise in the use of social media and social

networking sites such as YouTube, Facebook, Twitter etc. this blurring of boundaries have been exacerbated even more (Barnes 2006; West et al. 2009).

There are numerous debates whether to consider the internet as part of the public sphere or no (McCaughey and Ayers 2003). My aim is not to take part in those debates. Strategically, I will consider cyber-space as both private and public, depending on the use made by internet users themselves. Not to situate cyber-space in any clear category will help me to challenge and criticize previous literature surrounding cyber-activism and cyber-feminism, especially written on the Arab world and in the aftermath of the Arab Spring, by showing that exactly this 'in-betweenness', the fact that cyber-space is public and private in the same time, allowed Egyptian women to break taboos and to start criticizing and challenging gender norms and patriarchy.

2.3.2. Cyber-activism vs. cyber-feminism

Exactly as cyber-space, if we take cyber-activism (also known as on-line activism), we have to ask until which point it is a virtual fight and from which point it becomes actions and/or protests taking place in the physical world/reality. Cyber-activism is intrinsically linked with off-line activism, but according to Newsom and Lengel:

Online activism, while often tied to off-line activist organizations and efforts, differs from conventional activism in several key ways. Online activism affords opportunities for issue-focused efforts that allow activists to identify with and support specific efforts, for promotion of goals and activities that can reach further and more quickly than is the case with traditional activism, potentially reaching beyond its contained status. In addition, online activism

occurs in a liminal “third-space”, a place where traditional rules governing society can be set aside (2012, 32).

The term cyber-feminism was first coined by Nancy Paterson in 1992, and it has been widely discussed by feminists and scholars. In her essay *Cyberfeminism* (1999), Paterson calls for the appropriation of new technologies by women in order to empower them and counter their exclusion from cyber-space and new technologies. Showing the difficulty to define cyber-feminism, Paasonen writes that:

Ever since the term was coined in the early 1990s, it has been subject to multiple and often contradictory definitions and appropriations. To the degree that cyber-feminism has been identified with diversity, playfulness and the impossibility of exact definition, it has always lacked a clear point of reference (Paasonen 2011, 336).

However, she also states that “Generally speaking, cyberfeminism signifies feminist appropriation of information and computer technology (ICT) on a both practical and theoretical level” (Paasonen 2011, 335).

Cyber-feminism can also be described as (or as a part of) campaigning for women’s right and gender-equality related matters, situated within the cyber-space. In my thesis, I situate cyber-feminism as a part of the different kinds of cyber-activisms that emerged as a result of the Revolution in Egypt. I made this choice (differentiating but nevertheless bringing the two terms together) as a result of my research, in which respondents do not consider themselves feminists but still support some mainstream feminist ideals and have some patterns in common with cyber-feminism in the way and purposes for which they use internet and mainly social media.

The use of social media has changed the world in many ways. According to Lewis et al. (2014, 1), “on a societal level, social media create unprecedented opportunities for information flow”. The rise of social media sites (especially Facebook, Twitter and YouTube) also had huge consequences on cyber-activism and cyber-feminism, it introduced speed and interactivity and reduced time responses between activists (Eltantawi and Wiest 2011, 1215). Social media sites have been important tools for marketing a cause (Lewis et al. 2014, 7).

2.3.3. Previous Studies on Women Cyber-activism and Women’s Bodies in the Arab Spring:

Many have written on the participation of women in Revolutions and their political exclusion from the democratic processes coming after, in order to maintain patriarchy (Dunayeskaya 1985; Jayawardena 1986). During the Arab spring, the political exclusion of women in countries like Tunisia and Egypt was not an exception. Many studies have been made on Egypt and/or the Arab Spring, concerning the various attacks targeting women’s protestors in order to control women’s bodies (Hafez 2014; Johansson-Noguès 2013; Khalil 2014; Moghadam 2014; Morsy 2014; Tadros 2013; Sika & Khodary 2012; Sorbera 2014; Winegar 2012).

Regarding the Egyptian context, scholars have focus always on the same cases (essentially Samira Ibrahim and the woman in the blue bra)⁴ and

⁴ Samira Ibrahim is one of the female protestors arrested in January 2011 and undergone virginity tests led by the army. After that she went to the court and pursued the officer that led those tests.

mainstream events. My aim is to highlight some aspects that have been completely ignored by mainstream media and scholars, by showing which strategies have been created by some activists to rescue women from mob assaults.

In relation to the same topic, many have written on the use of the internet and social media by Arab women during the Arab Spring (Eltantawy and Wiest 2011; Khamis and Vaugh 2011; Newsom & Lengel 2012; Middleton-Detzner et al. 2011; Salime 2012; Stephan 2013; Radsch 2012; Zlitni and Touati 2012). The main aim of this literature review was to show that women were engaging in the struggles and used social media and ICTs as citizen journalism and in order to promote their rights. In that sense, Zlitni and Touati (2012) show how Tunisian women used successfully social media in order to contest the new Constitution written by Islamists political parties who wanted to suppress the term 'equality' and replace it by 'complementary with men'. Similarly, Stephan (2013) shows that cyber-feminists in the Arab world use the internet "as a way to further their exclusion from the physical world" and redefine patriarchal gender roles (2013, 2). Courtney C. Radsch states that cyber-activism allows activists to "tore down physical and social barriers between men and women," challenge religious norms and also attempt to reconfigure the public sphere (2012, 4) within the cyber-sphere. All of those studies are very helpful to understand the dynamics at play when looking at gender and cyber-activism/feminism during the Arab-spring. Nevertheless, studies are only contextualized within a revolutionary process. They also does not give any account of women, who are not activists, but are still using the

The "woman in the blue bra" is the surname given to a woman (her name remained anonymous) who has been severely beaten and stripped from her clothes during one protest in December 2011.

internet in order to participate and/or support gendered struggles launched by activists as a result of all events happening because of the Revolution (in this thesis sexual harassment). My aim is to go beyond those studies and show another aspect that has been ignored by many, regarding the use of social media in Egypt. By analyzing the Egyptian case, I wish to show that the use of social media also gave some opportunities to non-activists women or women who did not take part in the protests.

3. The Epidemic

Before starting my analysis, it is necessary to situate and contextualize the issue of sexual harassment in Egypt. This chapter aims at underlining key points and challenges encountered when approaching the issue of sexual harassment in Egypt. It aims also to give some reflections and possible reasons for its high prevalence in the Egyptian society. By analyzing some key aspects of sexual harassment in the Egyptian context, I will show that, strangely enough, the same explanations given as an “excuse” for the high presence of sexual harassment in Egypt, are the same reasons that brought the 2011 Revolution in the first place. The result is that women and their bodies, their very presence in public spaces and protests were always excluded and controlled by men.

3.1. Respondents Experience of Sexual Harassment:

All women interviewed said that they are victim of sexual harassment on a daily basis. On the 11 women interviewed, two of them were once assaulted by male mob (one during one of the protest in Tahrir Square, and the other while walking in a popular area of Cairo). The one attacked in Tahrir Square also witnessed once a taxi driver masturbating himself while she was in the car. Another one was kidnapped by a taxi driver once while going to a wedding; he led the car in a remote area outside of Cairo, locked the doors and started masturbating himself. Fortunately, all of those stories ended up well. The only mother I interviewed admitted that she was regularly harassed in front of her kids in the streets. All interviewees told me that gazes, murmurs

and insults were happening daily to them. The only two respondents who said that they were not suffering too much of harassment compared to most of women were the ones who possess a car, thus spending a lot of time driving when they are outside and not walking or taking public transports as much as the others. However, both of them admitted that even while they were driving in their car they were sometimes harassed, insulted, looked at etc. Having a car, gave them a feeling of safety and protection, that the others did not have when going outside, and so this idea that there were less harassed than other women in general.

As shown by all of these examples, the experience of sexual harassment is wide and very personal. When asked to give their own definition of sexual harassment, the answer clearly depended of the personal experience of the respondent. While sexual harassment is a shared experience by all female interviewed, the perception of it, when it starts and when it stops to be sexual harassment is clearly personal.

The only common pattern that appeared in the interviewed was the effect on sexual harassment on women's lives. All of them, veiled or unveiled, were really careful when choosing their clothes (not too tight, not too short, not too colorful etc...). They were also very careful not to come back home late, and were avoiding too crowded or popular area. However, as much as sexual harassment was affecting their lives, it never stopped them for going out.⁵

⁵ It is important not to victimize too much at those women and/or diabolize Egyptian men like what has been done by western media. Both Chandra Mohanty (1991) and Abu-Lughod (2002) warn us about the generalization and victimization of women in the Third-World which deprive women from their agencies. In Egypt, women always used to respond to sexual harassment, but until recently there were isolated actions. The campaigns helped in creating

The recent campaigns seem to have some positive effects in their lives as all of them started to be more aware of their rights. Most of them stated that now they will not hesitate to walk in the street and cross a group of young men as it is their right to walk freely in the streets, and/or answer them back if harassed. Similarly, many of them also stated that now they could go to a police station and file a case if it was necessary while before they would never do it.

3.2. Naming Sexual Harassment:

I often heard friends or commentators on Egyptian TV saying that harassment took huge proportions after the Revolution and it has often been compared to an “epidemic” by western and Egyptian media. Somehow people really believe that now it is much worse than before and that it is now out of control. All people I interviewed assured me that sexual violence and sexual harassment were much higher during and in the aftermath of the Revolution. While activists told me they did not believe that there was less harassment in the streets, all respondents (activists and non-activists) agreed on the fact that severe forms of sexual violence in the public sphere (e.g. mob assaults, sexual aggressions, rapes etc...) were globally on the rise. It is essential to question ourselves about the validity of this statement too often heard in Egypt. Is harassment more prevalent in the streets or do we just speak more about it? It is clear that the number of cases reported has dramatically increased in the last four years. Why? Is there truly more harassers or it is just

a sense of collective actions and made visible some of the strategies employed by women to deal with sexual harassment.

more girls and women not afraid anymore to go to the police and file a complaint?

Whatever Egyptian people feel or think nowadays, sexual harassment is not new. Nadia Ilahi (2009) and Paul Amar (2011) already wrote about the prevalence of sexual harassment in the Egyptian society before the 2011 Revolution. In both study, they relate about cases of mob sexual assaults against women taking place in front of a cinema in the city center of Cairo where a famous Egyptian belly dancer was thought to have been there (Ilahi 2009, 59; Amar 2011, 314). This example is really important as it shows that even mob sexual assaults and cases of harassment were present before the Revolution. It is noteworthy to say, that during the years 2011 and 2014, there was indeed a rise in violence targeting specifically at women protesters due to political instability.

In relation to what I previously stated the Egyptian Center for Women's Rights (ECWR) started writing reports on sexual and street harassment in Egypt since 2005.⁶ Then, there is nothing new happening in Egypt. What is new, however, are all the actions, campaigns and speeches surrounding this issue. Before, cases like the one described by Ilahi (2009, 59) were silenced by government and not taken seriously by official media (Ilahi 2009). I consider that what makes it appear as an "epidemic" is the fact that now people speak more and more about it whereas before it was a taboo. Before the revolution, NGO such as Shoft Ta7rosh and action groups such as OP-Anti-SH did not exist. HarassMap did exist but was unknown. Nowadays HarassMap and Shoft Ta7rosh are leaders in the fight against sexual

⁶ A copy of each report can be found on this link : <http://ecwronline.org/?cat=348>

harassment; mainly thanks to the use of social media networks, interactive maps, collective actions and mobilization. Raising awareness on the issue and campaigning through original means; the scale of these organizations has not stopped growing those last year, “forcing” people, governments, and mainstream media to speak about the issue. Because before the Revolution, sexual harassment was part of the numerous taboos characterizing the Egyptian society, for a long time sexual harassment was not defined and/or understood as part of a set of dynamics. The term “tahrush al-ginsy” (sexual harassment in Arabic) is now widely used and discussed by political authorities, NGOS, activists and women. Organizations and activists helped in showing that sexual harassment takes many different forms and affects most (if not all) Egyptian women and girls. More importantly, NGOs and small groups or Facebook pages (created by random people) helped women to speak about the issue and their own experience, thus breaking the taboo. What happened recently in Egypt, is that people started to name the issue, and by naming the issue without fear, women started to put words on their experience.

3.3. The Dynamics of Sexual harassment:

After naming, the first difficulty was to define the issue (what is sexual harassment?) in a society where before it was a taboo. Adding to this difficulty was that women until recently were always the ones blamed if something happened to them in the street. The complexity of sexual harassment in Egypt appears in an interview made on PBS NewsHour of Nehal Elwan and Diane

Singerman's. The perspectives of Singerman show that harassment is not only made through groping, touching or stalking; nevertheless it appears through their speeches or work that there is some difficulties to define harassment and that both do not agree on which forms of sexual harassment are the most prevalent in Egypt. Naming and framing an issue is important if we want to understand the extent it has in a society. For many years the ECWR, through their draft bill on (sexual) harassment, tried to include a definition of it in the Egyptian Penal Code.⁷ The ECWR defines harassment as follow:

“Harassment is defined as inappropriate touching, stalking, following or other forms of pursuit, sexual comments or obscene/offensive remarks made either explicitly or implicitly, over the telephone, online or by text message, picture message or messages containing images of a sexual nature.”

