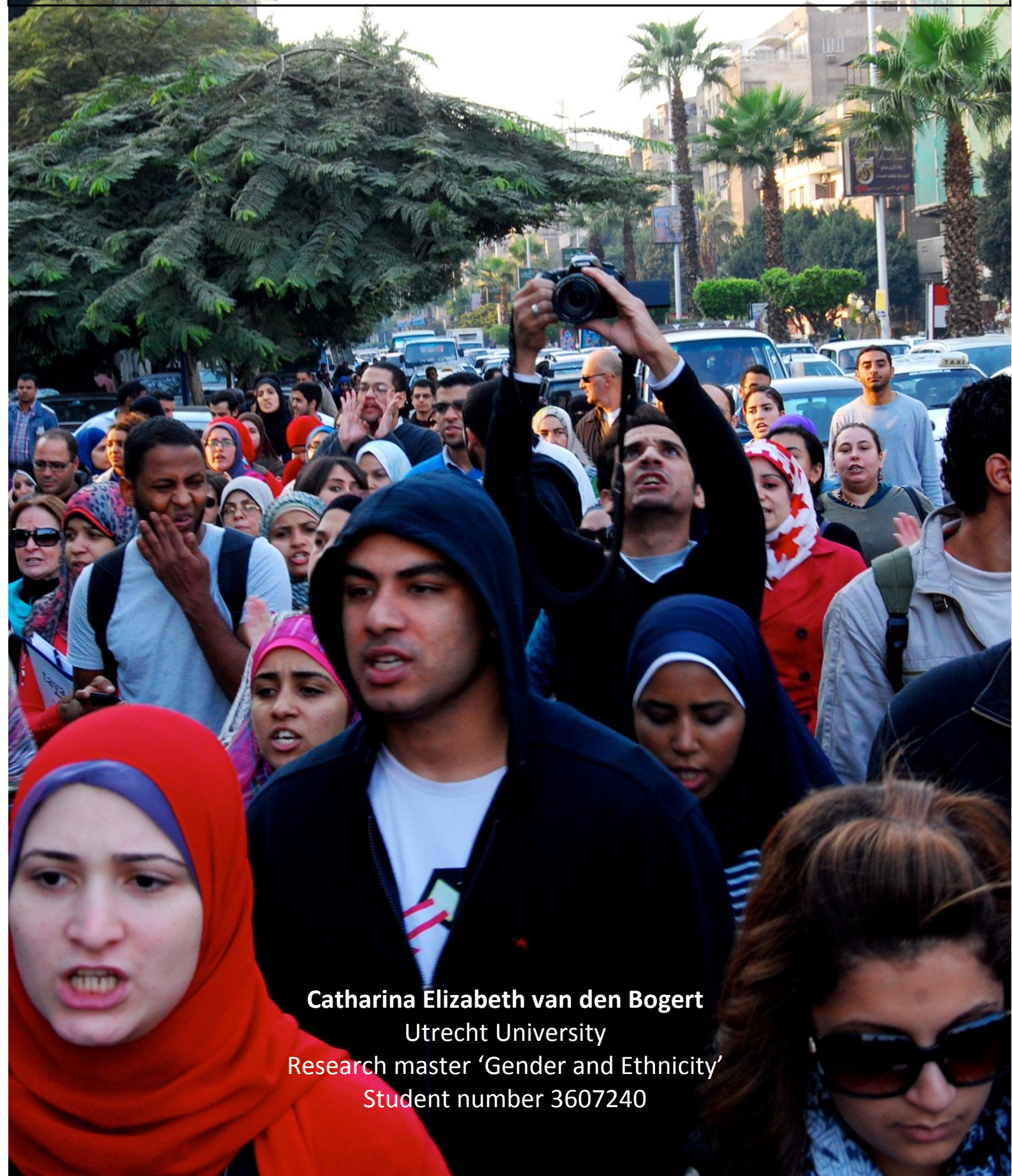


Agents of Revolution

Young women and men in Cairo: gender, religion and change



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Cover photo

No SCAF March to Tahrir – November 22, 2011

Photo taken in a march that started with 50 people and ended with thousands calling for SCAF to leave.

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Foreword

At the beginning of the year 2011, in the midst of my 2-year research master 'Gender and Ethnicity', the world was surprised by protests and revolutions in the Middle-East. I was intrigued by the images and footages live from Tahrir Square in Cairo; and the power, happiness and courage I saw among the people. I recollected my experience in Egypt a couple of years earlier, and soon I decided that my master's research should be about this '25 of January revolution' in Egypt, as it is named after its first day of protest. I wanted to know more about this revolution, how did it change their lives and their country? When I finally entered Egypt in December 2011 I could not think that I would love this country and its people that much.

Without my friends who shared with me their stories of the revolts, Tahrir, the marches, and the violence; this thesis could not have been written. Therefore, I thank Ramy and Ramy for taking me to Tahrir many times, for your funny comments and willingness to always explain things to me and tell me about the revolution, the clashes and political developments. I thank Hoda for the evenings that I could pass by, your stories and the delicious food; Salma for your endless energy and amazing anecdotes; Radwa for your exuberance during the protest we went at Tahrir Square and during the interview, Mohamed for making time to tell me about the Salafyo Costa movement and your frankness; Riham and Esraa for the great times at Cairo University and the fun at the women's protest; and Amr and Arsenios for telling me about your doubts, beliefs and experiences of the revolution. Also, my lovely flatmates Liza, Nilufer and Eva were very important for me; you gave me many contacts, fun and support during my stay in Cairo. Also, I want to thank my friends, family, and supervisor Anne-Marie Korte back home in the Netherlands for their advice and support in the process of this research.

INTRODUCTION

Revolutionary Women and Change in the Middle-East:

Theoretical Investigations

On the 28th [of January 2011], there's a friend from the 25th, I knew him from 25th of January, then I was late, and I went to the square straight away. I was late so it was good. Very early they [the police forces] started to do some violence. And they stopped for a while and they started again late. So I went the square, normally, in the march with a few people. Suddenly it's black! Police! With water cannons and rubber bullets and stuff like this. I met that guy there. He was a friend of some of my friends and he was living close to me, so we went home together. Then I went back on 28th. And he passed away. He got shot. A straight shot.

You know, Kathrine, I've never been in any march, in any protest... only one for Palestine. When I arrived the 25th, it was dark, it was night. And there were many gatherings of people, and you know... some were chanting and singing. Some of my friends were standing in a very big group in the street side just in front of Nile Palace bridge. So when I entered, when I went to the square it was just people protesting. The violence was out, it was maybe in some really far away area. So, when I entered I saw it's safe! But when they started to come from these streets, with water cannons, it was for me that time, it was a very big thing to happen, you know! Like big tanks, water, I thought everybody here will die! No joke, you know. No joke, really. So you can hear rubber bullets, you can hear shooting, you can hear the sirens. The ambulance cars and you can hear screams and shouts and people were really shocked. And the water it was really cold, haha. Then, we just run, run. And I go home and told my mother: 'There was a really big war! And they were killing everybody and everybody. And they are really crazy! This guy [Mubarak] will never stay again!' She said: 'I told you not to go!' My mother told me not to go, not to be in problems. I told her: 'No mom, this guy cannot stay anymore.'

Then the 28th, it's a Friday, a good day. But there are no telephones, there's no signal at the telephone, no internet, nothing. So I went down, and I met that guy. Because he's living close to me and on 25th he drove me home when they were shooting. So I took my Pepsi and I took my mask¹, I didn't took my phone, and I went there and I found him in some supermarket. The supermarket is half opened for people to have water and drinks and stuff. And there was tear gas in the streets, so we went to some balcony... to some families, they said: 'come up!' and I washed my face from the tear gas. There are many people and many security forces. We went from Agouza, near the Nile. Then, we kept walking and in some place we were stopped... just we couldn't move because the police was closing this area. So we stayed there and you know... there came police from here, police from there, so you're inside! And tear gas from everywhere so you're just inside. Well, so as usual, they started to come from the street sides, and people started to go back to the narrow streets. And they are shooting in the narrow streets in Agouza! Where there are families, homes, balconies and there's a girl that died in her balcony. She didn't join the revolution! And she's a martyr now! So they started to come from these side streets, so we kept going going going going, and we went back to the street to Agouza. Yeah and in this street at this time this guy died. He was really careful. He thought that maybe it's his responsibility to take care of me and my friends. And sometimes I found him asking 'are you ok? Do you want Pepsi to drink or to wash?' You know, he was a really beautiful person.

We were running together so I just looked at him and I found him lying... Then it was the first time to get hit in my back. He died and some people came, run to him, and they took him and carried him in some building or something. And then I hide, I hide in some building corner. There were really so many police in the street side. I didn't want to... I just didn't want them to arrest us. But they came again and hit my back and everybody's back. Like we're dogs or rats or anything.

- Heba

In this story we see how Heba, one of the revolutionists I met in Cairo, tells how she experienced the first days of protest in Tahrir (Liberation) Square and the marches through

¹ Protestors used gas masks to protect them from the tear gas, and Pepsi or coke as antidote to the gas.

the city. Her experience, and the experiences of other young upper class Cairenes form the core of this research. I will explore how their participation in the revolution² has changed themselves, their daily lives and Egyptian society. This revolution has started on the 25th of January 2011 in Tahrir Square in the centre of Cairo, and continues till today. The Egyptian revolution is sometimes referred to as the revolution of the youth, or as the Facebook and Twitter revolution (Winegar, 2011); this, however, does not catch the whole picture. Although the first protests were initiated by political youth movements; after a couple of days great parts of Egyptian society protested against police brutality, the emergency law that gave president Hosni Mubarak extra power, corruption, the lack of free elections and free speech, inflation and the high unemployment. So it was not only the youth that demanded the fall of the regime, great parts of Egyptian society participate(d) in the revolution. The youth, however, continues to play a great role by organizing mass protests and awareness campaigns against the brutal regime of the military forces (SCAF) that are now in power. This research is about these young agents of the Egyptian revolution and their experiences in Tahrir Square, the clashes with the regime, and the changes in society and their daily lives.

After Tunisia, Egypt was the second country where a dictator resigned after days of protest by millions of people in what is now called the Arab Spring. Egypt, the country that was generally seen by Europe and the United States as the most stable in the Middle East, with a strong leader allied to the United States. Under the surface, however, society was not so stable any more, and especially among the young people there was a great dissatisfaction

² It is debatable whether the events in Egypt can be described as revolution. However, the people I spoke with in Egypt usually use this term to describe what is happening. Hamid Dabashi (2012) argues that the revolutions of the Arab Spring are not revolutions as we used to understand; as a radical and sudden shift of political power and social and economic restructuring. But instead of denying the events in the Arab Spring and in Egypt as 'revolution', we should reconsider that concept and definition and 'understand it anew' (Dabashi, 2012, p. 5).

with politics, economic opportunities and their daily life in general (Osman, 2011). The youth of Egypt constitute a great part of the population, roughly 70 per cent is under the age of 35. In this demographic group, also among the educated people, there is a high percentage of unemployment: 21 per cent up to the age of 30. This makes it impossible for many young Egyptians to marry and start an own family; and thus frustration about their personal life is added to frustration about the corrupt government, and the lack of freedom of speech and of free elections (Osman, 2011). When the revolution started in Tunisia and dictator Ben Ali was unseated, this accelerated the waves of protest in Egypt that were already going on against the regime and it resulted in the decisive events from January 25th to February 11th 2011, when Mubarak was ousted as president of Egypt.

As many others, I was interested in the specific experiences of women, as they -and their bodies- became a significant and disputed factor in the Egyptian revolution (Fahmy, 2012). For example there were virginity tests committed by SCAF to arrested female revolutionists; and the brutal violence used against men and women in the uprisings of November 2011, where a female protestor was dragged off her clothes and beaten by the military. In reaction to that, there was a popular women's protest in December 2011. How have young female protestors experienced their bodily presence in the square, and how is this related with prevailing gender norms and conceptions in Egyptian society? About 82% of the women in Cairo have experiences of being harassed, sexually assaulted or raped (Shoukry and Hassan, 2008). However, during the protests at Tahrir Square, many women announced that they could participate without suffering from sexual violence. Can this revolution be the catalyst in changing existing gender relations and norms in Egypt? And if yes, how?

Yet feminist theorists have pointed out that often after a war, revolt or struggle for (colonial) independence – where women are equally participating as men – traditional and restrictive gender roles are reintroduced again (White, 2007; Droeber, 2005; Moghadam, 2003; Badran, 1998; Haddad, 1985). According to Aaronnette White (2007), participation in war against colonial or political oppression does not necessarily liberate women, but precisely reinforce patriarchal oppressive politics. How can the recent events in Egypt be interpreted in these ongoing debates about women, gender and change in the Middle East? Often these discussions are placed within an Islamic and patriarchal structure, where these structures are seen as repressive or subjugating for women. Images of mass Friday prayers with men and women in Tahrir Square as part of the protests suggested me that there should be other, less repressive approaches to gender, religion and change in the Middle East available.