It is noteworthy to say that the ECWR do not include “gazes or looks” into their definition while many women I interviewed view it as one of the most common forms of harassment and even the HarassMap includes it in their map as cases of harassment.

Tinne Van Loon, a 27 years old student in master of journalism from Belgium, living in Cairo for few years, decided to make a documentary, called *The People's Girls*, with one colleague to speak about sexual harassment in Egypt. In their trailer video “*Creepers on the Bridge*”, Colette (Tinne's colleague) crosses the busiest bridge in Cairo with a hidden camera to show the extent of sexual harassment. Striking in the video is the male gaze; the

⁷ The bill's draft was sent to Mubarak, the Supreme Council of Armed Forces (during the Transition period) and then Morsy and was ignored by all. It is only with Sissi (actual president of Egypt) that the draft was considered and harassment recognize as a form of violence and issue in Egypt.

woman is constantly looked upon, and a felling of insecurity and eternal judgment is felt. When I interviewed Tinne, she explained to me that they wanted to show that harassment was not just verbal or characterized by touches, but that first and foremost, in Egypt it takes the form of heavy gazes which gives you the feeling that you should not be here.

What we clearly see with all those examples is that people in general, in Egypt, do not agree on the extent of street/sexual harassment as well as the means by which it is done and achieved.

Apart from the difficulties in defining and framing harassment, the question of sexuality and sexual frustration (another taboo in Egypt) has been mentioned by some as a reason for harassment. Youssef Alimam, a young Egyptian filmmaker, made a short comic documentary called *Libido: A Documentary about Sex* (2013) to raise the issue and the extent of sexual frustration and the consequences of the lack of sexual education in Egypt. Alimam's initiative is really courageous as any form of sexuality is hidden and severely controlled in the Egyptian society. Alimam uses comedy to criticize taboos surrounding sexuality in Egypt, and highlights some of the consequences of sexual frustration on people and society in general. A parallel appears in the documentary between sexual frustration, the active watching of pornography on the internet and sexual harassment. For Alimam, pornographic movies are the means by which most (if not all) Egyptian (men and women) learn about sexual behaviors and so, have a false idea about sexuality and sexual behaviors.

Going deeper in the subject of pornography, Muhammad Hazem, in his article “The Politics of Porn” published on line in *Egyptian Streets* on the 4th of February 2015, criticizes strongly the influence it has on people’s behaviors, creating false beliefs and expectations which can never be realized and attained. More importantly, Hazem states that pornography leads to the objectification of women with high consequences in the entire society and on sexual harassment.

Hazem and Alimam’s theories on sexual frustration and pornography are important to acknowledge. However, to consider pornography and sexual frustration as essential in the cause of harassment might be misleading. Like Ilahi (2009) I consider that sexual frustration is not a valuable excuse. Most of the respondent (might it be men or women) often started to speak about this sexual frustration by themselves. Women were more critical of it, as cleverly stated by one them “we women are [sexually] frustrated too”. In my view, if sexual frustration is widely spoken about nowadays, it is because it is part of the process of breaking taboos and criticizing the sexual repression of the Egyptian society. We then have to look beyond sexual frustration. What is hidden to us behind sexual frustration?

The last fifty years in Egypt have been marked by economic difficulties, the Islamic Revival and a huge increase in poverty. The Islamic Revival brought back conservatism and “old values” that were rejected and considered backward by the elite after Egypt’s independence in 1952. The Islamic Revival, happening in many Muslim societies over the past fifty years, is part of a resistance towards the idea of a western modernization that was directly associated with behaviors and dress codes imposed on women (Mahmood

2001; Sika and Khodary 2012; Zlitni and Touati 2012). The Islamic Revival is not a cause in itself for sexual harassment, but it slowly reasserted certain values such as like the importance of marriage and dowry as well as the importance of some dress codes for women to appear in public (for example, the veil and long dresses). Now, because Egypt is facing hard economical time and because the dowry system took more and more value, it delayed the average age of marriages (Ilahi 2009, 63). A great number of young men do not have proper jobs and salary and so, they lack the money needed to pay a dowry. A consequent number of men also never get married. It should be acknowledged that marriage is (supposedly) the only legal and accepted way in Egypt to have contact with a woman (and so sexual intercourse).⁸ Added to that, religious pressures over the necessity to get married are really strong, as marriage is considered half of a man's life. A man cannot truly be a man if he is not married, and marriage is one of the main religious duties on a lifetime. As all relationships are controlled in Egypt, and people live with their parents until marriage, it is really difficult for men and women to have friendly contact with each other in general, as it is completely forbidden. This might create some kind of "permanent" sexual frustration which is taken out on girls and women in the streets. But mainly, those hard economic conditions and difficulties have profound effects on ideas of manhood and the construction of masculinities among these men. Here again, the interview of Nihal Elwan and Diane Singerman in PBS NewHours is really revealing. Elwan, in the video says that because Egyptian men are facing severe economic difficulties, they do not have control over their own lives. For Elwan, harassment is the way for

⁸ It does not mean, however, that Egyptian people do not have sexual relations before marriage.

men to reassert manhood and have a sense of power and control, power they do not have in their daily life, at work or in their family. In that sense, the street is becoming a male space, controlled by men (Rotundo et al. 2001; Hafez 2014; Morsy 2014). But for Elwan, the difference is that harassment is first and foremost a way to rebuild a sense of manhood destroyed by economic conditions and religious pressures and not a direct will to control women's bodies and/or excluded them from the public space. I consider that all statements by the three authors are true, and I also consider that they are all linked together and should all be taken into account when looking at the issue.

Nevertheless, the economic explanation is also highly problematic as it implies that only poor and young unmarried men are harassing women in the streets which is totally wrong. When asked to describe harassers, all women told me that it is impossible to make a profile. Harassers can be young or old, married or not, rich or poor. All of them also admitted that they have been harassed at least once by a police officer and it happened to some of them to be harassed by kids in the streets. All this shows a global acceptance of sexual harassment in the Egyptian society that is neither the direct result of bad economic situation and neither a consequence of sexual frustration.

Then, I will add to all what I wrote previously, that one of the main reasons is how gender relations are built within the family and education in the Egyptian society that also has effects on the way women are perceived. The Egyptian society is patriarchal: boys and masculine characteristics are always favored. All women I interviewed stressed the fact that men are always considered superior to women, as said by Rima "men are numbers one". Women are always perceived as less or lacking something that men possess. This is a

key component of the prevalence of sexual harassment which goes along with the desire to reassert control over women's bodies in the public sphere as well as to get a sense of power for men that do not have control over their own lives. In all interviews, there was always this idea rising that if women were perceived as worthy and equal to men in the Egyptian society, sexual harassment would reduce significantly. The means and priorities by which this should be achieved depended on respondents themselves: through education (at home and at schools), in religious discourses, through art and movies, campaigns etc.

Interestingly enough, global feeling of frustration and hard economic situation are both considered to be the main reasons that brought the Revolution in 2011. This shows that women bodies in Egypt, have always been excluded from public spaces and the public sphere before and after the Revolution. The next section will link the Revolution and the attacks targeting women with the rise of the new groups and campaigns against sexual harassment.

3.4. The Revolution: State Violence and Sexual Assaults in Tahrir

It is surprising to see that during the first days of the Revolution, men and women seemed to fight side by side in Tahrir Square without inconvenience or barriers that are usually present in the Egyptian society (Middleton-Detznier et al. 2011, 113). Numerous accounts describe positively those first revolutionary days. Then, all at once, everything changed. Women started to be sexually harassed, attacked or even raped in the Square or nearby. When

did that happened? Why? Middleton-Detzner et al. (2011, 113) makes an interesting parallel between those aggressions and Mubarak's resignation, with the arrival of massive mobs that were not taking part in the Revolution previously. A significant number of people described the aggression as violent and organized, but what is even more significant is what they heard: they shouldn't be here, it was a male domain, and they should have stayed at home (Middleton-Detzner et al. 2011, 113). It is clear that if aggressions targeted women, it was because women had crossed a line, an imaginary line that separates genders and the place accorded to them as women. By directly taking part in the protests, women transgressed the limit imposed on their gender and interfered openly in the public space. From that point, the issue raised here was that of their very presence outside of the domestic sphere. The public space is seen as a space controlled by men, which makes that "women's bodies are regulated and disciplined by the 'male gaze'" (Hafez 2014, 178). Following this quote, women's bodies are always controlled and their space of interaction is always limited. A number of nationalistic values are inscribed on the female body attached to notions of male honor (McClintock 1993, 62-63; Nagel 1998, 244).

In Egypt, virtue and honor are often constructed around the Muslim veil, modesty and chastity. However, in the case of the Egyptian Revolution, after Mubarak's resignation, it seems that dress codes and notions of modesty or honors were not the reasons for harassment and sexual aggressions. The situation is well summarized by the quote below:

The practice of veiling in Muslim societies, for instance, is one such comportment perceived as a religious requirement for women to enter the public sphere in acceptable ways. Women who do not

fulfill these requirements were not only harassed, but after the initial phase of the January Uprising, even those who wear the veil were often assaulted and there were several recorded cases of rape by male mobs thus signaling to all Egyptian women that their bodies are no longer allowed in the space of political expression (Hafez, 2014, 178).

As well shown by Sherine Hafez (2014), all women, whatever their clothes or age were at once seen as a threat. Harassment, rapes or aggressions within Tahrir Square are all the symbols of the process by which the public sphere is becoming a male space again (Hafez 2014; Middleton-Detznier 2001; Morsy 2014). A clear and strong message was sent to women, through their bodies, to force them to go back home (Morsy 2014, 173). It is however wrong to state, like Morsy (2014, 211) that the square was once gender-neutral and that the eighteen days before Mubarak's resignation were "utopian" and gender-equal". It should be acknowledged that male mobs were not the only ones to target women. The military power was also very virulent when it came to controlling women's bodies.

When Mubarak' forces started to intervene in Tahrir it brought tremendous changes. The violent repression of protesters was somehow different when it came to women and it clearly shows that women were never equal to men, even during the first days of the Revolution. Virginity tests led by the army during the first week of the protest are the most famous example. Even if this event quickly turned into a national (and international) scandal, it is however important to note that this attack on women's bodies was a way to directly attack the honor of male family members, while also delegitimizing the morality of the Revolution and its participants. Virginity tests are one example among others, but it clearly shows that the Square has always been a male controlled space where women and/or girls were not welcomed.

The participation of women in revolutions is often overlooked, and their role often delegitimized and/or minimized and what was expected by them is not met (Jayawardena, 1986; Dunayevskaya, 1996). In the case of Egypt, their very presence was questioned and rejected from the public/political sphere. Nevertheless, we can say that this violence directed against women did not have the effects expected, but on the contrary, it made women fight and mobilize themselves strongly for their rights and dignity even more than before. It is also through the Uprising, and the “changes” it brought that taboos started to be broken, and that people started to look at harassment differently and started to be conscious of this issue.

3.5. Let's Speak About Taboos: Breaking Norms and Conventions

Whatever is the situation now in Egypt and whatever was violence suffered by women within Tahrir and/or on a daily basis; anybody present at that time will say that the Revolution unleashed a number of taboos and new forms of activism. People started to speak about a number of issues and subjects that were hidden before. From the family code to police torture under the Mubarak regime, everything, for a short period was questioned and openly criticized. If nowadays Egyptian people are not free to speak as they were able to do so directly after the Revolution, some key political themes and issues are still widely spoke about, and sexual harassment is one of these. Documentaries such as *The People's Girl* or *Libido* (both mentioned previously) are part of this breaking of taboos.

The use of movies or images became really important in the fight against harassment and women's rights after the Revolution because they forced people to see. A bit different than what has been mentioned above, the street artist Merna Thomas also had some impact in Cairo with her graffiti against the harassment of women. Her graffiti represent women as victims of harassment and/or fighting back. In that sense, Merna, while victimizing women, also draw a possibility of empowerment by showing women that they can fight back and respond to the harassers. This double speech of victimization and empowerment is quite common as we will see later. Merna's graffiti are a clear call for women themselves to fight back and just her position as a young woman herself painting graffiti in public places of Cairo is in itself a small Revolution and the rejection of previous norms assigned to her gender.

All of the examples mentioned above are really important as there are parts of the new ways of fighting against harassment and stereotypes in Egypt. It is the result of the events that followed the 2011 Revolution, which opened a new space for critique that took place within the cyber-sphere. The three initiatives have in common the use of social media to reach public and gain notoriety. *The People's Girls* documentary call for funding was made through social media, and according to Tinne, without social media and especially Facebook they would never have the money and means to achieve it. The call for participants in the documentary was also made through Facebook. Similarly, *Libido* was widely shared and seen via YouTube, as it was never allowed to be diffused on Egyptian TV. Merna Thomas's graffiti, if painted in the streets were widely shared by social media users on YouTube and

Twitter. She also had her own social networks to share and spread her work. The key point through their work is that the critique is simply made and thus, accessible to everybody.⁹ They also open a lot of issues directly related to harassment, thus contextualizing it in time and space.