I will now outline this theoretical debate on gender, religion and change where my research will be situated in, followed by the specific research questions I aim to answer and the outline of this thesis.

Women's liberation and the Algerian revolution: Patriarchy and Paradox

In the Algerian revolution of 1954-1962 women played a critical role in resisting the French occupation and the strive for independence. Postcolonial scholar Frantz Fanon suggests that this participation has changed gender norms and relations in Algerian society during and after the revolution (Fanon, 1965). He was, at that time, one of the first scholars to give specific attention to the gendered aspects of revolution: 'Fanon broke new ground in suggesting that revolutionary violence held transformative potential for women as well as for men' (White, 2007, p. 860). The wearing of the veil is fundamental for the construction of

his argument. The veil became, as Fanon states, 'the bone of contention in a grandiose battle' (Fanon, 1965, p. 36). It is the reflection of conceptions of gender roles: men's cloth is very heterogeneous, while women's cloth (the veil) makes them a unified homogeneous group and is crucial for the ordering of society. This was strategically used by the French colonizers: they assumed that by unveiling Algerian women, they would be able to conquer the men and the country. Therefore, wearing the veil at first was a way of resistance against French occupation. Fanon, however, was keen on seeing the changing significance and meaning of the veil during the revolution. Unlike many other theorists, he did not regard the veil as an unchanging object with a fixed status, but acknowledged the importance of the veil and the women who did and did not wear it for the revolution. For, the attitude towards the veil changed as the liberation struggle continued: 'Upon the outbreak of the struggle for liberation, the attitude of the Algerian woman, or of native society in general, with regard to the veil was to undergo important modifications' (Fanon, 1965, p. 47).

The veil was not only a means of resistance against French occupation, it was also the perfect hiding place for bombs, weapons and written messages. When the French occupiers discovered this strategy, the National Liberation Front (Front de Libération Nationale, FLN) adopted the French goal of 'Europeanizing Algerian women' by changing clothes: previously veiled Algerian women now dressed like and thus were seen by the French as European women. This made them easily pass the French military checkpoints, without being checked on carrying bombs or weapons. Unveiled 'European' Algerian women were seen as harmless and as supporting French penetration in Algerian society (Fanon, 1965). So then, the meaning of the veil as resistance changed and not wearing the veil became a form of resistance and revolution, because it enabled Algerian women to participate in the war. Fanon points to the importance of the body in this process: 'The Algerian woman who walks

stark naked into the European city relearns her body, re-establishes it in a totally revolutionary fashion. This new dialectic of the body and of the world is primary in the case of one revolutionary woman' (Ibid., p. 59). When the French military discovered this new practice, the veil appeared again for unseen carrying weaponry or packages, and women had to use their bodies like there was nothing hiding inside their clothes (Fanon, 1965). So not only the veil, but the whole women's body became a means of resistance and of revolution. However, having attention to women's bodies in revolutions doesn't mean one has an accurate gendered analysis of these bodies, revolution and the changes in society. This becomes clear in the following point Fanon makes.

In a footnote he emphasises the liberating politics of Algerian women participating in the war: 'Involved in the struggle, the husband or the father learns to look upon the relations between the sexes in a new light. The militant man discovers the militant woman, and *jointly they create new dimensions for Algerian society*' (Fanon, 1965, p. 60, emphasis added). Algerian men are not jealous anymore if their wives are going out alone in the streets, and the culture of fear between a woman and an unknown (military) man has disappeared, Fanon furthermore argues. This might be true for the time during the revolution, but, these new dimensions Fanon speaks of never came in the case of Algeria. Social equality for Algerian women soon came an illusion rather than political implementation after Algerian independence in 1962, as Woodhull (2003) states. Women's intended social and political equal status proved to be problematic within the re-introduced Islamic family law, which poses restrictions on women's appearance in public and private life. Woodhull argues that it is not just an unhappy exclusion of women from national life and equal rights, rather 'women's exclusion increasingly *constitutes* the Algerian nation after independence, just as their veiling – at once a social practice and a powerful symbol – plays a

central role in producing and maintaining both Algeria's difference from its colonial oppressor and the uneasy coalition of heterogeneous and conflicting interests under a single national banner' (Woodhull, 2003, p. 569, emphasis original).

So, where women during the revolution played a critical and indispensable equal role, after independence their subjugation under Islamic family law is equally critical and indispensable for building up the new national identity and society. The constitution of national identity depends and is built on the exclusion of women; after the revolution they are denied as agents with resistance. Therefore, Woodhull (2003) argues, feminists cannot simply assert that women should equal participate in national life, since the national life is constituted by their exclusion. Which analysis and outcomes of revolution do we see in other countries?

Revolutionary Outcomes: Emancipation or Modesty?

Valentine Moghadam (2003) studied revolutions in the Middle East and beyond on the centrality of women's participation and the possible change in women's legal status and social positions it caused. She argues that it is important to have attention to gender in revolutions, since the changes in societal values and ideologies that accompany revolutionary transformations undoubtedly change gender relations and vice versa. She divided the revolutions in two different types: one where women's emancipation is a major goal or outcome, and one where family roles with a normative modesty for women are a major goal or outcome. The revolution in Algeria is placed in the second type, where women's visibility and participation in public life is restricted; while the Kemalist revolution in Turkey and the revolution in Yemen are emancipatory for women. This means that women are part of productive forces, liberated from patriarchal controls and addressed

within a discourse of sexual equality. In which one of the categories a revolution will eventually be placed is determined by economic, political and ideological factors, as well as the degree of women's participation and agency (Moghadam, 2003).

Although I agree with Moghadam's argument that gender relations shape revolutions and revolutions can change gender relations, norms and values; I think her separation of revolutions into two types is too simplistic. If we ask how gender relations change and are changed by revolutions, a choice between 'emancipation for women' and 'family roles for women' is not realistic. The Egyptian revolution does not fit in either of these categories Moghadam is proposing. During the revolution, Egyptian society had not one common opinion towards women's role in the revolution as emancipatory or traditional. Nor is the outcome easily placed in either categories. Rather, what the revolution has meant for women is highly ambiguous and still contested. There were and are different opinions among men and women about women's participation in the revolution, as well as different and contradicting meanings within men and women themselves. At the same time, women's participation in the revolution is seen as normal and natural, but also as contested and ambiguous, particularly in relation to women's bodies. I will discuss more on these issue in the course of this thesis. For now I want to show that Moghadam's work is reducing the question of gender and revolution to a cartography whereby a revolution is either emancipatory for women, or restrictive as women are relegated to family roles again. We have seen this division already in the discussion of women and the Algerian revolution, where Fanon saw the revolution as emancipatory and the feminist critics I have discussed mention the restrictive outcomes of the revolution for women.

Therefore, I argue, other questions would be more relevant, for example how this ambivalence towards women's participation in revolutions is constructed; what this tells us

about the involvement of the body in the revolution and how this in turn transformed gender relations and norms. Also, attitudes towards women's roles are not one and the same but change over time, related to the events taking place in the revolution. If we focus on these questions, a dichotomous and dualistic view can be avoided, in order to give more space to local realities and differences within revolutions, societies and women.

The construction of dichotomous categories regarding gender and the Middle East is often based on religious matters. We have already seen that religion, or more specifically, religious law is an important factor for the position women have in public life. Woodhull (2003) has argued that in the case of Algeria women were excluded from public and national life because of Islamic law. In other debates on gender, revolution or social change the relation with religion is also very typical.

This debate is often framed in a dualistic way: modern and 'Western' versus traditional and 'Islam'. Islam and tradition thereby are seen as static and unchangeable, with a low social and religious position of women. For example, in *Islam, gender and social change* Esposito and Haddad (1998) describe processes of change in the Middle East as 'adopting Western institutions and ideas' (Westernizing) or 'modernizing', whereby these two terms are assimilated into one and the same process. The 'pre-modern' time of the Middle East is hereby seen as something static and just informed by (religious) tradition. These terms, tradition, modernization, the 'West' and religion are intentionally or unintentionally connoted with the colonialist and orientalist practice of representing the West as secular, modern and enlightened and the Middle East as religious, traditional and backward. As in-between of these extremes, Esposito introduces Islamic modernism, which is 'attempted to bridge the gap between the more isolated position of many religious leaders (ulama) and more Western secular Muslim modernists' (1998, p. xiv). Here Esposito

attempts to nuance the opposition of modern and religious by adding Islamic modernism as in between. Yet, in this way he does not deconstruct the opposition, but rather articulates it by adding something that is a 'combination' of the two extremes, but the binary itself is maintained.

Esposito and Haddad (1998) and Keddie (2007) argue that due to this Islamic modernism and to Western influence in the twentieth century Muslim women's lives significantly changed, mainly in the field of education, employment opportunities and voting rights. However, Islamic family law was not replaced by Western institutions, so issues of marriage, divorce and inheritance remained 'historically intact', as Esposito (1998, p. xv) describes it. This suggests that there is a static, authentic situation of tradition in Islam. Although Esposito precisely wants to discuss the relationship between tradition and change, as he states in the following quote: 'Critical to the process [of transformation] is the question of the relationship of tradition to change' (Esposito, 1998, p. xxvii); he still remains tied to the dichotomies of East-West, tradition-modern and religion-secular, whereby tradition and religion is seen as static and modernity and secularism as sources for change. In these dichotomies religion is seen as a solely political restrictions for women and as a 'return' to a tradition where women were subordinated (Jansen, 1994); hence the family role type of revolution of Moghadam's division, against the 'modern' women's emancipation revolution. This representation of Middle-Eastern women by 'Western' scholars resonates with the colonial attitude of France towards Algerian society and population in the years of colonization (Fanon, 1965, p. 41).

As I mentioned before, other feminist theorists have also pointed out that often after a war, revolt or struggle for (colonial) independence – where women are equally participating as men – traditional and restrictive gender roles are reintroduced again (White,

2007; Droeber, 2005; Moghadam, 2003; Badran, 1998; Haddad, 1985; Al-Ali, 2012). But are these the only things we can see, when we study gender and social change in the Middle East? Is there just subjugation for women after revolution? This doesn't resonate with the feelings many women have in Egypt now. Therefore I will focus on which other questions we should ask in relation to gender, revolution and social change.

Daily Life as a way to study Revolution

In this research, I want to approach the revolution and changes in society via the daily life of young protestors. Julia Droeber, in her research on young women and religion in Jordan, also focuses on women's experiences of everyday life. During her fieldwork she discovered that for women's religious experiences 'it is generally not an "either/or", but often a combination of repression and empowerment, and always a clear "it depends", i.e. namely on time, place, and circumstances' (Droeber, 2005, p. 8). By focussing on the daily life experiences of religion, she shows the oppressive *and* empowering aspects of religious behaviour and religious belief for young women in Jordan. Furthermore, she discovers that behaviour and conceptions are not easily divided in 'secular' or 'religious', the dichotomy scholars so easily make. Rather, she says: 'I had to listen to how these young women define religion for themselves' (Ibid., p. 10). In that way, she is able to escape the dichotomous thinking of opposites like religious-secular, traditional-modern and East-West. In her book, she discusses family relationships, upbringings, religious practices, dress and education. I think this approach to religion, gender and social change via daily life will be also productive to analyse the experiences of gender and religion in the recent uprisings in Egypt.

Also Lara Deeb (2006) discusses religion among women in Lebanon in the context of their daily life, as she argues that religion is found everywhere; in the streets, balconies,

cafés, kitchens, in conversations and on television. The daily life is till now not very present in the academic debates on gender and social change. But, by studying daily life it will become clear how gender relations and norms are lived and experienced by men and women; rather than to see these norms just as part of a patriarchal or religious structure. For in their daily lives, men and particularly women may well escape and transform these structures (Droeber, 2005 and Deeb, 2006). It might seem strange, a focus on daily life while a revolution seems so far away from that daily life. However, in this way, it is possible to see the changes and continuities it generates and the different experiences people have. Also gender relations will not be defined in oppression *or* empowerment as Moghadam (2003) and others have done; but it will be more attentive to local realities and the ambiguities young women face in their protesting and daily life during and after revolutionary times.

Above I have outlined the theoretical debate on gender, religion and change in the Middle East in which my research will be situated. I have argued that the approaches they have and the questions they ask, are not productive in studying women and men's daily experiences in social contexts. In this thesis, therefore, I want to explore which other questions and approaches would be more productive, where the ambiguous and ambivalent experiences of women and gender in the Egyptian revolution will be showed, rather than concluding that the revolution was either emancipatory for women, or family roles were reinforced. Willy Jansen (1994) argues for an approach to gender and Islam where women are not only seen as suppressed subjects to Islam, but also as active contributors to changing gender relations and religious meanings. In this research I want to show the reality of men and women in Tahrir Square during the uprisings, where they actively resist politics, and combine this with religious practices and belief. Attention to gender aspects is hereby always necessary, since

prevailing gender norms and roles influence the experience of both men and women in the square. I don't see these gender norms and religious attitudes as static and essential, but as subject to change, especially in times of social and political change as is now the case in Egypt. These changes I will particularly study by focussing on the daily life. The question I therefore want to explore is how young people's demands of political, economic and social change triggered other changes in their daily life, particularly concerning gender relations and religious practices.