3.6. The Rise of Online Groups and Anti-Harassment Campaigns

It is during the last semester of 2012, when “things became ugly” following Mahmud’s words (an activist from Tahrir Bodyguard) that small groups of people began to gather to fight sexual harassment and assaults on women first of all within the protests. All those groups have in common the fact that they all started on-line and are the result of young revolutionaries’ decisions and discussions unhappy of what was happening. As the result, two main groups were created to protect girls and women from being sexually harassed and/or assaulted from mobs during protests: OP-Anti-SH (Operation Anti-Sexual Harassment) and Tahrir Bodyguard. The creation of Tahrir Bodyguard is interesting in the sense that it is the result of a girl’s call made through Facebook. According to Mahmud, which was the first one to respond to the call, the girl wanted to take part in the protest but felt insecure to go alone. She thus called for people (boys) to come with her like that they can defend themselves and protect her.¹⁰

⁹ This statement is only partially true. It should not be ignored that in Egypt part of the population is living in great poverty and do not have internet access and limited access to TV and are completely excluded from society.

¹⁰ Mahmud used the term “bint” which literally means “girl” in English. In Egypt the term “girl” is usually employed to describe an unmarried young woman. Because in my view the term “bint” is not appropriated, I choose to use the term “young woman” in throughout this thesis. I made an exception here, because I based myself on Mahmud’s quote.

In the mean time, Shoft Ta7rosh was created in October 2012. The aim was for women to write a message to them on Facebook or Twitter when something related to sexual harassment happened to them. Then, anonymously, the message was posted back publicly on the Facebook page by the administrators. From there, Facebook users could comment the post or just read the testimony. HarassMap gained wide support, mainly thanks of the creation of an interactive map, reporting and situating cases of sexual harassment all over Egypt (how the map is used and made will be explained in chapter 4).



Figure 1 Snapshot from the map on the HarassMap's website ¹¹

A thing leading to another, the topic and actions led within Cairo's streets being acknowledge more and more by Egyptian, on Facebook, for example, random people started to created pages such as "Ana Mesh Haskut 'ala el-tahrush" (I will not be silent on Harassment) or "La lel-Tahrush" (Not to Harassment) etc... to take the issue in their own hands. Then, social media, and mainly Facebook became a way for people to condemn the issue of sexual harassment, its wide acceptance within the society and more

¹¹ HarassMap's Website, accessed September 26, 2015. <http://harassmap.org/en/>

importantly, it became a place where girls themselves began to share their own experience, thus showing to them that they were not alone.

4. Cyber-Activism and Resistance

Contrary to what has been stated by media all around the world, the Egyptian Revolution was not a Facebook Revolution, even if ICT and social networks were widely used by some, too many people in Egypt did not and still have no internet access which has always limited the utility and impact of social media and its users during the protests. Nevertheless, when we look at the groups and NGOs that appeared to fight sexual harassment after the first year of the protests, the use of social networks and new communication technologies was indeed wide and essential. In this chapter I will look deeper at the new forms and ways of activism and awareness raising NGOs and social movements formed to fight sexual harassment in the streets in Egypt. This will help us to understand better why and how NGOs such as HarassMap and Shoft Ta7rush and action groups such as Tahrir Bodyguard or OpAntsh became successful those last years; to the extent that they were able to put pressures on various political authorities to take and apply new measures.

While looking at the way they work, I will mainly focus on the use of social media and the opportunities it gave to activists; but also the benefits it has for women. I will argue that on-line campaigns present a safer way for women to discuss and write about sexual harassment, without being afraid of being seen as violating social norms and or of inciting public scandals.

4.1. The Old and the New

To start with it is important to note that there is a huge division between feminists groups present before the protests and the groups that arose after.

While sexual harassment was a topic for previous feminists groups (such as the *Egyptian Center for Women's Rights* or the *Feminist Egyptian Union*) for many years, I saw clearly that there was no communication or exchange made with the two organizations mentioned above and the actual social movements acting nowadays against sexual harassment. The word "feminism" itself has not been mentioned by most of the interviewees for this thesis. This might be because, as explained by Amal, working at Nazra (the only openly feminist organizations that has some links with the NGOs and groups studied here),¹² "the world feminism is full of baggage". According to her, women might not identify as feminists, even if they embrace women's rights and gender issues, due to their own experience and as a conscious choice, but it might also be because of their reputation, feminism being looked at suspiciously.

Many reasons can explain this lack of connection. First of all, one of the main reasons is situated within the context of the Islamic Revival. In a desire to break with the West and counter its influence, feminism has come to be seen by the population as a western export in the last decades in Egypt (Mahmood 2001, 209). While some Egyptians feminists are known worldwide; their name, work or previous influence is totally absent from interviews, websites and Facebook pages of the social movements and NGOs I study in this thesis. In my view, if all the persons I met were clearly not in favor of a

¹² Nazra was created in 2005 and officially registered in 2007. The organization is specialized in issues regarding sexual violence in the public sphere. They provide psychological and legal support to "survivors". Because of the numerous cases of mob assaults and harassment during protests, Nazra became renowned through its cooperation with HarassMap and Tahrir Bodyguard mainly and the help they could provide to several women after they have been attacked.

religious state, there was clearly a will to detach themselves from the west and its mainstream feminism and/or politics.

The second reason is that feminist organizations of the Mubarak era have been accused of working for the government. The best example is the case of the National Council for Women, whom Suzanne Mubarak (wife of the former president Hosni Mubarak) has been the President for many years. Amal described the NCW as a “state machinery”. There is this idea that feminist organizations have been co-opted by the state to serve its own interests (Sika and Khodary 2012, 94). Thus, in a revolutionary context in which Mubarak’s figure and family was the enemy, it is understandable that centers such as the NCW are not trusted anymore (that said if they have ever been trusted once).

The third reason, which will be deepened in the following parts of this chapter, is the intensive use of social media that characterized the various anti-sexual harassment campaigns that left other “old” feminists at the margins. The use of social media had huge consequences for the development and continuity of the groups themselves as well for the organizations of their social activities and/or public demonstrations. By using social media, the new campaigns used a tool that was accessible and attractive to a lot of young women. Nevertheless, even if the word feminism or cyber-feminism was not mentioned by interviewees (except by two), indeed, some ideas and patterns are shared within the actual Egyptian context in between secular feminism and new organizations against sexual harassment, even if the notion is often rejected and/or not mentioned.

At the same time, it is noteworthy to say that “old” feminist groups are still present and active nowadays in Egypt. There are just much less popular and barely visible in the fight against sexual harassment. The Feminist Egyptian Union has a Facebook page but the number of people following them (2183 likes) is indeed really low compared to the two NGOs HarassMap (44559 likes) and Shoft Ta7rosh (47530 likes). Even Facebook pages which just denounce sexual harassment without being registered through an NGO or CSO are more successful and followed than the Egyptian Feminist Union. For example, “La lel-tahrush” (No to Harassment) page has more than 10000 likes and “Ana mesh haskut ‘ala et-tahrush” (I will not be silent on Harassment) more than 19000 followers.¹³ This discrepancy in the number of followers might be also explained by the language used. The Feminist Egyptian Union’s activity on Facebook is mainly to share articles and news about what they do and most (if not all) is written in Modern Literary Arabic, a language that is not accessible to everybody and usually requires a high education to fully understand it. In contrast, all the newer groups mentioned above are using the Egyptian dialect to communicate and share ideas which makes the contents more accessible and understandable to more Egyptian people with a basic education. The Egyptian dialect is easier to use but is also associated with spontaneity, authenticity and a degree of intimacy; meanwhile “SA (e.g. Modern Arabic) is associated with religion, mainly history and tradition”, a shared identity common to all Arabs, and came to be associated with the notion of authority and power (Bassiouny 2012, 110).

¹³ The numbers provided were looked at on the 9th of July 2015, there is great chances that the numbers will change, as they keep increasing each week for each Facebook page.

Therefore, all reasons combined we can easily understand why new campaigns were more successful and supported by young women. Because in the minds of women, they became more trustworthy, understandable and also easier to access than “old” feminist groups present before the protests started. Paradoxically, while feminism might be rejected by some, Amal told me that after the Revolution and the mob assaults started, a lot of initiatives were created. A lot of small feminists groups started to appear here and there in Egypt, constituted by people embracing the idea of women’s rights due to the violence targeting women during protests. Against this background, I see the Revolution as somehow the rebirth of feminism in Egypt. By rebirth, I mean new forms of feminism, which Sorbera (2014) describes as specific to Egypt, with its own identity and politics, detached from the mainstream western feminisms.¹⁴

4.2. Activism and Social Networks

Cyber-activism has many advantages that I will analyze now. The use of internet is easy for anyone who has the proper technology and an internet access. More importantly, the cyber-sphere became a place where people can share ideas or access information quite easily without moving from their houses (here, the private sphere), which has been a key strategy to involve more women in the fight against sexual harassment in Egypt.¹⁵ The internet is

¹⁴ A similar fact has been observed by Zakya Salime (2012) in Morocco and Zlitni and Touati (2012) in Tunisia during and after the Arab Spring, all authors stating that many women’s initiatives (online and off-line) started to appear as a result of women’s exclusion from democratic processes.

¹⁵ The use of computers and internet does not only happen inside the house. Some Egyptian women have laptop they can bring with them in public places, but a laptop is an expensive tool and the majority of Egyptians do not possess one. Moreover, coffees with free wifi access are still not

not easy to control. Noteworthy to say is that there has never been a real effort from the authorities to control and censor the internet, and anyway its implementation has always been limited (Kalathil and Boas 2003, 123; Stephan 2013, 2).

Nowadays, after the appearance of social networks, it became easier and faster to share and spread information around. Using Stephan's words (2013, 1), "the use of electronic communication technologies facilitates activism by offering inexpensive and extensive means for communication among transnational actors". It also became easier for activists to organize themselves with social media. In their study of the role of ICT and social media during the Egyptian revolution Eltantawi and Wiest write that:

What is perhaps most significant about the use of social networks in the Egyptian Revolution is how it changed the dynamics of social mobilization. Social media introduced speed and interactivity that were lacking in the traditional mobilization technique (2011, 1213).

I was able to verify this claim during my encounter with Mahmud, he explained to me that most of the communications between volunteers during protests were made through Twitter. According to him, it was easier and faster to use twitter than phone calls. With only one tweet, they could warn other members of some cases of mob sexual assaults and/or harassment happening somewhere, while, at the same time, also spreading the word to random twitter users following them but who did not volunteer in the movement. Then, in the case of Tahrir Bodyguard, twitter had many different uses: communication between volunteers, awareness raising as to what was truly happening during protests and campaigning against sexual violence and

common in Egypt. You can find, some internet cafés even in some remote areas of Egypt, but those are considered as a male space, and so women usually do not go to these places.

harassment. It is thus true that social media helped activists to be faster and more efficient to reduce time for responses between themselves (Eltantawi and Wiest 2011, 1215), but it also helped them to intervene faster to rescue women during protests. Mahmud cannot recollect the number of women they were able to rescue, as there were some days with huge numbers of cases of mob assaults and harassment, especially the period between the 30th of June and the 3rd of July 2013, when more than 80 cases of gang rapes and mob assaults were recorded.¹⁶ Surely, social media and communication technologies were key tools for their collective actions. However, the utility was not just defined by the need to protect women during protests, the number of cases of which was overwhelming for Tahrir Bodyguard's members. Following Mahmud's statement:

We always, always, went home feeling like what we did was never enough, like we... couldn't save everyone. We didn't really make a difference. But then with the messages we get afterwards, with people saying like we've helped them or they seen us helped someone and it made them feel safer... Then we started getting some faith in what we were doing.

In this quote we see that social networks also helped activists themselves with random people showing them their support. This pushed them to continue their activities in the streets of Cairo. The use of social media in cyber-activism is not reduced just to a question of organizing themselves and interaction in the public sphere; it is also about solidarity and self-support. Within the cyber-sphere, we can witness a "direct" exchange between activists, people who got helped and also random people/followers. All of that brings a feeling of closeness, each one of the party supporting psychologically

¹⁶ This is the period of the military coup and the ousting of the President Mohamed Morsy.

the other. It creates a sense of community of people acting against a delicate issue within the cyber-space (Puente 2011). An exchange is created based on mutual support from both sides, which give an idea of more equality between activists and other people.

To go back to Eltantawi and Wiest's analysis (2011), if useful, what is missing from their study is a deeper analysis of the notion of time and space of what was and is happening now outside of protests and for groups that are not acting in a state of emergency. During my interviews with members from Tahrir Bodyguard, Shoft Ta7rosh and La lelTa7rosh I was surprised to find that none of the organizations have actual offices. There is no hierarchy and no place to meet. Activists are always on the move, travelling and/or working, sometimes on-line, sometimes off-line, and dispersed all over Egypt. This fact was a difficulty I had to face during my research as it was really hard to find a place to meet activists who did not have lot of free time in between work and their activism. All interviewees told me that all members have their own tasks to do on the web. Tasks are divided and everybody knows what he/she has to do. Then, all of those groups are mainly virtual and most of the actions and/or campaigning take place within cyber-space. This lack of clear meeting point did not seem to bother activists. The only one that told me that it was inconvenient was Mustapha (administrator from La Il-Ta7rosh Facebook page), who said that it would be better if they had one office or official place to meet, in order to better organize public demonstrations and work. As I understood and saw by myself, it is clear that on-line communications, while really advantageous, also present some limits: for various reasons, all

volunteers are never on-line at the same time and written meetings are always “scattered” and a bit messy.