This research is based on four months fieldwork in Cairo, where I spoke with many revolutionists, participated and observed during protests in Tahrir Square and where I did in depth interviews with several young revolutionists. These interviews are mainly with young people from the upper and upper middle class, and not the mass of the youth who lives in poverty and did not have any chances to higher education. As a driving force behind the revolution, this upper class youth is an interesting group to investigate. Also, these educated youth, who were very much visible via Facebook, Twitter and weblogs, is in this research the most accessible social group for me, regarding language and possibilities for interviews. I am therefore not aiming at a representation of the whole (youth) population of Egypt in the revolution, rather I want to share and analyse the experiences of some of the young persons I met, and via their story say something about the wider social context where they live in. As daily life is the key space to study this revolution, and as I am doing interviews and observations, it goes without saying my own role in the daily life of the youth I spoke with is of crucial importance for the research. A discussion of this methodology and positionality will follow in the next chapter.

Main Questions and Themes of research

In this research, I will show how religion and gender come together during the protests in Egypt to overthrow the Egyptian regime, whereas the daily life of young men and women from Egypt will be the key space to focus on the changes they experience(d) in relation to the revolution. I will focus on the everyday manifestations that the participation in the revolution had for young upper class Egyptians and the personal and social change they experienced by participating in Tahrir Square and in the violent clashes. My main research question is: how is the daily life of young Egyptian women and men influenced by their participation in the revolution, and what are the particular gendered and religious aspects of that?

This research is a very exploratory research, as on this specific situation in Egypt not much research has done yet. In that way, it can function as a start-off for further PhD research on religion, gender and social change in the uprisings in the Middle East. Also, it explores new questions that could be asked in research on gender, religion and change in the Middle-East and beyond; in order to avoid the categorizing and stereotyping already fixed that much in academia, politics and popular culture.

In chapter one I will emphasize more on these dichotomous categories and postcolonial criticism, also in relation with the uprisings in the Middle East and my own position in this research. Here I will also discuss the methodologies I used and how this shaped my research. In chapter two I discuss more in depth the 'new' generation of young Egyptians. They were the catalysts of this revolution, but also had a particular experience of the revolution and politics in Egypt. This is expressed in their continued activism in social movements. Chapter three discusses the experiences of young protestors in Tahrir Square, with its unity and differences. Through the bodily activities in the Square, people who before

never would talk with each other, felt related and united. This changed their attitude towards their country, but also their personal (bodily) boundaries. I will elaborate more on the body in chapter four, where I discuss the violence in the Egyptian revolution, the physical and symbolical consequences of this violence for bodies and the society; and the new space that has originated in Egypt since the revolution concerning women's activities and participation. In the conclusion I will discuss the social change in Egypt since the revolution, and the importance of this social change for young revolutionists and their daily life. Also, I will reflect on the questions for further research on gender, religion and social change in the Middle-East and beyond.

CHAPTER 1

The Arab Spring as End of Postcolonialism?

Methodological and Postcolonial reflections

“But can’t they study themselves?” A question I heard a few times when I was telling people in the Netherlands about my plans to do my research in Egypt. This is not just a simple question of someone who does not understand why I like it to go to Egypt for four months, but it exposes a very relevant set of questions and studies that is generally known as postcolonial criticism. The idea that European and American scholars should go to other parts of the world to study the people, habits and cultures of that place, is part of a longstanding mode of thinking, or ‘regime du savoir’ as Hamid Dabashi (2012) calls it. This regime of knowledge has particularly manifested itself during and after colonial times, today included.

As postcolonial scholars Kwok Pui-Lan (2005) and Sian Hawthorne (2009) discuss, postcolonial criticism is difficult to define, although it surely does not mean that the colonial era is over. The prefix ‘post’ rather means ‘to go beyond’ colonialism; as the analysis of colonial, neo-colonial and imperial practices. Moreover, ‘for many postcolonial critics’, Pui-Lan (2005, p. 2) argues, “‘postcolonial’ denotes [...] also a reading strategy and discursive practice that seek to unmask colonial epistemological frameworks, unravel Eurocentric logics, and interrogate stereotypical cultural representations’. This ‘reading strategy’ is also where Postcolonial criticism originated from, with Edward Said’s ground-breaking *Orientalism* in 1978. In this book, he thoroughly analyses European literature about the

nearby-East, the Orient; and argues that the Orient is not something that exists materially, but something that is constructed by Western writers. In this construction, the Orient is seen as backward and the West as superior, not only in representation but also epistemologically, as Western scholars create Eurocentric epistemological frameworks to which they held and value all cultures and societies (Said, 1995).

However, still today, these Western dominant regimes of knowledge are consciously and unconsciously incorporated in many academics. This also applies to biblical scholars, as it is a particular superior Christian West that is constructed in Western literature, biblical scholarship and theology. Also in religious studies, postcolonial criticism has had a great share in analysing the concept of religion as institution and as field of study as a Western Christian concept, uncritically applied to different 'beliefs' in non-Western countries that were analysed through a Christian framework (Pui-Lan, 2005; Hawthorne, 2009). Gender is a category inseparable from postcolonial criticism and religion. Women are often excluded from religious practices and in religious texts and subordinated to men in religious dogma; as well as gender roles and norms of sexuality that are defined by the Church. Through colonization the West has put these religious norms of gender and sexuality on new colonies, often to articulate and reinforce symbolical boundaries with Muslims, who were seen as infidels and enemies of Christianity (Pui-Lan, 2005; Dube, 2002). Consequently, Dube argues that women were doubly oppressed: by colonialism and patriarchal religion.

Not only religious institutions and scholars are guilty of a colonialist lens, also classical Western feminism often does not have an eye for significant differences between women across geographical, ethnical, racial, religious and sexual divides; as well as feminist theology that does not pay sufficient attention to the experience of non-Western women and their relation to religion (Pui-Lan, 2005; Hawthorne, 2009). Pui-Lan (2005, p. 18)

describes the practice of women missionaries in colonial times, which is today reproduced by some feminist theologians and second wave feminists: 'Although with good intentions to save the souls of "heathen" women, these women missionaries participated in "colonialist feminism" both discursively and institutionally, by propagating the impression that native women were illiterate, oppressed, and waiting for the white women to bring light to them'. In these orientalist and colonialist regimes of knowledge, there has been little attention to people's experiences other than that of 'Western' men and women. Particularly women are seen as helpless and in need of saving; there is no attention towards their position as agents or creators of their own life and religious experiences. Instead, often there is constructed a hierarchical binary, where the West is always superior to the Other. Postcolonial criticism aims to deconstruct these binaries, like West-East, religious-infidel, subject-object, enlightened-backward and sacred-secular.

Arab Spring: The end of Postcolonialism?

Dabashi (2012) discusses the field of anthropology as remnant *and* crucial factor of colonialism, where the 'orient' as community and geographical entity is produced through the 'West's ethnographic lens in order to secure West's own centrality and superiority. At the same time, Dabashi argues that the Green movement in Iran and the uprisings of the Arab Spring have marked the *end* of postcoloniality, as a delayed defiance against the dominant regimes of knowledge, in the form of colonialism, imperialism, postcolonialism and orientalism. This delayed defiance is characterized by liberation movements that are no longer placed within and engaging with postcolonial knowledge productions. For Dabashi, the postcolonial era and its knowledge productions, which are ended by the Arab Spring, are

characterized as ideological formations, where an ideological domination by 'Western' scholars over colonies is at stake.

He argues that the uprisings of the Arab Spring do not merely change socio-economic situations in its countries, but it also changes the conceptions of the 'Western' world about the 'Middle East', who finally should conclude that the Middle East does not any more exist as such.

'What we are witnessing unfold in what used to be called 'the Middle East' (and beyond) marks the end of postcolonial ideological formations – and that is precisely the principal argument informing the way this book discusses and celebrates the Arab Spring. The postcolonial did not overcome the colonial; it exacerbated it by negation. The Arab Spring has overcome them both. [...] As I write, the Arab revolutions, each with a different momentum, are creating a new geography of liberation, which is no longer mapped on colonial or cast upon postcolonial structures of domination; this restructuring points to a far more radical emancipation, not only in these but, by extension, in adjacent societies and in an open-ended dynamic' (Dabashi, 2012, p. xvii-xviii).

So the Arab Spring is not only a liberation from their tyrannical regimes, but also from a postcolonial regime of knowledge production from the (imagined and created) superior 'West' over 'the Rest' or the 'East'. Dabashi argues that through the national-transnational configurations of the uprisings the ideologies of these false binaries are distorted: 'These revolutions are collective acts of overcoming. They are crafting new identities, forging new solidarities, both within and without the 'Islam and the West' binary – overcoming once and for all the thick (material and moral) colonial divide' (Dabashi, 2012, p. xix). The achievements of the Arab Spring remap the region and create its own geography and

identity, instead of being identified through western dominant knowledge patterns. The uprisings have wiped out the idea that the Arab and Muslim world is not able to transform or to act itself. But once everyone could see this world acting, through the protests in the Squares, the marches, the speeches and the new movements, this false claim that only the 'West' has a monopoly as acting world, is disputed. Now the Arab world is not an ideological product anymore of the 'Western' world, but its own product. It is not merely a 'reaction' against European and American colonialism and imperialism, in the form of (militant) Islamism, anti-colonial nationalism and Third World socialism, but it creates its own action (Dabashi, 2012). According to Dabashi (2012), we need to interpret and analyse the revolution in its own terms, and not reduce the events to existing categories, dichotomies and clichés we already (falsely) created.

It does of course not mean that through the Arab Spring colonialism, imperialism, capitalist exploitation and domination has immediately ended; rather it generates another form of resistance according to Dabashi (2012). This is a resistance not in terms of postcolonial ideologies (like anti-colonial resistance) but one in the revolution's own terms by contesting its corrupt dictators, the social-economic situations and the demands for democracy and freedom. It is therefore characterized as a civil rights movement which articulates the problems and things in the country itself, instead of contrasting it with the imagined 'West'. In fact, Dabashi sees the Arab Spring not only as the end of postcolonial ideology, but of all ideologies. The definition of revolution therefore, needs to be changed. It is not any more a 'total' revolution where one ideology is replaced for the other, but an open-ended process of creativity and civil liberties (Dabashi, 2012).

Doing Research in the End of Postcolonialism

What do Dabashi's arguments imply for my research in Egypt, in a very postcolonial academic and geographical setting? The Arab Spring has totally changed the dominant regime of knowledge where anthropology is the main executor of, Dabashi (2012, p. 54) argues: 'What we are witnessing unfold in the Arab Spring is an epistemic emancipation from an old, domineering, dehumanizing, and subjugating geography – the geography that anthropologists have mapped out for colonialists to rule'. What then happens, I would ask Dabashi, in an anthropologist is precisely going to study this Arab Spring?

If postcolonialism really doesn't exist anymore, it also doesn't make sense anymore to position or define myself in postcolonial categories or terms like a 'Western' scholar researching the 'Arab' or 'Muslim' world. This does not mean that one's background is now out of question, as the place where one comes from, is raised and educated; influences the questions one asks and the own opinions, norms and values. But if we do not want to fall into the trap of essentialist, binary representations like native- non-native, primitive-civilised, victim-oppressor and East-West, I think it makes more sense to focus on commonalities and common grounds, rather than on these different backgrounds. 'The task is to dismantle that regime of knowledge, as the Egyptians, Tunisians, and others are dismantling the regimes of tyranny that had ruled them' (Dabashi, 2012, p. 47). In this way, as Egyptians and other Arabs via the commonalities they experienced in the protests dismantled their regimes, we can dismantle the regime of knowledge via our commonalities.

With the people I met in Egypt, there was no ideological distance between 'my' life as Western woman and 'their' life as Egyptian protestors. These geographies were intertwined and particularly constituted our daily lives as cosmopolitan citizens. We frequently discussed and talked about revolutions in other countries, like Syria and Tunisia, the anti-government

protests in Italy and Greece and the Occupy movement in Times Square. Most of my friends could identify with or had solidarity with these protests all over the world. This is however particular for the educated upper class positions my friends in Egypt have, that made them able to have knowledge about these transnational events; something that might be different for other young people in Egypt. My friendship with this cosmopolitan youth makes it particularly possible to study social and cultural changes the Egyptian revolution generates, from a perspective of commonalities, solidarity and recognition; thus avoiding as much as possible the production of the 'other' as 'different', something Dabashi (2012) and other postcolonial scholars so critically discussed.

We are all university educated, still studying or in the young professional life of looking for a job, most of us are not married or having our own family, we are enjoying our free time with dancing, film and music (I recount the many times I went with my friends to concerts and films). We are interested in different religions, cultures and languages and are religiously raised; we love travelling and have seen many places in the world. From these commonalities my research has originated, these people became my friends and there was a mutual interest in each other's life and socio-cultural context where we grew up. That my interest in their stories was partly 'professional', for the purpose of writing my master thesis they understood perfectly well; as they all once had to write a master thesis or doing research as well. Karin Willemse (2007) discusses in her ethnography how important the place –the home- where one lives is for the research. In my research in Egypt, my home was also important for the relation I have with my friends. It was a space where we could talk freely, without parents or without strange looks from people in public places when they see an Egyptian guy with a foreign woman.

With my background in cultural anthropology and gender studies I conducted this research as an interdisciplinary approach of the fields of anthropology, postcolonial criticism and feminist research. At the base of (post)colonial knowledge production is gender, something Dabashi also discusses in his chapter: 'It is precisely in that context, where local traits and colonial stratagems come together, that the Arab Spring saw one of its most fundamental changes: namely, to the globalized perception of Arab and Muslim women' (Dabashi, 2012, p. 182). Thus, the Arab Spring altered colonial perceptions of suppressed Arab and especially Muslim women. Dabashi's argument about the end of postcolonialism therefore particularly counts for gender, given the great existence of scholarship (see also the introduction of this thesis) and popular writing about Arab and Muslim women, which is now reversed with the Arab Spring. So finally we are able to see not just women as victims and as oppressed, but also their actions and agency. This does not, however, mean that women are not also victims of the violence of the revolution. This position of women and the changes therein is therefore of central importance in this research. I will not only speak *about* women, as Dabashi does, nor only focussing on *women* when I talk about gender, but I will study the relation and meaning of being men or woman in the revolution, through speaking *with* men and women via interviews and informal talks.

I do this via some anthropological and feminist methods, where the experiences of people involved in a particular social context are always central (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2007). My main research technique is in-depth interviewing, where there are no preconceived categories of answers -as in structured interviews- but there is space for the interviewee to express her or his own feelings and experiences. These are often diverse and not circumscribed in a single, in advance defined, category; so in this way subjugated and previously unknown or unarticulated knowledge is produced, which is the aim of feminist

research (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2007). Also, in this way not the false dichotomies that Dabashi (2012), Pui-Lan (2005) and Hawthorne (2009) criticized are reproduced by putting experiences in these already defined categories. As the revolution is open-ended, this research is as well. Of course, I did not went without any ideas to Egypt, as in the introduction I have discussed the questions I had when going to Egypt.

However, the interviews were open-ended, with a focus on the everyday life experiences of the revolutionists. I was involved with many of them on a daily basis, and thus also gaining information through informal talks, discussions and comments on media and television. The in-depth interviews lasted an average of 2 hours. I started with asking if they could tell me about the first time they went to protest, but most of the time I didn't have to ask anything at all, as immediately they told me about the things and experiences that were the most important for them. The introduction of my research to people I met in Egypt I kept simple: I would like to know how young people experience the revolution. But this was very obvious for most of them, since anything in Egypt at that time was about the revolution. With some people I have done more than one interview, because we could not discuss everything at once, and with almost all the people I met I had many informal talks during evenings out, meetings at my place or during protests in Tahrir Square. Also, being there made me experience the great atmosphere where my friends were talking about all the time.

Meeting Omar, Amir, Heba, Yasmin, Nancy, Sherif, Mona, Noha, Samar and Ahmad.

I collected experiences and stories from 10 young revolutionists living in different areas in Cairo. There were many more protestors I met in Tahrir or via friends, but the people I introduce here, were the ones I saw on a regular basis.

I met Omar during an evening out in the Cairo Jazz Club, where I went with two of my flatmates; Liza and Eva. Liza already knew Omar and Amir via Tahrir Square, and from then on we met each other for going for diner, protests and concerts very often. Omar is 31, lives with his parents and brother, and works at his father's printing company. Before he worked for some years in the tourist industry, but he studied political sciences at a private university in Cairo. Together with his best friend Amir he goes to Tahrir Square almost every time there is a small or big protest; or when there are clashes at night with the regime. We met each other many times at my apartment, where we also had the interviews.

I met Amir at the same time and place as Omar. He is 29 years old and lives as well with his parents, sister and niece. Amir works as a dentist, and is also doing his master's degree. I see him, like Omar, very often and through the informal talks I had with Amir I started to know the revolution better and better.

Heba is a friend of Omar and Amir as well, so I met her via them and Liza. At the beginning of my time in Cairo, she lived with her mother and sister, but then she married and lived with her British husband. Heba's apartment was very close to my place, so in the evenings I often passed by and we talked, cooked and watched films together. Heba is 27 years old and works freelance in the cinema industry, but since the revolution she almost does not have any paid work. She was also a very active protester, always being there when there was something happening.

I met Yasmin (30 years old) in Tahrir Square when I was there with Omar and Amir. She's a friend of them, and a dentist as well. Because she has two children, she wasn't able to protest that much, but Yasmin tried to go as much as possible. She lives with her husband and children in a city close to Cairo. We had an interview at my apartment, in the spare moments that Yasmin didn't have to look after her children.

Nancy was sitting with her friends in a coffee place in Tahrir Square when I met her there. We immediately had much to talk about, since she just came back from an internship in the Netherlands. She is studying politics and law at the American University in Cairo, and works in a human rights organization. Nancy is in her 20s and lives with her parents and brother in Cairo. Unlike the others, Nancy is not religious but defines herself as an atheist. I met her various times during protests in Tahrir Square and I had an interview with her in a coffee shop in downtown Cairo.

I got to know Sherif also via Liza. He is an English teacher and I went to visit him in the school where he teaches, but we also held an interview in a coffee shop downtown Cairo. He is 24 year old and lives with his parents and sister.

Mona was one of my fellow students at the faculty of political sciences at Cairo University. I followed there just one course, but Mona was in her third year as political science student. She is also a member of the Egyptian's Women's Union, and with Mona I went to some women's protests organized by this Union. She is 19 years old and lives with her family. During the breaks, we met at Cairo University for doing the interview.

Noha is the coordinator of the English courses of the faculty of political science. This is her part-time job next to her studies in political sociology. She is 24 years old and lives on her own in Cairo. Her family lives in Alexandria, where she is raised. Noha has one sister with who she protested several times in Alexandria and Cairo. We met for the interview at Noha's office at the Cairo University.

Samar is the only Christian revolutionist I met. Liza knew him through her work as journalist in Cairo. I didn't see Samar that much, we met downtown in a coffee shop for an interview. He was very active in the Coptic protests, but started after a while also to

participate in the protests in Tahrir Square. Samar is 21 years old, works and studied commerce and lives with his parents.

Ahmed is the founder of a new movement in Egypt: Salafyo Costa. I was introduced to this movement via Omar, but got in touch with Ahmed via the Salafyo Costa Facebook page. He 31 years old, married and has two children. He did his Master of Business Administration and now works as a sales manager. I met with Ahmed and another member (Mohamed) of the Salafyo Costa movement in Costa coffee shop. In this place the members of the movement usually gather, where they talk about religion, Islamism, politics and revolution.

In the following chapter, I will discuss the opinions and actions of these young Egyptians in relation to the revolution in more detail.

CHAPTER 2

“You keep the parliament, we have the Square”

Young revolutionists about Tahrir and politics

This is what I take from the revolution, that no one, no one could believe that young people like these protestors will protest. Without weapons, that this peaceful protest can move this unfair president and very unfair ministry of interior with all its powerful tools. No one could believe that we have done it. That young people, 20, 21, 22, older ones of 30 accomplish the removal of the president. But that's what I pick up from the revolution. That if one really is persuaded from his or her principle and insist on it, we will do it! I think this way.

- Yasmin

I grew up and I was always hearing my parents and other parents complaining from the regime, but they weren't really doing anything. We, our generation grew up with parents and family everybody is complaining from Mubarak and the regime. And this generation is blaming the elder generation for letting this regime take all that time, so I don't want our children, the next generation to blame that we just started something and we're too lazy to continue it. So that's why we have to be united and continue.

- Amir

There are songs about revolution from 30 years ago! So it makes you feel that you are the generation that all the past generations have failed to do. You're the one...! I was just telling to my friends today, we were saying, I feel so proud! I can't wait to... during all the violence, sealing all of this in my memory, and in the back of my head I'm thinking: I can't wait for the day when my children sit down and they're studying for history and then I tell them, 'close the book I tell you about the stories'. I can't wait for the time when I take my children downtown and show them: 'in this street we were tear gassed, in this street we were...'. It

makes me very very proud to be part of this generation, I mean, we're the kids that they said of: 'you're stoned, you're becoming Americanized, you only care about the booze' and it's true!

- Nancy

In this chapter I will discuss the concerns, characteristics and identifications of young people in Egypt, like Yasmin, Amir and Nancy. This young generation is the group that is central in my research. What has the revolution has meant for them, which personal and social change they have experienced, and how do they think about the future of Egypt and its politics?

From the quotes above we can see how Yasmin, Amir and Nancy identify themselves with a generation different than their parents and older people in Egypt. A generation that was seen in Egypt as the 'lost' generation, as Salma explains: not interested in politics and in their country; just smoking hash and watching American films. Many people from this generation couldn't find a job, despite having a university diploma. They were not interested in the development of Egypt, cannot marry, and still live with their parents. This does reflect the social situation of some of my friends in Egypt, most of them are in their end 20s and live with their parents, are searching for a job or finishing their studies. So, as Yasmin tells us, no one expected that precisely these 'lost' youngsters were going to rebel against the regime, but once it did happen, it sparked them with a great confidence in the fact that young people *can* change their situation and country.

It was this generation that were the icons of the revolution, something the older generation couldn't do, as Amir describes. This does not mean that older people and older generations did not participate; but the generational difference continues to be a strong factor and identification for the young people I spoke with. Selime Shahine (2011) argues that the youth identifies itself as a new generation of Egyptians and this provokes other

Egyptians as well to reflect on their position and place among the generations. In this chapter I will discuss what this has meant for the revolution, how young people experience these generational differences and how this influenced the activities in their daily lives and opinions regarding politics and religion in Egypt.

Young men and women: agents of change.

Although the youth of Egypt were seen as the 'lost' generation, young people are also the ones that are key actors in changing social norms and social and political structures, argues Julia Droeber (2005) in her research on young middle-class women in Jordan. According to her, middle class people make the most significant contributions to social, cultural and economic change. Moreover, *young* middle class people contribute extensively to these changes, as they are not yet bound to social behavioural norms that are attached to adulthood and to having an own family. They are in a period of transition from childhood to adulthood, and this period of transition in Jordan, and also Egypt, has been extended in the past years. Markers of the beginning of adulthood remains often marriage and to have an own house; while to a greater extent young people in both countries are not able to achieve this, due to deteriorated social and economic situations and a big unemployment numbers. This puts them in an 'in-between' or 'liminal' status, something I will discuss in chapter three as well. According to Victor Turner (1967), this 'in-between' status of a group of young people is particularly threatening existing social order. Thus it is the phase in one's life where people are extensively changing social relations; and particularly gender relations, Droeber (2005) argues. Most of these young Egyptians are in an environment and ability to rebel and to protest, as they often live with their parents and bear not the responsibility of an own family. They just started working or are still studying at the university. This counts particular

for women, as studying and working for them as unmarried, 'free' women is still more ambiguous than that for men. So with their activities of studying, working and being politically active, they are already changing social norms (Droeber, 2005).

Also Tourné discusses the particular situation of young middle class people in Egyptian society: 'These young unemployed graduates were unable to make the transition to adulthood, most notably married life. There were not enough affordable houses for newly married couples and no income to pay for the rent and provide for a family. These graduates, doubling as involuntary bachelors, were figured as a 'lost generation', prone to vice and extremism' (in De Koning, 2009, p. 74). This young generation in Egypt has no experiences of other political and social situations of Egypt – like the socialist times under president Nasser – so they are not being 'satisfied' with longing or nostalgia towards that era, but just have experienced pure deprivation and economic misery (Osman, 2011). This finally led towards the protests and activism in Tahrir square. So young women and men not merely confine to existing norms, values and (patriarchal) structures in society, but they actively reshape society through the transitional 'in-between' phase they inhabit and their ways of thinking and acting (Droeber, 2005). It is thus not surprising that young Egyptians initiated the revolution and were at the core of its organizing groups and revolutionary movements.

What matters is not only that young people are expected to be more rebellious, as part of their 'in-between' status in Egyptian society. The belonging to this particular generation, first a 'lost' generation, than the generation that accomplished what their parents couldn't, is also of great importance in how young people in Egypt perceive the revolution, politics, the parliamentary and presidential elections, and how they shape their social and political activism and religious identifications. As we learn from Amir and Nancy,

they feel proud what they have accomplished; the removal of Mubarak, something their parents couldn't. This makes it clear why this is perceived among many as a revolution of the youth, although it is of course by no means true that older generations didn't participate. Rather, their participation was crucial, because of the workers' strikes with mostly older generations and the financial donations or supplies older people gave to revolutionary youth (Winegar, 2011). My informants do not deny this, but do at the other hand continue to create a divide between the young generation and the older generation that *couldn't establish this change in the past 30 years*. This sentiment among young people is something I discuss here, and not the historical roles of different generations that pre-empted the Egyptian revolution (see Winegar, 2011).