For Shoft Ta7rosh, both Twitter and Facebook are used by volunteers, even if according to Janit, volunteer since the creation of the movement, Facebook is most popular because, according to interviewees, “it is easier” for girls and women to use it. Nevertheless, following Fathi’s words (Janit’s husband and founder of Shoft Ta7rush too), they need both Twitter and Facebook, as users are not the same, and it helps them to reach more people. Social media help them to communicate with volunteers from all over Egypt anytime, day and night. Janit and Fathi are working in the same company and while working, the Facebook’s page of Shoft Ta7rosh is always open on their laptop. They both go back and forth between work and their social cause, dividing their working time between the two activities.

While they “speak” with other members about further mobilization and public demonstrations, they also receive messages from women and/or young girls all day long writing about what happened to them. Janit is officially the one responsible for answering Facebook messages from 9a.m. to 4p.m. during weekdays, but she admitted that often during evenings she was opening Facebook to look and maybe answer new messages. There is no limit of time and space with cyber-activism: as long as you have an internet connection you can do your task. Both of Janit and Fathy explained me that actually, there is always one volunteer online on Twitter or Facebook who is ready to answer girls or women contacting them through social media or their website, to give them support, comfort them or provide them with various information or contacts details.

YouTube is also used by all groups at times, and for different reasons. YouTube allows people to upload and share videos that can be watched by anybody in the all world. As seen in the previous chapter, YouTube as been an essential tool for many people to share the video of The People's Girls' documentary, *Creepers on the Bridge* and thus to fund their project. However, not all projects ended up with so much fame. It nevertheless helped a lot of activists to share their videos of events and actions within Egypt. For example, OP-Anti-SH and "Harassing the Harasser" have undertaken a lot of actions in the streets of Cairo to catch publicly harassers in the streets, and then shame them by writing with black paint "Ana mutaharush" (I am an harassers) on their shirts or just trying to shame them in front of everybody in the street. By filming those actions and sharing them on YouTube, activists were able to show and reach more of the public through the internet and social media and networks, members of the public that were not present in the streets at this precise moment.

4.3. Virtual Space, Virtual Reality: Occupying the Cyber-Sphere

To continue with the benefits and advantages of cyber-activism, we also have to take into account what it brings for women themselves. As said previously, there is this idea in Egypt that women should stay at home, in the private sphere. In that sense, the idea of cyber-activism or campaigns is useful particularly for women in Egypt, as they can read, discuss and share various information, articles or videos, without having to go out of their houses (Radsch 2012, 17). That is to say "within the parameters that patriarchy has set for her" (Stephan 2013, 2).

Regarding sexual harassment, it was essential that the activities of NGOs like Shoft Ta7rosh and HarassMap took place first of all on the internet. At the beginning, Shoft Ta7rosh, in contrast of HarassMap, was not an NGO. It was just a social movement created by 15 volunteers who decided to raise awareness on the issue. When I started to follow them on Facebook three years ago, at first the page was full of anonymous testimonies of young women writing what happened to them. There were no more than 400 followers. From there, other young people (mainly young women) could comment on the post. Comments were most of the time really supportive and in favor of the women. Although now Shoft Ta7rosh is an NGO receiving funds from Open Society, until today, testimonies are still mixed with other information regarding harassment (articles, photos of public manifestations etc.).

HarassMap works differently. Their Facebook page is not made of testimonies and is thus, less personal. Nevertheless, the system of the virtual map available on their website proved to be very efficient and original too. As we can see in the name, the goal of the organization was to create a virtual map of where, when and what kind of sexual harassment was/is happening in Egypt. Any women victim of any form of harassment could send a text message, email or directly go and write on the organization's Facebook page or their website to tell where and how she was harassed. From there, members of HarassMap, analyze the case, sort it and assign a color to it and put it on the virtual map with the testimony of the person harassed.¹⁷

Anybody, from Facebook can easily access various kinds of information, links

¹⁷ You can find the virtual map (in English), with the number of the cases reported per city on the following link: <http://harassmap.org/en/what-we-do/the-map/>

to videos and the map. The map is easy to understand and anybody can look at it, click on one city, or one area of Cairo or even search by color, to see what happened to other women, or simply search for similar situations they suffered previously. This system showed women that they are not the only ones being harassed, but that, actually, many others like them are suffering from it too. Even if less personal, the fact of seeing other reporting sexual harassment consciously pushes still other women to report it too. The social taboo surrounding the issue is then broken, at the same time the social stigma suffered by women is challenged, and finally, it creates a sense of global social action where anybody can participate if he/she wishes too.

4.4. Challenging Patriarchal Discourses within the Cyber-Sphere

During my research, I came to ask myself why so many women were writing via social networks to tell their stories. Both HarassMap and Shoft Ta7rosh have hotlines, but during the afternoon I spent with Janit and Fathi to learn more about how Shoft Ta7rosh works, the telephone did not ring even once. However, I cannot count the on-line messages on Facebook this day. According to Janit, they receive “in between 20 and 30 messages every day” on Facebook only, and it might be more. All of them having in common the fact that the young women want to stay anonymous.

When asked why young women were writing so much on Facebook to speak about harassment, all interviewees without exception told me that it is because they do not have other options. According to them it is not just that Facebook is an easy tool to use, it is one of the only strategies they found that

enables victims to speak freely without being scared of reactions and scandals that can affect their reputation. All interviewees also stated that in any case and whatever happens, it is always the girl that is blamed. Of the women I interviewed, some of them never spoke about sexual harassment with their families and the ones who did so were told that they were the first responsible. Only one of them, a young woman of 19 assured me that she could speak of this issue freely because her “family is open minded”. Regarding the use of social media, one of the interviewees, a young girl of 20 years old I will call Iman, made an interesting statement regarding what women feel when looking at the Facebook page of Shoft Ta7rosh:

“It happened with one of my friend Nour. So Nour, this girl she is veiled, and her clothes are really long and when she told once to her father that ‘somebody is flirting with me on the telephone, somebody is bothering me on the phone and he knows me and all’... he was really rude to her. I don’t know how! Honestly, what is this kind of mentality! So she started to think ‘ok, why I am wrong?; and she kept thinking ‘ok, what did I do wrong? (...) So when she goes on the page of Shoft Ta7rosh and sends a message to the administrator [of the Facebook page] to speak to her, and the administrator answers and people comment, encouraging and telling her ‘You’re right! And your father is wrong!’ So, she starts feeling that somebody is listening to her. So she started following the page.

That is the reason why many of them decide to write through Facebook, because they will feel less threaten and more listened to. But following Janit’s words, there are also other reasons:

I told you what is easier (e.g. with Facebook). Easier than the telephone that’s in your hand. At home, maybe mummy will be listening when I am speaking, maybe daddy will hear when I speak, but surely they will not hear the screen’s voice and the keyboard. So for her it is always safer. I will write and send what I want.

Then, it is clear that when women write on Facebook, they feel more safe and confident because they are writing to people that do not actually know them. They feel also less threatened, not judged, listened to and supported. By doing so, as we see in the first quote, Nour by writing to Shoft Ta7rosh is challenging the authority of her father. Stephan (2013, 1), speaking about cyber-feminism in the Arab world, writes that it allows women to escape patriarchal control “by providing them with a space where their fragmented subjectivities can exist”. This is also what is happening to Nour when she wrote to Shoft Ta7rosh, she could tell her story, but more importantly, others people will comment (administrators or simple followers of the campaign) and definitely disapprove the speech of her father and support her. Then, slowly, with each case, the patriarchal discourse surrounding women is being criticized and challenged. It is also easier than direct speech as women will speak and stay silent at the same time. Social pressures are far away in private messages. Again, as Janit told me, women need to speak, and it is easier for them to write on Facebook because nobody there knows them personally, so there are less scared. Nobody is going to blame them. On the contrary, the Shoft Ta7rosh’s team will do exactly the opposite. As explained by Janit, most of the messages she gets show a lack of confidence and self-esteem. Women do not value themselves and their bodies. Because they are always blamed, they do feel that it is their fault. This is why Janit, or other members, when they write back, underline the fact that this is not their fault at all and they should not be scared of speaking or be ashamed by seeking some kind of help. Nevertheless, what appeared through Janit’s speech is

that the patriarchal discourse, the authority of the father is not openly criticized and challenged: it is done in cyber-space.

If one of the women decided, for example, to send a message to Shoft Ta7rosh and she wants the story to be published on the Facebook her name will be hidden, and the story will appear, other people will read it and share their opinion. They will then find the support they could not find with family members or direct friends without fearing the fact that they might be recognized by some. The possibility to be anonymous was an essential aspect of the strategies deployed by HarassMap and Shoft Ta7rosh to push women to participate in the movement.

Even if mainly about psychological support and breaking taboos, Shoft ta7rosh can also be a tool for social empowerment. The messages received do not always seek help and relief. The Facebook of Shoft Ta7rosh has more than one utility for women looking at it. Janit showed me one interesting message she received once: it was the story of a girl who was harassed in a microbus. A man was trying to “flirt” with her and asked for her number. She told him that she would give it to him when she will go got off the bus. She took a paper, wrote on it “I am harasser” and gave it to the man when she went out of the microbus. She took a picture of the paper and sent it with her message.

This kind of message is important as it shows what kind of strategies Egyptian women have developed to fight sexual harassment without crossing the social barriers and pressures imposed on their gender. By sending a picture of the paper she gave to the man, she shows to other women that she

is not passive anymore in the face of sexual harassment, but that she actually reacted, she did something. Here comes the idea of self-empowerment by refusing to be sexually harassed or let the man go without doing anything. By writing on a piece of paper and giving it to the man, she avoids scandal and the risk of being blamed by others. By sending a message on Facebook, she avoids troubles with her family and gets support from other people encouraging her. She also encourages, in an indirect way, other women to do the same by showing that she is not just only a victim anymore. Her reputation and honor remains safe while she shares with other a personal victory.

4.5. Successful Campaigns? Limits of Cyber-Activism

If all activists I interviewed stated that all kind of women, young and old were contacting and writing to them through Facebook to report harassment, we have to, nevertheless, ask ourselves who is truly using social media and who has access to the internet in Egypt. For example, when looking at the Facebook pages of HarassMap and Shoft Ta7rosh, you find respectively numbers of 44,000 and 47,000 of people who likes and follow the page, and according to activists, most of the followers are young women.

This fact must be taken into account if we want to know who is truly benefitting from these campaigns. The key point here is that it is mainly young people who are using social media. According to Radsch's study (2012, 7), 70% of Facebook accounts in the Arab world belong to people under the age of 29. They know how to use Facebook or Twitter; they know how to search

for information because they grew up surrounded by new technologies. You rarely see a woman aged 60 having a Facebook account or truly at ease using social networks. There is thus, a limit or barrier of age for people to be part of or spectators of to these new campaigns and social movements. I need to add here, that the fight against harassment is inscribed within a revolutionary context, which was launched first and foremost by the youth of Egypt.

Secondly, cyber-activism is limited by the possibility of accessing the internet. Following Boas and Kalathil's statistics (2003), in March 2001 there were only 560,000 internet users in Egypt, that is to say 0.8% of the population. The numbers of internet users kept rising in the last decades, but according to an article written by Sara Aggour in the *Daily News Egypt* and published on the 29th of January 2014, "two out of 100 individuals in Egypt have access to broadband internet penetration", only 40% of them being women. This means that the internet has not and never had a huge impact in Egypt as more than two-thirds of the population does not have internet access. Social class and literacy are two important facts that can seriously limit the impact cyber-activism: you need to be rich enough to have a computer at home and pay the internet bills each month. You also need to be able to read and have a minimum of education to read testimonies or articles and share your opinions on Facebook. In that sense, paradoxically, when the cyber-sphere revealed itself to be the only and easiest way for women in Egypt to speak, condemn sexual-harassment and find support; same means also excluded most Egyptian women from discussions and social actions led against sexual harassment. Although all activists I met assured me that there

were holding seminars and going to the countryside or underprivileged areas of Cairo to raise awareness about the issue there too, the means to interact there are not the same, and women might find themselves squeezed in between the desire to speak up and the impossibility to do so because of social pressures and the lack of internet access that can prevent them to be publicly recognized.

Mustapha (whom I previously mentioned) is himself from the countryside and told me that it was a problem to truly act in those parts of Egypt. As explained by him, in Saïd, girls are not supposed to even have a Facebook account because it will mean that they will want to speak with boys. Then, even if there is internet access in the house, it is almost impossible for many of them to be part of these new campaigns.