'You keep the parliament, we have the Square'

In the period after Mubarak stepped down, when the military forces and religious actors like the Muslim Brotherhood are main players in the political field, the distance young revolutionists create between themselves and the elder generation becomes even clearer. Many of my informants oppose the politics and religious teachings of the Muslim brotherhood, which they consider from the older generation that do not really want change and revolution for the future of Egypt, but rather want to keep their own position safe. The Muslim Brothers for instance tell uneducated poor people in Egypt that they are an infidel if they don't vote for the Muslim brotherhood, or they use anti-regime protests to campaign for their own party. My friends and acquaintances in Cairo often create a dichotomy of revolution versus politics, as will become clear in the following story from Nancy:

I feel that, listen, I feel that... you know, I don't care about the parliament, I don't care about the political, I don't care about the army, I don't care about any of this because all my bets, is on the kids on the frontline. It's on the people who believe in this dream and who went to sacrifice their lives on the street. I mean, you know, they're the ones who are going to make this revolution succeed or fail. Not anyone else, because they're the ones who pay the price. You know, if anything gets accomplished, it gets accomplished after blood. And they pay for this blood. So as long as they exist, and they are still present, then the revolution continues and it's... it's, you know, as long as they're alive, it won't stop. You have to kill us all, to win!

- Nancy

Here we see that she puts her hope for the future of Egypt not in the parliament or politics, but only on the revolutionists at the frontline. To play politics, whereas Muslim brotherhood is the greatest example from, is seen as *opposite* Tahrir and revolution. Nancy, but also Amir, Yasmin and many others see that inherent in politics is just self-interest, the strive for power; it's a game. These are precisely the things that are according to them crucial for a successful revolution, and the things that were completely absent in Tahrir Square, the centre of the revolution. So the opposition of many young Egyptians against the Muslim brotherhood (even the youth of the Muslim brotherhood) is not because they are religious or Islamist, but because they *play the games of politics*, and because they 'left' the revolution after Mubarak stepped down by digging into the politics. Nancy expresses it even more strongly: *The Muslim brotherhood has sold the revolution before it even ended*. Or Mohamed, a member of the Salafyo Costa movement about the Muslim brothers: *They are very smart and I think they are very good people, but yeah... they're politicians...* Meaning that it's about being politician (which is seen as bad) and not per se about being Muslim or being a member of the Muslim brotherhood.

This game of politics is seen as game from the *older* generation, because they have their economic interests and their agendas of political power and businesses which they want to secure via political influence.

The most people here in Egypt, and really it's so bad, really Egyptian people and their ideas are so bad. Especially the older one. The older people who are over their 40 years old here in Egypt, they are talking about 'the economic state and the protesting is making us backward and we lose economic gains, tourism'. Nonsense of course! I tell you before protesting things weren't stable either. People were hungry! But older people here in Egypt they're so negative... I think they are the reason of our poverty and our unfair treatment, how we were treated before. They were the reason, before. And now, they are the reason of our problems. I think so! But the young people can speak! Who don't just agree and say 'yes', you understand me? They're the ones who object the regime, the last regime, who eh... I think youngers are the change now, what we make now. It's the future, it's our future! I think that youngers, only youngers are responsible for their future. Older ones, ok, they already have had their young period of time and their adult period of time. And they reached us to our problems. Now also! They are entering themselves and putting us in problems and they reject the youngsters' way and even stopped us in the streets and prevent us from marching forward. You know... where are you? Where were you when the last regime was taking your money and taking your food and taking your freedom, where were you?? Now you are talking? Now your voices appear? I think it's so bad... Really. That's my idea about them.

- Yasmin

We always cursed the country. You don't drive with a cab driver without cursing Egypt! And everybody wants to travel, including myself he! And I didn't even suffer that much but finally I felt it myself, nobody wants to stay here. But now you have people, everybody started to care! And that's the power of it, I mean, political parties, political movements they have an agenda, they want to sit in the parliament, they want... you know the businessmen they want something, you know everybody wants... But, those in the frontlines, they... what do they want? They want a good job, a good education for their children, a good health care. I mean

the things that are not only for them but for everyone. It's not an immediate agenda. You can't tell them I'll give you a seat in the parliament and stop protesting, just like the Muslim Brotherhood did, or the political parties did. These guys, they're not going to negotiate. Give them their demands and then they will stop to go down.

- Nancy

So 'to play politics' is the ultimate betrayal towards Tahrir Square and the revolution. For the revolution to continue, it is only possible through Tahrir Square and revolution, since there is no self-interest and immediate agenda. Also, in these quotes we see how the older generation is related with politics and how the revolution is associated with the youth, the 'kids'. Nancy further explains why playing politics and compromises are not possible for her and her fellow revolutionists:

And we have to stand with the protestors. I mean, even if I understand why... you know a friend is telling me like, 'listen, if you want the fight to be over and build a new country, a clean country, let them go! You're not gonna... you know by hanging SCAF, you're not going to kill poverty. You're not going to better health care. You have to think of future!' And I... you know... I see his point of view, but the problem is... these are our friends who died... you know, we can't sacrifice their live. Their families won't be able to sleep... its betrayal! Even if we know it's unrealistic, it's not like you have a choice... we can't!

- Nancy

Playing politics and cooperating with SCAF would be betrayal towards the people who died in the revolution, since compromises mean that the demands of the revolution are not fully reached. Politics also made to 'fall apart' the unity in Tahrir Square, when after Mubarak's ousting political and religious parties emerged again on stage with their own agendas, just to secure their own position and power. This is particularly true for the Muslim Brotherhood, as

after years of repression and prisons, they can finally speak out in public and to be in power. They do anything to accomplish this, even sitting around the table with the military forces. This is something everyone I spoke with mention, and especially Omar and Amir every time get angry when we talk about this. So this why my informants oppose the Muslim Brotherhood; not because they are Islamist or religious, but because they play *politics* – under the name of religion.

Ok, Muslim Brotherhood, they're bastards. It's not about religion that I say that, because they have an Islamic background, but because they only have... you know since 1920 since they emerged, since Hasmad Bounda, the founder of Muslim Brotherhood; in the end he said 'I wish I didn't create this organization'. He said that. Because they only look at their self-interests. They don't care about the country, they don't care about the cause. They just care about themselves. The Muslim Brotherhood has sold the revolution before it even ended. They sat down with Omar Suleiman³ in February. And this was... you know during the battle of camels! Getting beaten, and still they sat down with Omar Suleiman, the vice president. Eleventh of February, they quit the Square and play politics. And they are playing it since. They only go down to the Square, to show SCAF that they can mobilize the streets so they have to do what we say. You know, to have something to bargain with. They use Tahrir as a bargain thing. That's it.

- Nancy

It is not only in these political and religious parties that the youths are opposing the older generation. Also, for many upper middle revolutionists it was a personal 'battle' with their parents who sometimes had high political positions.

³ He was part of the Mubarak regime

I was telling you, you know when I was at the gate searching people, I saw so many girls, so many guys from my university, he. Elite! You know, the crème de la crème of the society. One friend of mine, his mother is a minister, and everybody hates her. Now he doesn't even talk to his mother. And one friend of mine her dad is best friends with the minister of interior. But they go! They don't care about their parents, you know, they're not brainwashed. Their parents say something and they say 'no, this is my generation, my revolution, fuck off'.

- Nancy

Thus, a new dichotomy is created; namely revolution or Tahrir versus politics. Through this binary the generational differences are interwoven, in the image of the older generation who belong to the Muslim Brothers or to corrupt politics; versus the young generation without self-interest, who continue the revolution and its goals of a corrupt-free and equal Egypt, poverty reduction and freedom.

De Koning (2009) argues that young people in Egypt cannot make the transition to adulthood, because they have no proper job, house, or an own family. Through the revolution this transition is being made, in a different way. It gives them a new aim and goal in their lives, whereas before the revolution many youth felt they had no future in Egypt. It is at the same time a move away from the 'old' corrupt politics, which caused the bad economic, social and political situation in Egypt, and the sectarian violence fuelled by the government. In this way the youth can articulate the differences of their generation versus the older generation. Now, there is a new political and social activism through the revolution and the unity the revolution creates. Egyptian young people want to change their country. As Mona states:

I want to be like... I don't want to be graduated and then to be part of this messy political system. I'm a political science student, I'm aware of the problems of the people, I want to be part of the change, not part of the problem.

- Mona

New activities that developed among young revolutionists are for example the participation of young women and men in women's or feminist movements, or the new movement 'Salafyo Costa'.

Salafyo Costa and Revolutionary Dialogue

I came to know the Salafyo Costa movement via Omar, who met them in Tahrir Square. After a first contact via the Salafyo Costa Facebook Page I met two members of the movement in Coffee shop Costa in Cairo, where the movement is named after. Salafyo Costa originated during the revolution out of a group of young Salafi's⁴ that 'sit at Costa', as is the literally translation of Salafyo Costa. Costa is an upper class coffee place where mostly young Egyptians come to socialize with each other. The movement is also characterized by their young members, and by a different view of religion and Salafism than the traditional and conservative Salafi's. Ahmed, the founder of Salafyo Costa tells:

Normally, Salafi's, we have beards, and we don't go to such places like Costa Coffee. So I felt there is a big gap between Salafi's and others. That's why I decided to make Salafyo Costa. Then we decided to bring all the people from different ideologies in this group, so that we can

⁴ Ahmed describes Salafism as following: *Salafism is a religious ideology, your relation with God. It gives you some general guidelines, that you should follow in whatever you are doing, getting married, job. It's like orthodox in Christianity, those who decided to follow the early followers of the prophet.*

So, Salafi's can be generally described as those who want to live like in times of prophet Mohamed, that means they have a very strict interpretation of Islam and the Quran. Salafi's were very oppressed and discriminated during the Mubarak regime, they were not allowed to be in politics and always suspects of terrorism; therefore many of them have experiences of detention in prisons, without any proof.

make some sort of discussions. Where people start to get to know each other, because we felt that this gap is very dangerous. And this gap might bring us down.

- Ahmed

So the aim of the movement is to form dialogue and understanding among people with all kinds of ideologies. The movement has members who describe themselves as atheists, Christians, Salafists, Islamists, liberals and socialists. Also many people identify themselves with several of these categories, depending on the context and the people they are with. As Mohamed, another member of Salafyo Costa tells me: *The Salafi's call me liberal, the liberals call me Salafi*. So he is *both* liberal and Salafi at the same time. Also Ahmed describes himself as religious, Salafi, progressive *and* revolutionary, all in the same person. This is not undermining the Salafist identity of the movement, but it rather shows that there is not one fixed identity of Salafism, and particularly that in the Salafyo Costa movement Salafism is not opposed to secularism or liberalism. The movement herewith questions stereotypes, discrimination, and dichotomous thinking. Therefore, it also questions dominant binaries of religious versus secular, and traditional versus modern.

Salafyo Costa also does not want to participate in politics, but *keep the spirit of the revolution*; of unity, dialogue and understanding among people and care for each other. They don't want to participate in the politics as 'mainstream' Salafi's now do, as it only creates a separation among people, Ahmed tells me in Costa. Again we see the division of politics versus revolution, where politics is associated with the older generation Salafi's and revolution with the younger generation of Salafyo Costa members and revolutionists. This is clearly captured in the title of this chapter: 'You keep the parliament, we have the square', which was the text of Heba's banner during the one-year anniversary of the revolution on the 25th of January 2012.

For me it was very confusing to sit and talk with these two members of Salafyo Costa, since everything they told me transgresses and challenges my own ideas about categories of 'liberal', 'religious' and 'revolutionary', that often seem so difficult to resist. Therefore, young people like Salafyo Costa members not only create a dichotomy of politics versus revolution and old versus young, but they are at the same time crossing borders of other very dominant dichotomies: religious versus liberal and traditional versus modern. Here I do agree with Dabashi's argument that the Arab Spring effectively contests these dominant and colonially inspired dichotomies. 'The language we are hearing in these revolts is neither Islamic nor anti-Islamic, neither Eastern nor Western, neither religious nor secular – it is a worldly language, emerging from the depth of people's historical experiences in the world, towards the world, a language irreducible to any familiar cliché' (Dabashi, 2012, p. 81).

According to Droeber (2005), middle class youth do less adhere to institutionalized religious parties or political religious parties, but form their own interpretations and experiences of religion, more from a 'personal' starting point. This resonates with the rejection I often heard from my Egyptian friends of the Muslim Brotherhood and Salafi leaders: *They have a view of Islam that is not correct*. Also the Salafyo Costa movement rejects some Salafi teachings about the rule not to protest, and about opinions about other religions in Egypt.

In the popular debates in the media and politics, the future of Egypt is portrayed as being *either* a secular (western) *or* a religious (backward, Islamic) state (Agrama, 2012). For the youth of Egypt, this is a less relevant question as they do not live in either of these worlds, nor with one foot in the one world and with the other foot in the other world, but both 'worlds' merge into each other in their daily lives where being Egyptian, having foreign friends, speaking English, watching American films, praying, protesting for Egypt and

studying are all found in one and the same daily life, without dividing these things into two worlds. So the dichotomous concepts of religious versus secular, religious versus liberal or traditional versus modern merge into another if we look at the opinions, practices and the daily life of young Egyptian protestors. They are not religious or secular, but live on the border crossings and junctions of these categories.

Charles Hirschkind also argues that the Egyptian uprising is characterized without the oppositional religious versus secular binary; by describing how Islamists, liberals, leftist and secularists all could identify with the revolution and the events in the revolution, like praying (which was tolerated by the liberals and leftists) and popular revolution songs (which was tolerated by the Islamists) (Hirschkind, 2012). Here, I think, he misses the point, since the power of this revolution was not that people in different 'categories' could protest together, but that the revolution precisely showed that these categories altogether were not tenable any more. Agrama's analysis fits the picture better. He questions the popular distinction of secular versus religious, and argues that the protests in Tahrir square were rather a-secular. By that he means that the question of Egypt as either a secular or religious state, and where the division of religion and politics should be, was not at stake. The revolution was indifferent to it, since it was based on a *people's* sovereignty rather than a state sovereignty (Agrama, 2012). In this people's sovereignty, 'the protests expressed every potential language of justice, secular or religious, but embraced none. [...] No one – no one person, group of people, social or economic class, religious or secular political orientation – should have a monopoly on power' (Agrama, 2012, p. 29).

Not the distinction between religious and secular is important, but young people are bothered with the question of *democracy*. This is not a democracy where the questions of citizen's rights and nationalism are central, which are by definition excluding people who are

denied rights and citizenship (Agrama, 2012). It is about a democracy that Talal Asad (in Agrama, 2012, p. 30) has called an 'ethos of democratic sensibility', where mutual care, support, and truth is central. A sensibility that is without judgements and per definition inclusive (Asad in Agrama, 2012). Young people have experienced this exclusion of a political democracy in their daily lives before the revolution and are thus opposed to this; in favor of a democracy as was formed in Tahrir Square at the start of the revolution.

However, I do not agree with Agrama that after the 18 days of protest in Tahrir Square, this democratic sensibility has disappeared, as I think it still lives in the activism and beliefs of young Egyptians.

New Social Activism and Change

The revolution made young people able to change Egyptian society; at the same time they are changed by revolution. This means a move away from 'old' politics and the older generation, but a new revolutionary activism which crosses different categories of religious versus secular and liberal. It is no coincidence that it is the young people that are crossing these borders and simultaneously creating new borders of generational differences.

In Tahrir Square a common public space started and developed further in many activities like women's and student's movements, community development groups and dialogues like in the Salafyo Costa movement. These new activities of young Egyptians show us that the recent uprisings in Egypt and the Middle-East do not necessarily and only lead to Islamist politics, as is often thought in 'Western' countries, but that precisely through the uprisings and revolution new forms of religion and politics, religion and secular movements and liberal politics are emerging and created, like the Salafyo Costa movement. This will not only change these young adults and young revolutionists, but the whole society.

These movements are according to Dabashi (2012) the most important and key to civil liberties and social justice. He summarizes it as an ever-expanding public space. Therefore this new revolutionary activism is inherently open-ended and not fixed. 'The Arab Spring is changing the imaginative geography of the region by way of bringing all these [...] movements closer together and categorically de-racialising revolts along Arab-Iranian, Sunni-Shi'i, nationalist-socialist, and secular-Islamist divides' (Dabashi, 2012, p. 214). The revolution catalyses social change, like Salafy Costa movement, women's movements and many more activities that youth deploy in Egypt since the revolution. 'The mobilizing of these formations is precisely the factor that can guarantee the success of the revolutionary uprisings' (Dabashi, 2012, p. 216). Also young people in Egypt are optimistic:

I'm very optimistic. I mean this generation you know, 2011 generation, what we have seen and what we have accomplished what our parents and grandparents never even dreamt of. It's fascinating! And because we have experienced this and because our mentality works this way, our children, and the generation that will come, will never accept the state of affairs that our parents and grandparents accepted. 10 year old, 12 year old, I've seen them! At 2 o'clock when the schools are out in their uniform and backpacks, they're marching to the Square! So they're learning this manners of comradeship. Of like... a fellow Egyptian even if he's not your friend, you need to protect him.

- Nancy

Also, Nancy is very proud to be part of this generation that accomplished the revolution, something that before the revolution, when the youth was seen as a 'lost' generation, never was the case.

I felt that I had the responsibility to do my part. Because, you know, I felt very proud to be of this generation.

- Nancy

I have showed why it is important to study the experiences of young men and women in Cairo, as agents of change; how they see and experience the revolution as opposed to politics; and I have showed the new activism that this revolution caused. Also personally, many of the youth in Egypt experience change in their daily lives, like Nancy:

All my lifestyle changed. My lifestyle, like before the revolution, what did I do? University, work, and then I would just smoke up, drink beers... All we cared about was the parties, and the boys... our conversations were limited to that. We never really sat down and discussed politics. Ok? And this is not just me. Now, walk, and I love this ok? Even if they're saying stupid shit, the arguments, but the fact that you walk by and everybody is talking about the elections, and about Tahrir or about this... the fact that people are now politically engaged, you know, this is the step that you're moving in the right direction. So now I mean, this is the thing, now when I'm going out I don't want to speak about boys, I don't want to speak about beer, I want to speak about the revolution and the future and what I'm going to do.. we have to think about initiatives. That is what I enjoy now! And that is why I enjoy the company of my Tahrir friends because this is what we... all the jokes are revolutionary, all the songs, you know. The spirit, fun! I have a very good time.

- Nancy

In the following two chapters I will discuss the catalysts of this activism and personal change: Tahrir Square as Utopian Space and the violent clashes and blood(shed). Also the gendered aspects of the participation of these young men and women in the revolution will become more clear.

CHAPTER 3

The reality of Utopia in Tahrir Square:

Praying, chanting and change

The best memory or the best thing that I feel in the Square is that I feel the Square is my home. And all people around me are caring about me! It is something I have never seen in the street, anywhere! Not only in Egypt, anywhere! I have been in many countries before, but I never feel that I am feeling home in this area or in this square like I feel in Tahrir Square. I feel that here is my freedom! I can press air inside this place. You know, it's a very good feeling... you feel that all people around you do care about you and if something happens with you they will be with you. It's something I think you have never felt it. And if you have someone doing something you don't like, he says 'sorry, I'm sorry, I don't mean...' This is something very good. Very good relations. This is love! This is love what I feel! And this is love what I gain after the revolution, that... I love all the people!

- Omar

The atmosphere, I really loved it. It's like people who are... you know the utopian society? It feels like... it was like a country inside a country! It was a perfect society. People were very helpful, they let their self-interest aside, they weren't divided and had common goals: we have to make him [Mubarak] step down. Actually I admit there have been made a lot of mistakes in the Egyptian revolution, but actually these days were like the golden days. And look, in Tahrir square there was no harassment. These days, no harassment.

- Mona

Many different kinds of people, many different loyalties, many different ages, many different, so different! So different people are just standing together. That's maybe a surprise for many people, yeah even for me. But this happened, and different religions, Christianity and Islam.

Many Sheikhs were there, with us. Many, many. And eh... so yes so many different people, so many different kinds were going together. And this unity disappeared after the stepping down of Mubarak. Disappeared! Many just go into groups, this is not bad but it's eh... it's bad and some other picture, like eh... you have to be united to be able to get your demands, right? It's ok to be into groups but you have to be united in thoughts to force the ruler to achieve what you want. But this didn't happen. So yes that was about the unity during the 18 days before Mubarak stepped down. It was just like an amazing thing. I liked it very much.

- Sherif

These quotes are exemplary of what many of the people I met in Egypt told me: the amazing, utopian space of Tahrir Square without inequality, harassment and self-interest. People made new friends in Tahrir, met people from neighbourhoods and professions they had never met before and discussed politics nights long with people from all different ideologies. Tahrir is called 'home', 'your address', but at the same time referred to as a place outside Egypt or as 'a country inside a country'. Everyone is like one big family and there is solidarity of proportions people didn't know it would ever exist in Egypt. Many also mention that they feel reborn or another person after having protested in Tahrir Square:

I feel that I am different from my neighbors and my friends who didn't go [to the Square]. I feel that I'm brave.

- Yasmin

How can we analyse these experiences and this utopian space that almost seems unreal to someone who has not participated in it? The following description of Sherif strengthens me in my belief that it is not merely a discourse employed by revolutionists to express their

feelings towards Tahrir Square and the revolution, but something they have experienced with their whole body and mind.

Yeah actually during these 18 days you can see that the utopian city, you know it? That has really happened. Actually this is not a blank verse, or just a speech, no that has really happened. And I saw it myself.

- Sherif

In order to analyse how this real experience of utopia influenced people in the Square, I turn to anthropological literature about liminality and to literature about the body and (religious) rituals. Not only the unity that was present in Tahrir Square is important, but also the articulation of *differences* in the Square. This will be central in the second part of this chapter, before concluding on how people and society were transformed and changed through their experiences of Tahrir Square, bodily rituals and new borders of differences.

The liminality of Tahrir Square

The utopian space of Tahrir Square was a temporary phase in the revolution, found in the 18 days of protest from 25 January till 11 February 2011, the day that Mubarak stepped down. After that the solidarity and unity disappeared, only to come back a few times during protests and violent clashes with the military forces in 2011 and 2012. How has this solidarity and unity arisen in a country that before was so ideologically and spatially divided and segregated according to class, religion and gender? These 18 days of protest in Tahrir can seem just a space and time in between two political regimes: one with Mubarak as president and one with the military forces (SCAF) in charge. However, if we take a close look at the stories the revolutionists told me, it was above all a space in between two different

lives of the people involved and in between two different societies. By using anthropological theories of liminality for the analysis of Tahrir Square, we can understand how crucial this utopian time and space was for the transformation of a society *before*, to a society *since* the revolution.

Arnold van Gennep developed a model for the different stages that constitute *rites de passage*, rituals that mark the transition of a person or group into different positions in life: from separation, via liminality, to aggregation. Separation is hereby the detaching of a person or group from the existing structure of social and cultural norms and behaviours, liminality is an ambiguous space *in-between* and aggregation is the return to the social and cultural structures again, however as a person with a new social position (Grimes, 2000). These phases are not just symbolically, but accompanied by a physical movement and transformation: 'Van Gennep's theory rests on an analogy: Social 'movement', that is, a change in status, is akin to a bodily movement through space' (Grimes, 2000, p. 103). This model is now used to analyse all kinds of transformations, from the acceptance in sorority or fraternity on American campuses to death rituals among different religious groups. I argue that it is also helpful to use this model, and particularly the concept of the liminal phase, in the analysis of Tahrir Square and the way how it transformed people⁵.

Victor Turner (1967) follows Arnold van Gennep's model and gives specific attention to the liminal phase and the rituals and symbols that constitute this phase. In this liminal phase, the person or group is highly ambiguous and *in-between*, often also physically in another place. This is crucial for the people to turn back to society as their new, transformed selves; for example as woman instead of girl, or as lawyer instead of student. For Turner, in

⁵ Many theorists have criticized this model for its gender and Western bias (Grimes, 2000). Women's *rites de passage* can follow different patterns and not all *rites* can be divided in three phases. I therefore don't consider Van Gennep's model as universally valid, but I do think the concept of a liminal phase is useful to analyse a space like Tahrir Square.

contrast with Van Gennep, people do not just acquire new social positions, but are transformed *themselves* as well. In liminality the group reflects on the structures available in society; and the rituals performed transform them into new persons and positions. The liminal phase is therefore not a particular social or cultural structure, rather it is by definition unstructured, outside of the structures that normally are available in society. For Turner liminality is at the same time against the assertion of existing structures, but also the *source* for (new) societal structures. Moreover, it is 'a realm of pure possibility whence novel configurations of ideas and relations may arise' (Turner, 1967, p. 79). We see that this liminal phase bears many resemblances with how people have experienced Tahrir Square and the new creative ideas, discussions and friendships that are formed there.

Friendship and comradeship features equal importance in both Turner's analysis of liminality and in Tahrir Square. According to Turner, the liminal group is not structured by hierarchical positions, but a community that transcends distinctions of age, class, kinship position and sometimes even sex (Turner, 1967). I discovered that many youth in Tahrir Square made new friends and crossed thereby the boundaries that before constituted the limits of their relations and friends; like class, gender and religion. Turner argues that the comradeship is facilitated by the interstructural character of the liminal phase: people are not bound to predefined modes and norms of relationships and they can 'be themselves', as Turner's (1967, p. 101) and my informants frequently mention. Crucial for this comradeship is equality and unity in Tahrir Square, rather than the forms of inequality and segregation that dominated social life before the revolution.