The internet is not the only obstacle activists face in underprivileged areas or in the countryside: the dominant notion of public sphere is different than in urban areas and for women from lower classes or ethnic minorities (Bargetz 2009). In the countryside, where women are used to working outside in the fields, sexual harassment and its representation in the minds of people is situated elsewhere and understood differently.¹⁸ In that sense, the ideas launched by the NGOs and social movements that women have the right to walk safely in the streets is not valid in the countryside. To go further, Egyptian women from the lower classes are used and have always been used to working on a daily basis. There are often maids and servants for households from the upper or middle-class women. While being harassed in

¹⁸ Kimberle Crenshaw (1991) was the first to speak about the importance of intersectionality, that is, the need to take into account the different varieties of experience which differ greatly from gender, class and race.

the streets, there are also harassed in their workplace and it might be done by women from the same advantaged social classes that are using the net to speak about sexual harassment perpetrated by unknown men. The binary representation created by this new fight “men harassing women” is problematic in those cases. Then, paradoxically, while discourses created by all those new NGOs and groups intend to criticize mainstream patriarchal discourses in Egypt, they also reproduce a kind of hegemonic discourse by generalizing and homogenizing women’s experience of sexual harassment because it is framed solely by middle class people, thus silencing women’s voice and experience from rural and underprivileged areas.

4.6. Conclusion

In this chapter I analyzed what were the benefits and advantages of the use of social networks for the various social movements combating sexual harassment and for women themselves in Egypt. Being faster and easier to use, and letting more people (especially young women) participate in one way or another, cyber-activism has created a sense of community, of shared identity of people fighting for a social cause (Puente 2011). Social networks give a sense of equality between activists, followers and spectators because everybody can participate in one way or another and within its own limits. Cyber-activism was also essential to free women from the burden of silence by creating a female cyber-space where women could speak freely without endangering their reputation. By showing all that, I argued that on-line campaigns present a safer way for women to discuss and write about sexual

harassment, without being afraid of social norms and public scandals. This is one of the main reasons why groups that appeared and grew encountered so much support compared to other feminists organizations that did not (or could not) adapt themselves to new ICTs and meet the new needs of young Egyptian women.

However, as shown in the last part, cyber-activism in Egypt is deeply related to social classes, as internet users and activists are all from the upper or middle-class. It is then, in the scale of Egypt, only a minority of women that can truly fight taboos, challenge and resist gender norms with the help of the internet. It is also problematic in the sense that even if it creates a counter-discourse outside of mainstream politics, this discourse created by NGOs and the various action groups is hegemonic and limited as it might not be relevant and out of context for women from the lower classes or from rural areas of Egypt.

5. From Cyber-privacy to Public actions: Blurring Boundaries in Between the Public and Private Sphere

As shown in the previous chapter, the new campaigns and initiatives against sexual harassment in Egypt, especially Shoft Ta7rosh, helped women to start “speaking” about violence happening to them in public spaces, by creating a specific cyber-space where women can express themselves without fear. In this chapter, I will argue that cyber-space is blurring the boundaries between the public and private sphere but that interference within physical public spaces remains limited. In order to prove my argument, I will analyze how, through cyber-activism, women learn about gender issues (sexual harassment in particular) while staying at home, but also how it helps them to have a sense of all public mobilizations that are happening in Egypt. As cyber-activism ultimate goal as always been to interfere in the public space (Lewis et al. 2014; Radsch 2012, Stephan 2012), and in the case of this thesis, to change the way women are perceived and treated within public spaces (Stephan 2012, 2), I will also analyze how those campaigns are trying to push women to go in public spaces by changing their attitudes, but also all the kind of problems and limitations activists and women might encounter while interfering in the public sphere in Egypt.

5.1. Facebook: In-between Public and Private

How social media and networks are redefining the dichotomy and boundaries of the traditional notions of public and private has already been discussed by many (Barnes 2006; West et al. 2009). According to West et al.

(2009, 615), boundaries between public and private on Facebook are “fuzzy” because “the ‘public’ appears to be the individual’s private social world”. To start with, we have to look first at how information is shared through Facebook. Facebook is special in the way the information is shared and spread. You read articles that your friends share. You follow the pages you want to, but it is usually because some of your friends already liked the page (Radsch 2012, 6). It thus appears in your Facebook Newsfeed that “you might also like” the page. Then, when you like a page on a particular topic, the browser automatically displays on your account other similar pages in relation to the first topic. The more you will look at a topic, the more will be displayed on your personal Facebook feed. Your own “media network” will thus automatically create itself (Barnes 2006).

Facebook is in itself a compromise between public and private; it can be personal or social depending on the use you make of it.¹⁹ As well stated by Barnes (2006) Facebook is a privacy paradox: while all you post and write on it comes from something private, the aim is to make it “public” for your friends and/or followers to see it and maybe comment it. What will appear on your Facebook feed will be some of your friends’ private life that is going to become temporarily virtually public on Facebook, meaning that you will deliberately let other people to see it.²⁰ Facebook redefines our own understanding of privacy, it is just an “illusion of privacy” and of what is public (Barnes 2006).

¹⁹ There are many different ways of using Facebook. It can be just used to keep contacts with friends and family members, which can be described as a personal use. Or it can be used as a way to fight/denounce for a cause (like it is the case in this thesis) or to promote your own work (like some artists do for example), which can be considered as a social use.

²⁰ Virtual in this sentence means that what is going to be public only stays within cyber-space: it is shared via Facebook and is seen by others through Facebook. It does not imply something physical.

5.2. Learning behind the screen

As mentioned before, cyber-activism can help anti-harassment activists in Egypt to reach women without the need to physically meet them. But women's actions are not just limited to writing to get relief. By going by themselves to those websites, they start a process of learning and discovering through the use of the internet regarding some gender issues, sexuality and any kind of topic they will not learn at school or can ask family members about (Newsom and Lengel 2012; Radsch 2012, Stephan 2013).

As I noticed quickly, within the bubble of the cyber-sphere that has appeared as a result of the new campaigns, women do not only support or comfort each others; they also teach each other by leading one another to different Facebook pages and/or websites on different issues. In her master thesis "Feminism and Twitter", Emma Cullen (2013, 28), states that by using Twitter, women came together to discuss gender issues (in her case intersectional feminism) and spread awareness on those issues around them. Although my thesis is based on the use of Facebook, I came to a similar conclusion. Except one, all the women who participated in my research and who are not activists told me that they had heard about Shoft Ta7rosh and/or HarassMap on Facebook, through this process of media sharing. Only Iman heard about Shoft Ta7rosh by looking at the Bassim Youssef's Show, *Elbarnameg* (The Program), on television;²¹ and then went to search on Facebook to discover

²¹ After the Revolution, Bassim Youssef, a former surgeon, started to make critical and satirical videos he posted on YouTube. The videos went viral in Egypt and as a result, *Elbarnameg* TV show was created. It was the first openly independent critical and satirical political show in Egypt, the fame of which reached the entire Arab world. Over the course of three years, Bassim Youssef attacked politicians, religion and taboos in a comic way. Because of his critique, he was arrested once under Morsy's government, faced multiple death threats and has been definitely censored under the new government in Egypt.

more about the issue of sexual harassment. For Iman and the other women I interviewed, the internet allowed them to learn about and search for various kinds of information regarding sexual harassment, but also information about sexuality in a safe way and without disrupting codes of conduct by asking openly improper questions to other people.

5.3. A window to the Public Sphere

However, cyber-space is not simply a place to learn and discuss about some topics. Activists also tried to push women to go public events and break some gender norms by doing some activities seen as masculine. All this show that the campaigns are not just limited to actions within cyber-space. However, to push women to break publicly gender roles is harder due to social pressures and cultural beliefs that are hard to challenge.

During the three years I have been looking at Shoft Ta7rosh through Facebook I came to have a sense of what was happening in Egypt regarding anti-sexual harassment campaigns, even after I moved out of the country. I was able to learn about some public events if I could not participate, just by looking at the pictures they shared on Facebook. By looking at their pictures on Facebook, you can see what the events were about, what the volunteered did and how, and maybe even you can guess where they were. Pictures show them speaking to people in the streets, or sticking stickers on walls, conducting interviews or team meetings and many other things. Pictures let women have a glimpse into what is happening in the public sphere, even if they were not physically present at the public events. It includes them in the movement as spectators, when before they might have just been excluded

from all actions. With Facebook, they can show support and keep updated on all events going on.



Figure 2 Activists from Shoft Ta7rosh during a team meeting. Shoft Tahrosh's Facebook Page, accessed August 28th, 2015.
<https://www.facebook.com/Shoft.Ta7rosh/photo>

Furthermore, the use of social networks in cyber-activism can go even further and be more than just a window to the public sphere by transcending all traditional representations we have of the public and private spheres. For example, some pictures posted on Facebook by the administrators on the 28th of June, where about a team meeting. Everybody can guess through the picture that members are gathering to discuss further strategies and discuss improvements and/or social impacts of the campaigns and actions.²² This kind of pictures gives the impression to the follower that somehow he/she is entering in the intimacy of the volunteers. And here again, Barnes's theory (2006) is important to take into account as we clearly see that Facebook is transcending the traditional idea of privacy. There is no true privacy as the private, actually became the public. The photos give access to the follower to what he/she will not be able to see even if he/she was witnessing one of their

²² This is also visible on the board activists are looking at, and where it is possible to read some sentences.

public events. The follower will have the possibility to have a glimpse in the private life/actions of the activists.

With Facebook, you actually do not need to participate or go to a public event; you can just go and watch pictures to know what activists are doing in the streets. By looking at pictures, you get a sense of what is going on. In that way, as an example again from Shoft Ta7rosh, if you click on “pictures” and then “albums”, you will be able to look at any event you are interested in.²³ Following this idea, the album *“Imna’a garima... et-tahrush el-gimsy garema”* (Stopping crime... Sexual harassment is a crime) is full of pictures of members raising awareness in Cairo’s streets. You can see pictures of the members doing a group photos, members speaking to men and women, you even have pictures of an activist speaking in front of a camera and of another one being interviewed by a journalist. You understand then, that official media are being interested by the campaigns and by the actions undertaken by the NGO. Your screen became thus a window, showing you what is happening in the public sphere.

5.4. Who is truly going Public?

As I just explained, cyber-space can become a place where women can see outside of their own houses. It brings closeness and creates a kind of virtual intimacy between activists and middle-class women who have an internet access by showing more than public events, by transcending both the notions of public and private. While the cyber-space is redefining those notions, it is

²³ Shoft Ta7rosh’s Facebook page is public. Everybody can have access to it, even if you do not “like” the page.

also highly problematic that women stay behind a screen, and so, we have to ask ourselves, who is truly going public, and who is interfering in the public sphere. According to Fathi, volunteers in Shoft Ta7rosh are approximately 60% men and 40% women.²⁴ This is not clearly apparent on social media and the pictures shared. As opposed to this, the majority of social networks' followers are women. This discrepancy can be found in all groups and NGOs studied in this thesis. We thus, have to look further than what is shown to us.

According to Mustapha, this is due to the fact that men have more freedom to go and interact in the public sphere. They have more facility to go out, less social and family pressures to go back home early, and they are less controlled and less limited in their movements. What does this mean? It means that even if campaigns are made in favor of women, women are still mostly excluded from public actions, even if they can share ideas and support in cyber-space. Going back to Facebook and social media, most of the time women remain only spectators of public events from behind their screens which is of course also highly problematic as there are not directly taking part in public events and remain mostly invisible to non-internet users or people not taking part in the campaigns.

Another thing I noticed while looking at the same album I mentioned previously, is that in pictures involving activists speaking to random women, you never see the face of the women. You will see her veil from behind or sometimes her hair. This is surprising because in the pictures of activists

²⁴ This is also true for Tahrir Bodyguard and OP-Anti-SH, where men are the majority of activists rescuing women during protests. Some others random initiatives, not related to a group or NGOs and aimed at catching and shaming publicly harassers (such as "Harassing the Harasser" or "Expose the Harasser") are only composed of young men.

speaking to random men in the streets, you can see their faces. It is not surprising however when you take in consideration that, as said in chapter 4, women do not want to take the risk to be recognized by family members and relatives, again due to social pressures and fear of scandals. The only women's faces you will clearly see are the ones of female activists, and the one of the journalist interviewing activists.

It is clear that, while trying to challenge patriarchal discourses and asserting women's right to walk safely in public spaces, there are still obstacles that activists from Shoft Ta7rosh have to face and cannot openly challenge. Activists' efforts to include women in the public sphere remain always challenge by gender and social norms, and patriarchal discourses. Women always remain anonymous and/or faceless even in cyber-space, again due to their "choice" to remain anonymous.

5.5. Acting in Public: Promoting Self-Defense Classes

As stated by many (Lewis et al. 2014; Radsch 2012; Stephan 2013), cyber-activism's final goal, even if it takes place within a virtual space, is to interfere in the public sphere at one moment or another. Whatever the social cause is, apart from public demonstrations, mobilizations and awareness rising, the aim is to produce a change in the society in the long run.

If in the case of Shoft Ta7rosh and HarassMap their first and main goal is not to bring women into the streets but to make them speak and break taboos, some initiatives have been undertaken to bring women into the public sphere and cross gender boundaries. For example, few bike rides have been

organized around some areas of Cairo, on the 19th and 20th of May 2014 by HarassMap and Shoft Ta7rosh, in cooperation with the National Council for Women as a public manifestation against sexual harassment (Mansour 2014, 3). Inviting men and women together to join in a bike ride is unusual and it pushes women to break even more gender expectations and the restraint they should have when they appear in public (Mahmood 2001, 205).