Equality is according to Turner (1967) also one of the features of a group being in a liminal phase and space, where privileges, superordination and subordination tend to be eliminated. He argues that the only form of obedience is obedience towards the elders –the

ones that teach and accompany the liminal group– or, if they are not present, towards the *aim* of the liminal phase itself: transformation. I will write more about obedience towards this aim or ‘cause’ of the revolution and the relation with violence in the next chapter. For now it is sufficient to say that both in Tahrir Square and in Turner’s liminal phase equality and friendship among the attendees are central, and this is facilitated by the absence of societal structures of behaviour, norms and relations.

Similarly to Turner’s argument that the liminal space is by definition unstructured, Nancy describes Tahrir Square as completely anarchic, decentralized and spontaneous. There is no authority that decides what should happen, and this sparked great creativity and new ideas among the revolutionists in Tahrir Square:

That’s the thing, everybody, everyone has a role. Like the ultras, they go to the frontlines, the women they’re with the medicine. The doctors are in the field hospitals, the motorcycles; they take their motorcycles as ambulances. I mean, it was amazing because it was so spontaneous and yet, in the middle of all of this, of the crisis, you find amazing ideas. Amazing he, like I told you the fact that they managed to get the antidote for the tear gas, the fact that they thought of making a path, the fact about the motorbikes, the fact that immediately on twitter you would find special hash tags⁶ for supplies, I mean it’s everything spontaneously, it was just emerging and working out! And then you have on the entrance people volunteering for searching, some people chanting, some people giving out food, some people you know... everyone has a role to play. But that’s I mean, because everybody has a role to play, this is why it works. Not everybody is doing the same thing. And then you have at KFC for example, the artists. You know, in every way... during the sit in, there was a school for the children! There was Tahrir cinema, like a projector and showing movies about the revolution. There was tweet madula, it’s basically having a conference inside the street and everybody has like two minutes to speak. Like twitter. - Nancy

⁶ Twitter is a social media network where people can post short messages that are ordered on subject by means of a # hash tag. In the revolution this was used extensively to communicate and distribute the needs for supplies like medicine, food, blankets and tents.

Here we see already the 'realm of pure possibility whence novel configurations of ideas and relations may arise' as Turner (1967, p. 97) attributes to the liminal space and phase. Before the revolution spaces in Egypt and Cairo were segregated according to class, gender and sometimes religion: health care, supermarkets, restaurants, schools and leisure places, every place has its specific inclusion and exclusion politics based on class, gender and religion (de Koning, 2009). In Tahrir Square new relations and spaces seems to be inclusive and open, without the structure of division and segregation that dominated life before.

This also shows that liminality is necessarily related to space. According to Turner, most groups in liminality are physically far away and/or experience being far away from their home or society, because they are not bound to structures and norms of behaviour that precisely define their home or society. This also counts for people in Tahrir:

Being in Tahrir Square is the best thing I have ever done in my life. The best thing. And I feel like that I'm not in... when I'm in Tahrir Square I feel that I'm not in Egypt and also I'm not in any other country. I feel that I'm in a very different place. You just saw this place in your dreams. After some time we didn't protest with Copts at Maspero anymore, I found that the way and that the salvation is in Tahrir Square. So after anything happens we are going to Tahrir Square with our Muslim brothers. To encourage them and to do something.

- Samar

Maspero is a square in Cairo known for protests by Copts that had taken place after some incidents whereby churches were burnt down. First Samar was protesting mainly there, but when the violence of the military forces increased, Samar and many other Copts protested in Tahrir Square to be stronger and united with Muslims against the military forces. So being in Tahrir Square, as a 'far away' place is crucial for the political and social transformation to be

successful. To accomplish change, 'to do something', you have to be in Tahrir Square and not somewhere else, as Samar mentions. The importance of this particular space is also illustrated by the fact that at some points the military or the police forces were attacking the Square, and it was for the protestors the most important to defend and to keep their own free space of Tahrir Square. Being in the Square means being far away from how society was before, and how society is outside. It means being in a Utopian city; equal, united and perfect.

I do not want to argue here that society before the revolution in Egypt was a static and unchanging society, where the liminal phase is an exceptional state in. This constitutes often the critique on Turner from religious and gender studies (see Walker Bynum, 1991), which is a valid and important critique. Also, Caroline Walker Bynum (1991) argues that Turner misses the complexity of religious experiences, especially women's. However, for me this does not fade away the possibility to use Turner's liminal phase for analysing Tahrir Square and the transformative power of Tahrir Square. I do not consider Egyptian society before the revolution as static, since societies indeed are always changing and contested by individuals and groups and vice versa. However, the change that was central in Tahrir Square was on a much larger and intensive scale than before and can therefore be seen as an 'exceptional' liminal phase different from 'normal' society. It was not that change before was not possible, but Tahrir Square changed people and society in a *new* way, unity and strength.

Walker Bynum (1991) furthermore argues that in women's rituals it is more an internal transformation that is taking place gradually. This is then not experienced as a turning point or climax, as in Turner's theory, but as *continuity*. This is an important point to consider, since for men and women the revolution does not stop at Tahrir Square. It is a

process and continuity in their daily lives as well, as I showed in the previous chapter and as will become clearer in the next one.

Embodying transformative rituals

How then was this feeling and reality of Utopia realized? What constituted the liminal space and the unity experienced in Tahrir Square, and what made the people change while being in the Square? Of course important is the idea of having one goal altogether: *We have to make him [Mubarak] step down* - Heba. However, such an idea alone is not enough. According to Turner (1967), (religious) ritual and symbols accompany and facilitate the change the person or group goes through in the liminal phase. He regards ritual thereby as precisely *transformative* and *creative*, in contradiction to many conventional ritual theorists that see ritual as confirmative and guardian of a particular social situation or structure (Grimes, 2000).

I find Turner's concept of ritual as transformative and creative very useful in order to analyse the transformation of people in Tahrir Square. I will therefore focus on some rituals in Tahrir Square that have created unity among people and at the same time transformed them: praying, marching and chanting.

The praying gave me a more comfortable feeling. And another thing, I feel that God is with us. I feel that we are going the right way. Also the praying in Islam makes people together with each other. To do the same moves and the same actions at the same time. In our Islam it's this reason of the prayer. To collect people, to be with each other. Not each one alone, you know. Gathering and praying and asking God for good things makes the human being more comfortable and more... it helps people to insist of this situation and insist of this demands, you know. It insists to complete decisions. It fixes the people, you know. That's what I feel that day. Also other protests after people were removed [from the square, by the

military forces], there were no prayers, ok? There were no prayers. Don't ask me why because I don't know why, ok? Only when you went with me [there were prayers]. Before that, I went two times in other protests after the removal and for other reasons the government did to the people, there were no prayers. You know Kathrine I think the two protests that were done without praying have done bad things, the protesting separated. The government really became over the protesting. While nothing of their demands have been answered. I don't know if my thinking is right or not. But I feel that, that prayers or praying makes... when you feel... you are Christian? When you feel that God is with you I think something happens. I think it's by God, by the hand of God, or by his help. It's the same thing! It was so... you know the praying in the revolution it was so eh... I imagine that you know the Ka'aba⁷ of the Islam. There you know a lot of people were praying around the Ka'aba, I didn't go but my mother and my relatives and my friends went. When they returned, all of them told the same story. That there are strange feelings they felt in front of Ka'aba, because of all the people around, a lot of people. When I was in the revolution I think that was the same feeling. I don't know, if it was because of the people, a lot of people, or because the reasons that I went there, the protests and the reasons I go, you know. I don't know what I feel but I feel really strange and especially the first prayers. The first one was really amazing. I remember it till now.

- Yasmin

Praying at Tahrir square? Oh that's very good and it encourages us to go on and to sustain our demands and our thoughts and ideas of revolutions. I guess we have to start our democracy first and prayers at Tahrir square are a good sign for me, it shows unity, it shows good faith, you see. So it's a good sign. Yeah and you expectedly saw that Christian guys are protecting the Muslims, while they are praying? That's a very good sign actually, yes. We are all citizens, we are all Egyptians, so yeah, that's a good sign to me.

- Sherif

We see that the ritual of praying in the Square has multiple meanings and effects. First of all,

⁷ The Ka'aba is the most sacred site in Islam, placed in Mecca in Saudi Arabia. Every Muslim is supposed to go there once in their lifetime on *haj*, pilgrimage, and it gathers millions of Muslims praying at the same time.

it unites people by acting the same bodily movements and gestures at the same time; and, not less important, it strengthens and encourages people in their (political) demands and goals, by the support from God people get while praying. From Yasmin we learn how crucial the praying was for creating and sustaining unity in the Square, since her experience is that the protests without praying have divided rather than united people. Also, praying as Muslims together does not only create unity among Muslims, but also unites Muslims and Christians. Coptic Christians were also participating in the praying, they prayed together but also in a different form: by protecting Muslims from attacks from the military, they create a safe possibility for Muslims to pray. Also a picture of two Muslim women praying in a church away from the violence, and the accompanied comment on Facebook⁸ 'Only in Tahrir!' shows how the praying in Tahrir Square united people and united religions.

However, we must not forget that praying is above all also a form of personal and social piety; not reserved for or new in Tahrir Square and the revolution, but part of normal daily life of many Muslims and Christians (Deeb, 2006). Lara Deeb in her study on piety among Shi'i Muslims in Lebanon, argues that 'bodies form a canvas on which personal piety can be transformed into a subtle public demonstration of faith and/or a louder demonstration of collective identity' (Deeb, 2006, p. 103). Praying is one of these bodily practices where personal piety is transformed into public demonstrations of piety and, I argue, also into political demands. Through praying one is able to spend time with and to communicate with God, which strengthens and encourages people in the articulating of their (political) demands. Moreover, when this is done in public, as a group, people are incorporated 'into a single undifferentiated body of belief, utterance, motion and intent' (Deeb, 2006, p. 105), which creates the unity in Tahrir Square which so many people have

⁸ November 24, 2011. Facebook-page 'We are all Khaled Said' <https://www.facebook.com/elshaheed.co.uk>

described.

Praying in Tahrir Square had indirectly also another political aim, since 'whatever one's motives, public prayer was read by others' as Deeb (2006, p. 106) mentions. For Tahrir Square this means demonstrating the revolutionists' piety to the cautious people in Egypt not protesting, which means they are religious, trusted people and not criminals or thugs as Egyptian state television wants people to believe:

I always trust in the religious people, ok. So when I found them there, I have something like... convertible, that this revolution, or this change in my country, is something to a better position or a better state to my country, ok? I found there a lot of religious people, and they have the religious uniform you know, with the... they put something on their hand, they have to wear galabeyya's, and they were praying in Tahrir square.

- Yasmin

We have seen now that a religious ritual like praying doesn't necessarily have only religious meanings, but that it is intertwined with political demands, effects and meanings. According to Ziad Munson (2007), these multiple meanings are the key to accomplish change in modern society, since this makes it possible for many people to identify in their own manner with this ritual: 'The very ambiguity we face in classifying events as religious or political is a basis for the power such events have to be transformative' (Munson, 2007, p. 128). For some people praying is more a political statement and for some it has mainly religious meaning, while many people ascribe political, religious and social meanings to the same act of praying, which, as we have seen in the previous chapter, herewith crosses these boundaries of religious versus secular politics. In this way, many different people could identify with this ritual and as Munson (2007, p. 130) states: 'the diversity of meanings leads

to greater participation and a greater potential impact'. This impact can be social or political, in the way that the demands are achieved, but also personal since people can become more religious or more political active while participating in these rituals with multiple meanings. This shows the social and personal transformative power of these rituals (Munson, 2007). Noha mentions that many young people that were before not interested in politics, became interested and active in politics, because of the intertwinement with religion and because religion plays a role in politics now. Similarly, some people mention that the revolution strengthened them in their believe, or that they started praying more. The common bodily ritual of praying creates new meanings and new potential actions (Munson, 2007). This is also important when we look at chanting and marching, those have similar effects and meanings as praying, however they might seem less religious to occasional spectators.

Also something I remember, it is amazing. Did you hear about the airplanes that were flying above Tahrir Square? During this three weeks of revolution? On that day, this airplane comes. I think they are watching and registering, I think, what's happening in the square, and how many people come, or how many people left. How I know that? Of course because people were sleeping and living in the square, or training in this situations when the airplane comes. Number one, it came after the time has come to go home [curfew], number two it came nearer and the sound was so loud, louder and louder and louder. You know that is the sound of the airplane, very near I think just over this building, ok? So the sound was so high. What the people do? They are rising up their flags, and shouting: 'We will not go! He will go!' You know! Hahaha. And shouting more and more, to the extent that their voices become more up and louder than the airplane. It was really really really amazing. You know. I think that their voices urged the airplane to rise up and go away. And they [the airplanes] stopped, well I swear. That's what I remember.

- Yasmin

What I remember the most, when we march in the street and you shout as loud as possible, you feel free, you feel your voice must be heard and the echo especially if you're big numbers. So I still... because the biggest march I went in it was on January 28th. So yeah I still feel very powerful, when doing that. You feel you have control.