However, related to this idea of crossing gender boundaries, the most interesting example are the self-defense classes offered by HarassMap and Tahrir Bodyguard. I met two of those teachers giving classes: Coach R., a man of 46 years old, working in cooperation with both HarassMap and Tahrir Bodyguard; and Coach S., a woman of 34, in relation to HarassMap. For Coach S., social media played a great role in attracting students to the classes, most of her female students learnt about her through Facebook or the anti-sexual harassment organizations' websites.

To take self-defense classes is not something easy. It is not seen as a feminine activity and the idea for women to fight is not accepted by all. In Coach R.'s words:

“There is a cultural problem in that. Women are not in charge of their own decisions here. You know, they have to have permission to do whatever, and if a girl tells her dad, or her husband, or whatever, you know, I need to take this class of Self Defense, they are like ‘You’re not a man, you’re a woman, you don’t learn how to fight’”.

Not all women therefore can freely enjoy self-defense classes. As shown in the quote above, gender norms are not allowing women to fight because this is not what they are supposed to do. However, in contrast to Coach R., I do not think that the problem is just cultural, I wouldn’t say that this is just in

Egypt but in most countries of the world: women are expected to be passive and subordinate (Nagel 1998, 251), learning self-defense (a way to fight) makes you active. According to Coach S., self-defense is “super-empowering” and changes women completely by giving them courage and self-esteem. Moreover, by learning self-defense, you will not need men to protect you anymore; you will be able to do it by yourself, which is even more challenging to gender roles. Nevertheless, according to Coach S. she had a lot of students that never told their families out of fear of critics, plus women themselves have the tendency to impose limits on what they can learn:

“I have students who tell me ‘I don’t want to become that tomboy kind of girl. You know because... as a woman I have to be very female. And if my man in the future knows that I am self-defense trainer... euh... I might not be any more attractive for him as a candidate (e.g. for marriage). Or if I always react like very strong to everyone who I felt that they crossed my boundaries, they will say about me that... uhm... I am a very hard character and I don’t want to be a very hard character. I want to be a soft lady.”

We see with the quote above that women impose limitations on themselves by reasserting some traditional gender values on how they should act and be perceived by others in public. Even if they are willing to learn how to fight, they are the first to believe that what they do is something masculine and they fear the reactions of others or the negative consequences it might hold for them in the future. Even if they can defend themselves, their position in public as a woman is still controlled by strong patriarchal norms that are hard to change and which these women do not want to challenge openly.

Interestingly enough, while self-defense is perceived as something highly masculine it is not rejected by all men and women. Again from what Coach S. speech, she has never been openly criticized for teaching self-defense to

women which was a surprise for her at first. Even, she said that more and more women were coming to her classes, and men were globally very supportive with the initiative, again due to the various attacks of a sexual nature that targeted women during the Revolution and its aftermath. However, both coaches admitted that most of their students were middle-class Egyptian women or foreigners. Then again, at first, women who could practice self-defense were a small number of middle-class women.²⁵

Self-defense can bring much more than that the ability to defend yourself. Coach S.'s program includes what she calls "the window technique". The window technique is the way you should appear in public. Its aim is clearly for women to gain self-esteem and confidence to later change the way they appear when they go into public spaces. Instead of walking with your head low and looking at the ground, Coach S. trains the girls to look confident and sure of themselves when they walk in the streets: head high, straight-ahead gaze, showing you know where you are going. According to her, the idea revolves around how others will see you: if you look fragile, you will have more chances to be harassed. Look strong, and men will not dare to harass you. Even if the initiative is limited due to the small number of women who can enjoy classes, the initiative to offer self-defense classes launched by the new campaigns is a clear call for women to break some gender roles and change the way they appear and walk in public places.

²⁵ Nevertheless, efforts have been made to spread self-defenses classes and include more women from the countryside or underprivileged areas. Part of her work was also to train women to become trainers themselves. When I spoke to her, apart from teaching classes, she trained a total of 24 women that now have the necessary skills to train other women. Then, Coach S.'s initiative started from the middle-class, and then by training other coaches, slowly she could created a network with the help of new female trainers going to other parts of Cairo and Egypt to give classes.

5.6. Who has the Right to go Public?

As we have seen, cyber-activism, and especially the cyber-sphere allows middle-class women to see what is happening outside the private sphere. It also pushes them to act differently in the public sphere or to break gendered norms by doing some activities seen as masculine. However, we now have to ask ourselves who truly has the right to go public and interact in the public sphere in the contemporary Egyptian context. Campaigns are successful and supported, but Egyptians are far from being free to do what they want, be they men or women. As we have seen briefly in the previous chapters, there are big differences between NGOs such as Shoft Ta7rosh and others groups such as Tahrir Bodyguard, OpAntsh etc. Tahrir Bodyguard was never able to register, moreover they have recently been outlawed, threatened and some members arrested. Why? The answer is situated in the ways those “actions groups”, as they described themselves, are fighting harassment. Their aim was to literally fight sexual harassment and mob attacks by any mean possible. They were patrolling the streets during protests, rescuing women being attacked, publicly catching harassers etc... Even if they were using social media, lots of their actions were taking place in public spaces. As Mahmud told me cynically:

“We tried to register as an organization, but the law prevents us from doing so because the very first article in the law of NGOs states that you cannot register if you have like militia activities. And according to the classification of the law we’re a militia. It doesn’t matter what cause we work for. It doesn’t matter what is it we do, we have organized groups, with militia - like skills and we work on the grounds in formations so yeah, militia! Arrest them!”²⁶

²⁶ Militia, in this quote can be understood also as “terrorists”. Groups such as Tahrir Bodyguard, OP-Anti-Sh, and Harassing the Harasser have been accused to be similar to terrorist/militia groups in the

In my view, to accuse them of being militia was a way to discredit them publicly. But the main reason for this defamation goes far further than the law itself. By patrolling and rescuing women, even during protests they came to do what the police should have done. That said, by taking the issue into their own hands, they openly started to criticize the inability of the state to protect women. They took over the authority of the police and the army: they rescued and protected some women while the state did not. They succeeded where the state “failed”, and so, as said by Mahmud, they became “the public enemy number 1”. The new government, particularly repressive and willing to reclaim its authority and legitimacy by any mean, started to publicly denounce Tahrir Bodyguard and similar groups.

To understand this conflict better, we need to look quickly at the notions of masculinities in Egypt. Egypt is a highly militaristic society where military service, with a few exceptions, is mandatory for every man. As in every militaristic society, to go to the army is part of the process of becoming a man while the military man became the hegemonic and perfect model of masculinity (Gill 1997; Altinay 2004). Since the establishment of the Republic in 1952, all presidents were former generals in the Egyptian army.²⁷ The army is the highest authority of the country, defending and protecting people against external (e.g. Israel) or internal attacks (e.g. terrorism). What members of Tahrir Bodyguard did was to openly challenge this ability to protect the people, and mainly women, which could seriously affect the credibility of the state and its national (male) honor (Nagel 1998).

sense that they were not respecting the law and arresting people without having the authority to do so.

²⁷ With the exception of Mohamed Morsy, who belongs to the Muslim Brothers’ political party, elected in 2012 and overturned by the army in June 2013.

Because of the growing success of all NGOs, actions groups and campaigns against sexual-harassment, the state had no choice than to give the impression it is taking measures. The latest events happening in Egypt during the Eid el-Fitr 2015 are interesting to look at.²⁸ Members of the group Harassing the Harasser, usually patrolling the streets and catching harassers during national and religious feasts were forbidden to go in the streets. As explained by Mustapha:

The reason we didn't go in the streets (e.g. during Eid el-Fitr 2015) is the warning sent to us by the police. So after more than four years going to squares and streets to free the country of harassment, we got a warning not to go down. We were forced to obey and it wasn't our choice. The reason of the warning was referring to the new terrorist law which says that any group of people, starting from 3 and more, going in the streets (e.g. manifesting) without a legal permission will get arrested and go to jail for at least ten years. And they informed all members how dangerous it can be if we decided to go [in the streets].

Activists were prevented to go into the streets by direct threat of imprisonment. The law against terrorism and the unstable political situation in Egypt now was used as an excuse. But it shows that activists themselves, even young men are not free to act as they want in the public sphere. They also have limits and barriers they have to face, especially if it involves direct criticism and questioning of the authority of the state.

Meanwhile, a female police unit was created recently in Egypt to patrol and arrest harassers in the streets. During Eid, this small section of the police was highly promoted and spoken about in official media. I consider that the female police unit was created in order to show that the state was taking the issue seriously and doing something against harassers. But it was also used to

²⁸ Eid al-Fitr is a four days religious feast, always happening at the end of the Ramadhan. This year it started on the 17th of July 2015.

prevent young revolutionaries and organized groups to go in the streets and catch harassers.

It is nevertheless, noteworthy to say that the creation of a female police unit is a first in Egypt and a big break in gender roles, giving the opportunity for few women to cross gender boundaries by becoming part of the police. The concept of femininity is interesting to analyze a bit here. While we saw above that women willing to learn self-defense say they do not wish to become a “tomboy” and still want to appear attractive and soft to men; the female officers are exactly the opposite. They are the tomboys women do not want to become. They are all big, tall and do not hesitate to publicly grab harassers, shout at them and even beat them. Those policewomen are clearly crossing the boundaries and limits of what women are expected to do in public. They also have authority and position of power in public over some men, which is quite unusual and surprising. Nevertheless and paradoxically, they are also all wearing a white or blue veil under their cap, which is problematic as it imposes the idea that the veil is the norm for women to appear in public.



Figure 3 Picture of a policewoman catching an harasser in the street during Eid el-Fitr 2015.²⁹

Pictures and video of those arrests went viral on the internet, and the initiative was highly supported. Even Mustapha, who has always been very critical of state initiatives and government actions regarding sexual harassment, wrote to me that he considers that this is a good initiative, even if we need to see what will happen next. Nevertheless, the initiative is double-edged: while it re-established the full authority of the army and the state over its citizens, preventing any way of contesting its actions by young revolutionaries, it also created a small space of opportunity for women to have access to jobs in the police which was closed to them until now. The image of the lack of femininity they convey might, however, prevent most of Egyptian women from following their path.

²⁹ Egyptian Streets' Facebook Page, published on July 19th, 2015. Accessed august 13th, 2015. <https://www.facebook.com/EgyptianStreets/photos/pb.130170587149191.-2207520000.1443362397./514718812027698/?type=3&theater>

5.7. Cyber-activism: Helping Women in Public?

We already saw in the previous chapter some limitations of the new campaigns regarding social class and internet access. There are other limitations that I will show now. As with the example of the actions groups Tahrir Bodyguard and Harassing the Harasser, to take too harsh actions in the public sphere poses a threat to the state authorities. There is then a limit on what activists have the right to do. If HarassMap and Shoft Ta7rosh have not been outlawed it is for two reasons. The first is, of course, that these groups are supported by too many: to forbid them will be something that might turn itself against the state. The second reason is that Shoft Ta7rosh and HarassMap stay within the confines of what we can call acceptable actions. When they carry out public events, they privilege dialogue and awareness rising, they do not catch publicly harassers. There is no violence and/or conflict involved in their actions. As stated by Fathi, “the state is not an enemy, but it is not a friend [either]”. If they criticize the state and the place it gives to women, they do not openly challenge its authority like Tahrir Bodyguard and others.

If this fact lets them continue what they do without being threatened, it nevertheless puts serious limits on what they can do to help women in some cases. For example, if Janit receives a message of a woman being harassed over the phone, even if she has the number, she does not have the authority as a member of an NGO against sexual harassment to call the man and speak with him about his actions. She cannot contact the person who harassed a woman on Facebook, even if she has his name. Another problem is that women usually write when something has already happened to them.

Even if they can reassure her or if her story is shared on Facebook, the harassment has already taken place. The only choice left in that case will be to take legal measures and this still remains very difficult for women in Egypt. Furthermore, the majority of them will be reluctant to do so. The law is not really favorable and contains a lot of important holes. Esraa was the only one I interviewed who tried to bring a man who harassed her to the Court. In addition to the fact that police officers did not take her seriously she had to face others difficulties: she lacked witnesses and faced pressures from her own family as well as pressures from the family of the harassers urging her to drop the case. She indeed dropped the case after a while. Nazra is the NGO with the best ability to support women legally: they have their own lawyers. However, as Amal explained, the law does not guarantee that an accuser will remain anonymous. Her name and address can be seen by the family of the harassers, and it is quite common that they go to “threaten” or pressure the woman to drop the case in her house and in front of family members. What happened to Esraa is thus quite common. Once again this notion of public scandal appears which prevents women to go further than the cyber-sphere and activists themselves (still) cannot do anything about it. Most of the activists’ work will thus be confined within the cyber-sphere without having real opportunities to punish harassers without endangering the reputation of the women involved.

5.8. Conclusion

In this chapter I argued that social media, by blurring the traditional public/private dichotomy, are trying to push women to go public and change

the way they appear publicly by breaking some gender norms. I first analyzed how Facebook and online campaigns are blurring the notions of public and private spheres (Barnes 2006; West et al. 2009), thus enhancing the possibility for some to see what is happening in public spaces but also entering into private events held by activists. As a result of this, I also showed that on-line campaigns and cyber-activists are trying to push women out of the cyber-sphere through different means and activities that cross gender boundaries. We saw that despite all efforts undertaken, a true occupation of the physical public sphere by women remains limited, firstly due to gender expectations, social and cultural pressures; and secondly because of the limited ability for activists themselves to act in public. Indeed, I also show that some changes have started to appear slowly in Egypt as a consequence of those campaigns, in particular with the appearance of self-defense classes and the creation of a female police unit, which present new opportunities for some women. Until now I showed that cyber-space was the only place where criticism against the state, patriarchy and gender roles could take place, the next chapter will focus on the fact that even if safer cyber-space is still gendered.

6. Gendering Cyber-Space

Throughout this thesis I stated that cyber-space offers women an escape to patriarchal discourses and gender norms by creating a safe space where women can speak freely about their experience of sexual harassment. I showed that the use of social networks, especially Facebook, could present some opportunities for women to criticize gender roles and patriarchal discourses and in a limited number of cases to cross gender boundaries. As I mentioned in the two previous chapters, however, on-line campaigns, NGOs and actions groups have some limits in acting and interfering in the public sphere but also in including most of Egyptian women in the movement, due to issues regarding social class, age and internet access.

In this last chapter, my aim is to go further in probing the implications of those limitations and to analyze the cyber-Space through a gendered lens; that is to say, to analyze how gender norms, roles and social expectations are still perceivable in the cyber-sphere. While the use of internet and social networks helped to empower some women (more or less significantly depending on personal experience), others had a more or less negative experience of it (again depending on personal experience), far from being empowering. I will argue that the cyber-space is a gendered space where social norms and gendered expectations still prevail, thus limiting women's empowerment and victimizing them sometimes by simplifying discourses around sexual harassment and overlooking its complexity.

6.1. The Feminization of Sexual Harassment

The first important fact to note in this chapter is that sexual harassment, while being discussed more and more in Egypt, has been completely feminized. Two of the men activists I interviewed told me that they were also harassed by young women in the streets even if both of them asserted that it was less common. All other respondents admitted without hesitation that men were also suffering some harassment, even if according to Coach S. “it is more men harassing other men than women harassing men”.

Paradoxically, when asked if they considered this feminization of the issue and the creation of the dichotomy “men harassing women” in all discourses (by the NGOs, official media, government etc...) to be problematic, none of my respondents seemed to see it as a real problem. I was then perplexed thinking that if we just speak about one aspect of an issue, then the issue in itself is incompletely perceived and understood. The point for the interviewees was that many more women are being sexually harassed in the streets, at work, in public transports etc... So the idea was that the priority was to fix this issue first.

While in Egypt many men suffer harassment, too, in the streets, they have no place to go and speak about the issue. They might not even want to speak about being harassed. As stated by Mulroney and Chan's study, *Men as Victims of Domestic Violence*:

Men have pressure placed upon them by societal values and norms to maintain a high level of invulnerability. Historically, men have been indoctrinated that being a man means being strong, that they do not discuss feelings or seek help for individual problems (2005, 13).

This statement can be applied in the Egyptian context of men and masculinities. Because men are supposed to be and look strong, avoid feelings not be considered as feminine, they might not even want to tell their stories or share their experience regarding sexual harassment. Furthermore, the term sexual harassment might not even be applied to them and the issue is considered differently: they can be harassed but not sexually. If a man is sexually harassed by another man it will imply an idea of homosexuality which might worsen his own situation if publicly known. If a man is harassed by a woman, it will mean that he is weak. In her study, also about men victims of domestic violence, Caroletta A. Shuler writes that:

Male victims have a fear of the stigma. No man wants to be considered as weak. As a result, like many crimes of intimate partner violence that has women victims, men are as equally or even more silent about this crime. (2010, 167)

While for women to use Facebook will be a way to free themselves and share their experience, it is not the same for men. I never saw a post or a message from a man writing that he was (sexually) harassed. However, many messages are written to HarassMap and Shoft Ta7rosh by men to report cases of sexual harassment they personally witnessed. This fact is in relation to the ways masculinities are built and perceived in Egypt; men are the protector of the family honor through the protection and control of female members (Nagel 1998, 254). A man cannot be a victim of harassment because it will question his virility and credibility as a man (Mulroney and Chan 2005; Schuler 2010), but he can surely report cases against others as a way to show his implication in the movement. The result is while on-line campaigns are trying to challenge gender norms and criticize patriarchal discourses, the feminization of sexual harassment is, paradoxically, also

exacerbating some masculine traits (such men protecting the female honor and virility) that also appear in the cyber-space. Some gender norms (such as men protecting and helping women in need) are thus reproduced through Facebook and Social networks which reproduced a kind of inequality between genders.

6.2. Challenging Patriarchal Norms?

This feminization of the issue led me to think to which extent on-line campaigns are challenging the patriarchal discourse and gender roles in Egypt. It is clear that the notion of femininity is being openly discussed, as well as the place of women in the public sphere. Old myths and norms are being challenged: clothes, the superiority of men, women's place in the home and so on. Some aspects of masculinities are also being challenged but not easily. There is indeed a desire to challenge the common idea that men are superior to women, and men and women's equality is openly asked for. Nevertheless, by omitting to take into account how the construction of masculinities play a role in women and men's oppression, and how the notions of feminine and masculine are intertwined and shaping and opposing each others, true changes will always be limited (Nagel 1998, 251; Spike-Peterson 1999, 40).

Furthermore, as I already showed, if patriarchal discourses are widely criticized it is mostly done in secret, through Facebook, and by women who want to stay anonymous. As we saw with the example of Nour (which is similar to most cases), the father's authority is challenged, but not directly in

front of him. Counter-discourses and criticism of the patriarchal system stay within the cyber-sphere. Nobody will go and speak to Nour's father. If so, it might turn against Nour herself. It is just a generation raised surrounded by ICTs and social media that are able to criticize patriarchy in Egypt, changes are thus slower and limited.

6.3. A Female Virtual Space?

Following the previous idea, I have to question this idea that all those campaigns created a female virtual space safe for all women. On the one hand yes, because they are the only ones who can truly speak about the issue of sexual harassment and share their experience on Facebook. On the other hand no, because the campaigns are not challenging issues related to masculinities and the gender system as a whole, which are the main reasons why sexual harassment is so prevalent in Egypt.

In all Facebook pages, if the majority of followers are women, a significant number are men. They can share testimonies and support women, but some of them do not agree with the campaigns and can be the first to criticize the campaigns. There are thus negative reactions and comments written by some men that undermine this safe cyber-space women and activists have created to challenge and criticize the prevalence of sexual harassment in Egypt. All activists told me that they receive messages from people (men but also women sometimes) criticizing their work; even if globally they asserted that they were supported by men and women from all ages. However, most of the time, negative criticism will not take place openly on the Facebook pages of

Shoft Ta7rosh, HarassMap, La lel-Tahrush etc. because those pages are created to oppose sexual harassment, they support any action to tackle the issue and people who will visit the page or website will globally support their work. Negative comments will be communicated mostly by private message. If someone writes a public comment, for example blaming a woman for what happened to her, other followers of the story will automatically contradict him/her.

In that sense, HarassMap and Shoft Ta7rosh are indeed a place for women to speak freely. Negative reactions will be more visible on YouTube videos. When Tinne and her colleague Colette released their video *Creepers on the Bridge* (the video trailer of their documentary *The People's Girls*), it went viral on the internet, and according to Tinne, reactions were quite good generally in Egypt. But they also had to face some critics, especially Colette, the young woman who appears at the beginning of the video. As Tinne explained:

Colette had more trouble than me, because she is the one visible in the video, not me. Umh... And, she got pretty upset sometimes by what people were saying, you know... like... like... 'Oh, who's this girl?' Or "it's because of how she is dressed.' Or 'she looks so slutty'... 'She is asking for it...' So she felt really bad sometimes while people were saying that.

Because Colette is visible she is the one that had to face all negative reactions and comments. She is literally blamed and it affected her even if Tinne was always trying to reassure her and even if there were also good comments. The video *Creepers on the Bridge* can be found easily on YouTube, and in contrast to Shoft Ta7rosh or HarassMap, *The People's Girls* documentary is not part of a movement or NGOs. It is a personal initiative launched by two students: it is thus easier to criticize it or show disagreement.

More importantly, the criticism faced by Collette show that all social norms are transposed into the cyber-sphere: clothes, the way she appeared etc... while actually, while Colette is crossing the bridge, you cannot really see how she is dressed on the video, and you cannot see how she walks either. Again, what we see is this eternal circle of blaming the woman without acknowledging what really happened.

Regarding sexual harassment in Egypt, videos showing men interfering do not face the same reactions as those showing women. Men also have more freedom to cross gender boundaries in some cases, especially when it is related to activism. Who has the right to appear and act in the public sphere is repeated and visible within the cyber-sphere too.

As an example, in the video "*The campaign 'Harassing the Harassers' arrests harassers in Down town*",³⁰ a group of young men go in the city center of Cairo to catch publicly harasser and shame them, nobody is judging the young men because of their clothes or their appearance. On the contrary, the first blamed will be the harassers. Men will never be criticized as much as women; and they will not have the same experience as women. It is easier for men to cross some gender boundaries and then share it in the cyber-sphere later on. In the YouTube video "*Interesting experiment in Egypt: a young man dresses as a woman, goes in the street and gets harassed*",³¹ Waleed Hammad, a young actor, disguises himself into a woman (once as a woman unveiled and then veiled) and walk in the street of Cairo's city center to

³⁰ Original name in Arabic: "hamala et-tahrush bel mutaharesheen ta2bad mutaharesheen wast el-beled"

³¹ Original name in Arabic: "tagreba muthira fe masr - Shab yertady zay fatah we yenzil ash-shara' we yatam tahrush beh"

experience sexual harassment. He then talks about what he felt, how he was scared sometimes and how he would not like to live like that every day. Even if the initiative was launched by young activists and filmmakers in order to show the scale of sexual harassment in Egypt, the result is that a man speaks about women's suffering. As we saw with the example of Collette, for whom the overall goal of the video was the same -to denounce sexual harassment- Waleed is not criticized for his clothes or blamed for the way he might have walked in the street. On the contrary, by disguising himself as a woman, his experience is taken for granted and his opinion might be seen as a kind of "expertise", more convincing than what women say. Yet, the fact to disguise himself into a woman allows him to cross gender boundaries which forces other men to look at the issue of sexual harassment through a man's gaze.

Once again, we see an initiative that is double-edge: while it silenced women's voices and experiences; this can also have positive consequences and raise awareness for a number of people looking at the video on YouTube by showing an unusual experience challenging gender roles and also masculinities.

Again, because men have more ability and freedom to act within the public sphere, and because they belong to a more powerful category than women, it is easier for them to criticize and cross gender boundaries, or also to act publicly against harassment (also because they are from the same category of the harassers). The result is that the YouTube's cyber-space is divided: men acting (active and more visible), women speaking (passive and less visible). The result becomes the same as in the physical public sphere, the

cyber-space is mostly occupied by men while women are relegated to the second rank, even if cyber-space also give them many opportunities.

6.4. Facebook as a Tool for Social Control

While I stated until now that Facebook became a place for women to speak about their experience of sexual harassment, it does not mean that Facebook is a liberating platform. On the contrary, in some cases it can be used as a tool for social control, thus limiting the benefits it might bring to women. This social control can be exercised by your friends or relatives, even if you own parents are not part of your Friends list. The best example is the one of Sara. Sara is a divorced woman, 38 years old, veiled, a mother of two kids, who took part in the 2011 protests, and then in the protest against the Muslim Brother in June 2013. She follows campaigns against sexual harassment in Egypt, has assisted in some public events and even knows some activists personally. Following her words:

I blocked all my family on Facebook. Why? I am... I am a woman alone. Since 2011 I speak about politics, and I went to the protests. I went to throw stones in the streets. Some women saw it [on Facebook] and started to tell my mother, 'Sara is insulting, this is wrong.' And then the Muslim Brother came, I am against them, so I shared posts against them. And again, one woman in particular called my mother and told her 'Samar is against Muslim Brother. She is insulting them, this is not good!' (...)

So I stopped speaking about politics and I begun to share songs and love poetry. And this same woman asked my mother: 'Sara wants to get married? She is speaking about love. Why is she speaking about that?'

With the example of Sara we can see that she is not free on Facebook. Whatever she does or shares, she is controlled, criticized and judged by other

women who are going to repeat what she is doing to her mother. Facebook, while allowing her to learn about sexual harassment it is also controlling her. As a woman, it is not respectable for her to go to the protests or insult politicians. To tell her mother is thus a way to bring her back to her place. Because of what happened to her, Sara is very critical of Facebook. Regarding comments on Shoft Ta7rosh or other Facebook pages, she can see that comments are very supportive but as she cleverly stated: people will not react in the same way if the same happens in the real life in front of them: “if it is in reality, people will not dare to support [the woman harassed].” According to her, the Facebook community in Egypt today is very different than the reality:

The Facebook community in Egypt makes you want to live the life you dream of, but you cannot live it in reality. There is some people who in Facebook in a certain way and in real life in a different way.

For Sara, the campaigns on Facebook are utopic, even when she admits that they can give hope and courage to women. According to her, what is happening in the cyber-space will never happen in public spaces, because in “reality” things are different. The criticism of patriarchy and gender roles stays in cyber-space, and even in cyber-space criticisms stays within Facebook.

6.5. Cyber Harassment

The last topic I will elaborate on now is cyber-harassment. Cyber-harassment is the paradox of all on-line campaigns that have been launched since the beginning of the Revolution. While cyber-space became a place to fight harassment, it is also a place where girls are sexually harassed.

Harassment is really prevalent on Facebook. All women I interviewed told me that they were harassed on Facebook. Strangely enough, some told me that most of the time it was not really harassment. I consider that this statement depends on your own experience of Facebook.

The way harassment is perceived on Facebook is a paradox. If somebody tries to flirt directly in the streets many will see that as a form of sexual harassment. But Facebook is also the place where men and women can speak to each other when they cannot do it in public. The women told me that many times, they receive messages in the “Others” box from men that just want to speak with them. In that case, they do not consider it as “real” harassment. I consider that this difference of perception is made by the physical barrier that is the cyber-sphere: through Facebook women do not feel directly threatened, they do not feel somebody has crossed into their personal intimacy as opposed to with direct contact. The “Others” messages’ box is not directly appearing in your Facebook account. There are no notifications displayed on your account and it can even take few days before you realize that somebody sent you a message. Also, if women feel less threatened this is due to the possibility that you can easily block somebody on Facebook while you cannot always get rid of the same person easily in the streets. Sexual harassment is not directly touching or affecting you. You can easily ignore it and avoid reading the message. Again, from the speech of the female respondents, I found this idea of safety behind the screen and within cyber-space, as if nobody can actually harm you.

There is, however, a big difference between street harassment and cyber-harassment. According to Esraa:

In the others messages one asked me 'Do you love sex?' I didn't reply and then he sent me a different message 'I love your boobs'. One day I got harassed from a guy and he said like 'I love to be a slave, just take as your dog. I will lick your fingers'. (...) In the streets they can look at your boobs, and say a good word or a bad word, but on Facebook they will say it frankly... Maybe because the shy barrier is gone.

The last part of what Esraa said is essential to understand what is different with cyber-harassment. There is no limit, and there is no pure control on Facebook. On Facebook, somehow, you can do what you want in private messages: nobody is supposed to see it except the receiver and the harasser. The sexual character of harassment is exacerbated on Facebook, there is no shame and no social restraint. While in public harassers will also face social barriers: they will not say sexual things too loud and/or they will not show off their penises in a crowded space. Even if during the last decades sexual harassment came to be seen as normal in Egypt (Ilahi 2009); there are still limits to what forms of sexual harassment are acceptable or not within the society but also the fear of other passerby that can see what you are doing. As a result, paradoxically, while women feel safer and freer in the cyber-sphere, harassers do, too!

For example, while I was doing the interview with Fathy, he and Janit received a message from a woman saying that she was being harassed on Facebook by a man that sent her a picture of his penis. She attached the picture in her message (the picture can be seen below after it has been censored by activists from Shoft Ta7tosh and posted back online). As said before, this man would not show off his penis in public because it will be badly perceived if seen by passerby, but on Facebook he can send a picture of it because nobody will "see" what he is doing. A lot of messages from harassers

on Facebook include pornographic images, or sexy women half naked. Facebook has thus become a way also for harassers to get around of social pressures.



Figure 4 Picture of a penis sent by a harasser to a woman³²

On the topic of Cyber-harassment, Mustapha developed an interesting strategy. He took over the Facebook account of one of his female friends who was getting harassed, and using it, he started to add all harassers as friends. On this account, there are more than 2,000 friends. The ultimate goal of this account remains for me a mystery, even he does not yet know what he exactly will do with it. Although he has a long list of names of cyber-harassers on this account (which might prove to be useful one day), he has no authority to do anything against these men. As Mustapha told me, even he can be

³² Shoft Ta7rosh's Facebook Page, posted on April 26th, 2015. Accessed September 26th, 2015. <https://www.facebook.com/Shoft.Ta7rosh/photos/pb.253938978062757.-2207520000.1443372622./704039783052672/?type=3&theater>

“disgusted” by what he reads. He stated that cyber-harassment is “dirtier”.³³ According to Mustapha, cyber-harassers are not the same on-line and off-line: “if you see them in real-life, they are really *respectful* people, but on the internet or Facebook they are different.” This difference is not appearing publicly. When I checked with him and with Janit some Facebook accounts of cyber-harassers, it is hard to imagine that these men are cyber-harassers. Their Facebook pages, in most of cases are full with extract from the Koran. They appear as religious people, full of knowledge. And here again we see the paradoxes of Facebook and how the private and public are blurred (Barnes 2006; West et al. 2009). Facebook is just an illusion of what people are. We see only what they want to show us, not what they really are. While the same can be said of people in real life, it is even harder to see the true nature of people online.

6.6. Conclusion

In this chapter I tried to problematize on-line campaigns by showing that even if women succeeded in creating a female-friendly virtual space, the cyber-sphere as a whole remains male-dominated. I argued that, even if it can be a safer place for women to resist patriarchy and challenge gender roles, the cyber-sphere is indeed male dominated and has its limitations that can, in some cases, affect negatively some women. However, as I showed with the example of Waleed Hammad, who disguised himself as a woman to

³³ “Awsakh” (meaning literally “dirtier” in English) is the term that was used by Mostapha during the interview. It comes from the name “waskh” which means “dirty” in Arabic. In Egyptian dialect, “Enta wasikh” (“you are dirty”) is often used as an insult against people with wrong sexual behaviors. Then when Mostapha says “awsakh” it has a sexual connotation, meaning that sexual harassment is much worst on-line.

experience sexual harassment, cyber-space can be a place where gender roles and identities can be challenged even by young men in order to promote social changes in favor of women (by showing their suffering, and promoting a change in the conceptualization of masculinities). I also showed that the cyber-sphere, if used in order to fight sexual harassment, is in the same time a space where women can get harassed. This is the paradox of the cyber-sphere: while giving new opportunities and giving the ability for women to speak about their own experience of sexual harassment in the public sphere and resist patriarchal authority, the same space will free harassers from social pressures and restraint, thus making sexual harassment “dirtier” and harder to control. Yet, as shown with the example of Mustapha and Janit, activists are the first to be aware of this issue and are still creating strategies to combat it.

7. Conclusion

During the 2011 Revolution in Egypt and the three years of political instability that followed, men and women fought side by side, asking for freedom and justice. However, the participation in the Revolution did not have the same consequences for men and women. By going to the protests and openly challenging a dictatorial regime, women crossed the limits imposed on their gender and were soon punished for that (Radsch 2012). As soon as the protests began, attacks of a sexual nature (gang rapes, mob assaults and harassment etc.) targeting female protesters started, first by Mubarak's political forces and then by random male mobs, which aimed at excluding women from the public sphere and delegitimizing their presence in public spaces. If mob attacks of a sexual nature targeting women already happened before 2011 and sexual harassment was already prevalent in Egypt (Amar 2011, 314; Ebaid 2008; Ilahi 2009, 59), both issues are said to have increased dramatically after the Revolution.

The 2011 Revolution has brought many changes in Egypt that might not be visible at first sight, and in this thesis I aimed to highlight some of these changes. By asking how women and organizations use social media and cyber-activism in order to fight sexual harassment and also challenge gender norms and patriarchal discourses, I aligned my thesis with the work of others scholars on the topic of cyber-activism and cyber-feminism in Egypt and the Arab world during the Arab Spring (ElTantawy and Wiest 2011; Khamis and Vaughn 2011; Radsch 2012, Stephan 2013) to probe that women in Egypt, with the help of new NGOs, groups and Facebook-based activism started to

respond to these virulent attacks targeting female protesters and to denounce the prevalence of sexual harassment. Those new campaigns pose a challenge in both the way we have to think and analyze feminism in Egypt (and the Arab World) after the Arab Spring (Sorbera 2014).

This research is based on fifteen interviews and a study of the new on-line campaigns against sexual harassment in Egypt launched in the last semester of 2012. Throughout this thesis I have shown that the use of social media changed the dynamics of activism in Egypt by offering new original and more attractive means for collective action to young women. I argued that the use of social media in the new on-line campaigns gave new opportunities to activists and women to challenge gender roles, criticize patriarchy and the state in Egypt within cyber-space, by allowing women to break taboos without disrupting openly gender roles in public spaces. Then, Stephan's statement (2013, 2) that cyber-feminism in the Arab world allows women to further their political participation whilst still being in the acceptable parameters of what patriarchy allows them to do, is the key of the success of these new campaigns, mostly based on-line.

Social media helped to create a sense of shared identity through the fight for a common cause (Puente 2011, 344) in which everybody interested can participate if he/she wishes too. By blurring traditional notions of private and public (Barnes 2006; West et al. 2009), social media created a virtual space, where exchanges between activists and supporters of the campaigns are direct and mutual. A sense of equality and shared intimacy is thus created, favoring women's participation. In that sense, Facebook is an important tool for activists and NGOs fighting against sexual harassment as it offers a safe

compromise between public and private by allowing women to speak and share their experience with other Facebook users while staying anonymous, that is to say, without the fear of public scandals. As a result within cyber-space, notions surrounding femininity and gender expectations regarding women are openly challenged and debated. Within cyber-space, myths and false ideas surrounding sexual harassment given as a justification for its prevalence are destroyed. New discourses are created and challenge patriarchy, as well as the place given to women in Egyptian society by asserting women's equality and right to walk freely in public spaces.

Radsch (2012, 17) writes that cyber-activism allows women to play a role and participate to the campaigns without physically going to the streets. And while I could verify this fact during my research, it is also highly problematic as women mostly remain spectators and not actors of those campaigns. Thus, cyber-activism has significant limitations on how both women and activists can truly interfere in the public sphere and occupy public spaces. Activists themselves are limited in what they are allowed to do in public spaces. The example of the repression of members of groups such as Tahrir Bodyguard and OP-Anti-SH clearly shows that most activists' actions are also confined within the cyber-sphere, where the threat for the state is only partial and contained into a virtual space. As a result, patriarchy and gender roles are only challenged within a specific place in cyber-space. Actions allowed by the state within the public sphere are limited to awareness raising in the streets. Nevertheless, there are some opportunities given to women to break some gender roles by doing some masculine activities (through biking or learning self-defense) in order to change their attitude in public spaces and aimed at

giving them more self-confidence. But in those cases women are the first ones to impose limits and reassert some gender values on themselves by fear of the consequences it might have for them later on.

While we can say that in general the campaigns, through Facebook-based activism, indeed created a safe cyber-space for women to speak, discuss and help each other, we cannot deny that in some cases the cyber-sphere affected negatively some of them. As said by Radsch (2012, 5) the cyber-space is a “virtual public sphere”, which means notions of gender and power relations are reproduced within it. In the case of sexual harassment in Egypt, it is especially visible on YouTube where we see that men have more facility and more freedom to act and speak for a cause than women. Men and women do not face the same critics when it comes to denounce sexual harassment. Nevertheless, the prevalence of cyber-harassment on Facebook also shows that even on Facebook women are bound to codes of conducts imposed on their gender. The issue of cyber-harassment is a paradox in the case of this research. While Facebook proves to be a place where women can get rid of some social pressures, the same is true for cyber-harassers. All activists acknowledge the issue of cyber-harassment and both HarassMap and Shoft Ta7rosh include it in their reports, however, at the state level and in mainstream media, the issue is still ignored.

In this thesis I already spoke about some of the limitations of cyber-activism and the use of social media in Egyptian society. When speaking about computer and social media use in Egypt, no one should forget to take into account social class. Egypt is a country with little internet penetration (Kalathil and Boas 2003) and the majority of women do not have access to the right

type of technology to participate in the campaigns (Radsch 2012, 17). All interviewees are middle-class and all have a good level of education and went to university. In that sense, if a lower-class woman finds a way to access Facebook to contact Shoft Ta7rosh, her experience of those groups will be completely different from what my respondents told me. Also, my research was based in Cairo, that is to say the biggest and most populated area of Egypt.

All the organizations I spoke about in this thesis are also working in other Egyptian cities where living conditions are different, impacting the way women experience and perceive harassment. Lastly, all the groups and NGOs mentioned in this study are relatively new, and are initiatives launched by young revolutionaries and few of them (if any) are not gender experts neither have they been trained on any kind of gender-based violence. As said by Amal, “we hope that the movement against sexual harassment will not die”. Amal is scared that now that the protests ceased in Egypt, the interest in the issue of sexual harassment will die with the Revolution. No answer can be given to Amal, but until now the number of followers of Shoft Ta7rush and HarassMap has continued to increase. Another branch of Shoft Ta7rosh has been recently created in Tunisia which shows that the success and recognition of this organization is reaching further than Egypt. Further research is needed into Shoft Ta7rosh and its progress in the Arab world, it would be interesting to see how they frame sexual harassment in an Arab context, but also which new strategies they will develop later on. A study of this kind will be also important to counter western hegemonic discourses by

giving a non-western vision of sexual harassment with new and non-imported strategies.

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