- Amir

But you look at the marches! In the marches, you have to understand you know, one will go on march from such a long distance and chanting on SCAF! This is our power! I remember also one march that was really touching, it was the one after Mohamed Mahmoud⁹ when we were marching with coffins. All over, from Mohandiseen to Dokki, to the Square and then they put the coffins in the street and it was very touching of course and we were all wearing black.

- Nancy

As we see, the chanting and marching gives people power and control, because they accomplish something (the airplane goes away and ultimately, Mubarak steps down). Also, they get a response from the regime when marching or chanting; for example a speech from Mubarak or the police that tries to prevent them from marching to Tahrir Square. This response is very important for the revolutionists, because it means that their demands are being heard, whereas before demands were simply ignored.

Moreover, Amir mentions that the marches are important because it brings a part of Tahrir Square to the people at home, people that cannot or do not want to protest. According to Amir, people have to know who the revolutionists in Tahrir Square are in order for the people to support the revolution. *You have to bring Tahrir to them* – Amir. Otherwise

⁹ 'Mohamed Mahmoud' refers to the clashes between revolutionists and the military forces in front of the Ministry of Interior in Mohamed Mahmoud Street from November 19 till November 23 where 40 people got killed and 2.000 injured.

it is just the false state television that let people believe that the revolutionists are just thugs and criminals.

Some marches were used as collective remembrance and funeral rituals for the martyrs of the revolution, as Nancy described. But at the same time they were clearly a political sign against the killing of many Egyptians by the military forces. Here we see again the multiple meanings marching and chanting can have, as political, religious or both at the same time. Also the shouting of *Allahu Akbar* (God is great) or *La illaha Illa allah* (There is no God but God, Islamic creed) during the marches is interpreted not only as Islamic slogan (*You know, Christians would say this chant* – Nancy) but also as a cultural expression of ‘going to war’.

Thus, through the simultaneously bodily involvement in these rituals people are united with each other, and exercise power and control over their political demands. They experience that they are being heard by the political regime, that their action accomplishes their demands and that God is supporting them in their political actions through prayers. How does this transform the people involved?

Turner only subtly mentions the importance of the human biological body in the liminal phase, but doesn’t mention how it works to facilitate personal and social transformation: ‘The symbolism attached to and surrounding the liminal persona is complex and bizarre. Much of it is modelled on human biological processes, which are conceived to be what Levi-Strauss might call ‘isomorphic’ with structural and cultural processes. They give an outward and visible form to an inward and conceptual process’ (Turner, 1967, p. 96). For Turner the body is merely exemplifying symbols that accompany the transformative process. I argue that the body has a greater role in these processes of change.

In a lecture held in September 2011, Judith Butler discusses the importance of moving and speaking bodies in mass protests in public spaces. Hereby, this public space is not a given, but precisely that what is being resisted or disputed by these bodies. At the same time, public space is the *support* that is needed in order for human bodies to act. Butler borrows Hannah Arendt's concept of the 'space of appearance' to describe this political action, where Tahrir Square is a typical example of. Moreover, this 'space of appearance' is characterized by a space of *alliance*, which is found *between* the people who participate; and more precisely, between their *bodies* present as Butler argues. This is not an alliance in a specific location, but it can be found anywhere, in any place, like the Utopian space of Tahrir Square I have described before.

For when people protest in the streets, they are chanting their demands, but this demonstration is not just featured by language or texts, since already the persistence of their bodies in the streets is a corporeal way of demonstrating and contesting the political regime (Butler, 2011). This cannot be done alone: 'No one body establishes the space of appearance, but this action, this performative exercise happens only "between" bodies, in a space of that constitutes the gap between my own body and another's. In this way, my body does not act alone, when it acts politically. Indeed, the action emerged from the "between"' (Butler, 2011). So between those bodies that act, a new space is been created. This is what Butler means with alliance, and this alliance is not reducible to individuals, but to the *space between* individual bodies. Therefore, the claim of equality (or other claims that are made during demonstrations) are not only spoken or written, but articulated in the spaces between bodies, when they appear together. Relations of equality, however, are at the same time important to maintain this space of appearance and of action. This new space between

people that before never have met each other makes a transformation of people and society.

So, between *whose* bodies does this new space originate? This is the subject of the next part of this chapter.

Differences within, differences without

By analysing the equality and unity in Tahrir Square it is also important to think about differences. Without differences among people, there is no need of speaking about unity or equality. The praying, chanting and marching was so special to people and so different from 'normal' life because it was done with all different kinds of people together. With differences I mean the different categories that constitute ones identity and social, cultural and economic position in society; like combinations of class, gender or religion. How were differences articulated and employed in the Utopian space of Tahrir Square? Nancy describes how differences between classes changed in Tahrir Square:

I come from a higher class... Ok? Where I hang out, the places that I go to, the club, my family, my acquaintances, they're all from the same class. I was never exposed or never had any friendship, with any other classes. You know, any lower classes. Ok? The revolution has turned it the other way around! Now I hang out with... haha, with people that... That's the thing though, before, it's not just because of a classes thing that we're not friends with lower, with working class or middle class. But because we have nothing in common! Even the slang that we use is different. The way of thinking... I mean it's like we come from different countries. But the revolution has given us something so big in common. It's like... you are like my brother now, we have all these culture differences and we laugh! About the terms that we use: 'Ah you're so bourgeoisie! Haha'! I mean, I would like... the revolution gave me the opportunity to really know my country. And really know the people of my country. Before I lived in a bubble. Ok? I was friends with more foreigners than with Egyptians. And even my

Egyptian friends they were always speaking English. If you look... it gave me back the Egyptian blood or the Egyptian touch. Now I... exactly that's the thing before the revolution you would never find friends who are driving a BMW with guys who don't have more than 5 pounds in their pocket. And yet, you are equal! You know, it's not... the poor is not better than the rich and the rich is not better than the poor.

- Nancy

To place Nancy's story more in context, I will discuss Anouk de Koning's (2009) research on youth, class and gender in Cairo. Education is the main factor that constitutes ones belonging to a certain class; being middle-class means having attended higher education and being acquainted with modern institutions. However, De Koning (2009) argues that through the differences in secondary and university education that generally developed in Egypt's neoliberal era, the middle class became increasingly divided and segregated into upper-middle class and lower-middle class. The upper-middle consists of people who received foreign education: language schools or private universities (like the American University in Cairo), while the lower-middle class is dependent on the deteriorating public education without any reasonable career prospects. Education is also an indication of the social and cultural capital one possesses, which are partly also related to one's family background. Cosmopolitan capital (e.g. fluency in English, American consumption lifestyle, 'Western' fashion and international diplomas) is among the most important markers of this new division of class, since this is only accumulated in private, foreign educational institutions (De Koning, 2009).

The labour market strengthens this class division, since the well-paid jobs in foreign businesses and organisations are reserved for upper-middle class young professionals with foreign private education and cosmopolitan capital. Less paid jobs in the public sector are

left for the increasing group of unemployed (lower-)middle class youth without eligible education. Also leisure activities are divided and segregated by class, like coffee shops in 'Western' style where familiarity with and belonging to foreign cultures and the English language is required to be at home in these places. Often, this means also a physical distance from other classes, since Cairo's geography and neighbourhoods are shaped according to class, so people belonging to different classes don't necessarily have to meet each other while passing through the city. 'These upscale spaces not only intimate cosmopolitan belonging, but also distance from other local realities' (De Koning, 2009, p. 130).

So, before the revolution started, as we have learnt from Nancy and De Koning (2009) people belonging to different classes hardly see, interact and deal with each other. The revolution has reconfigured this completely, since Tahrir Square was an inclusive space not defined by one particular class belonging. It gave upper class youth, like Nancy, the opportunity to first of all meet people from other classes, and second, engage together in bodily rituals for their common demands of the removal of the regime, which, third, made them feel related and united.

As De Koning (2009) argues with respect to Egypt, class is intrinsically bound with ideas about moral codes, (moral) behaviour and 'social level'. Many people from upper-middle and elite classes see people from lower classes as having less moral and cultural values, manifested for example in the language or slang people use, their attitude towards women in public, and the (leisure) places they visit, like local *ahwa's* (coffee houses on the street). This all intimates the place on the constructed hierarchical social ladder where people are positioned. For example, harassment of women is seen as mainly perpetrated by lower class men without education or proper job. A harassment free space for women, knowledgeable people with decent behaviour and cleanness were regarded as elements of

the upper-middle and elite classes, who inherited these moral codes and behaviours via their education and family. It is interesting to see that in the unity of Tahrir Square these moral connotations related to class and education were not detached or removed, but differently employed. Values that were first only reserved for upper class people, were now also attributed to the lower class.

In Tahrir, I will speak about Tahrir square first. Tahrir square is the best bit of Egypt. It's the best place, and the best people there. I can feel that I'm Egyptian there, not Coptic or Christian. Anyone is acceptable there. Their thinking is very good and I feel humanity and nothing else. And they want the best for Egypt, nothing else. I see that in their eyes, in their faces. Anyone is acceptable, they are very good people there. That's the atmosphere in Tahrir square. Most of them are Muslims, most of them. But they are very good, they are the best of the world. I said that it's the best thing I have ever did, it's to be in Tahrir and to see these people, which I didn't expect they are in Egypt. I want to say something... the kind of people in Tahrir square are... ehh... the best in Egypt, you know. You can say that a student from American University and business men, doctors, engineers, something like that, people who can understand. So the kind of people in Tahrir square is the best in Egypt, or anyone killed in Tahrir square it's... a loss. All of Egypt loose anyone killed from Tahrir square, because the kind of people there are different, so good. So I want to say something like that. They are the best because of their way of thinking, this is the main thing. Also, they are better kinds, as I said from American University, the most of them are doctors, something like that. Not only educated, but well-educated also. So they are different kinds you know, they are very good, not only in the thinking but also in the positions in life.

- Samar

Samar describes people in Tahrir as the best of Egypt, with good thinking and knowledge, well-educated and having good positions in life. This is undoubtedly the case for some of the protestors in Tahrir Square, but many of them only received primary education –if at all- and

would be normally described as having 'lower' positions in life, considering De Koning's argument about the relation between class, education and social position. Samar's description of the people in Tahrir Square therefore doesn't mean that they actually *do* have university-diplomas or jobs as engineers, but that they embody the cultural values and moral codes that normally are only related to the *educated* upper-middle class: no harassment of women, knowledge '*people who can understand*', acceptance of people with different religions, politeness towards each other and a revolutionary language.

So Tahrir Square was the Square of virtues, of no harassment, of good behaviour and helpful people. Since these behaviours are normally regarded only as elements of *educated* and upper-middle class people, now *all* people in Tahrir Square could be described as *educated*, although many of them might never have received (higher) education.

So Tahrir Square is, contrary to other spaces in Egypt, not related to one particular social class. The spatial segregation also determines in which places one feels at home and where not: 'Particular class performances determine in which parts of the city one can feel at home, and how one is seen and treated in different spaces on Cairo's class-segmented map' (De Koning, 2009, p. 11). However, many young people in Cairo increasingly feel not at all at home in Cairo, due to the difficulties of everyday life, among others most important unemployment. Tahrir, meanwhile, was a place where everyone could feel at home, maybe the only place in Cairo that was not determined by a specific class-bound people accepted. The place or area where one lives and works and leisure's are crucial markers of identity, specifically the class-specific belonging (De Koning, 2009, p. 121). Many people call Tahrir 'home', which means not wanting to be identified anymore with one's classed background,

but with belonging to a better Egypt, where morality and cultural values are not only reserved for people from upper-middle classes with education, but for everyone.

What does it mean for me? It stands for its name! Tahrir, liberation. I mean... this is it, all the generations that now will come, Tahrir now won't be the busiest, the Square with the most traffic, or the Square with the horrible Mogamma building. Tahrir is where... it's your address you know. Representation of your loyalty to the nation. Loyalty to the cause.

- Nancy

I do not suggest that lines along class divisions in Cairo or in Egypt have reshaped or even disappeared, that's simply impossible in 18 days. But, different people have got to know each other and are now more inclined to work together for a better Egypt, as the many new initiatives show that I discussed in Chapter two. We have seen that upper class youth have reconnected with Egypt again; whether this is also the case for other classes in Egypt, further research should point out. Now the upper class youth is closer to local realities and they are belonging to Egypt, as their references to 'home' suggest.

Young Egyptians increasingly cross the lines of class segregation that before the revolution were strictly upheld in order to secure one's class position and affiliated cultural and social status. Now there is more contact, commonalities and understanding between people from different classes. Upper class youth is more related to and belonging to Egypt, whereas before this was almost singled out for a belonging towards abroad, localized in a cosmopolitan Cairo (De Koning, 2009). A nice example of this, is the upscale Coffee shop in downtown Cairo that after the revolution received its new name: *Baladi*. Before, *baladi*, which means 'local', was only used to denote lower class coffee places on the street. This also shows the one-sidedness of this border crossing, because it still remains a coffee shop

that is simply too expensive for many lower class Egyptians to visit. Also, many people in Tahrir took up the task of cleaning the streets, which someone of the higher classes would never have done before the revolution, as De Koning describes: 'the essence of being middle class lies in the ability to avoid socially degrading, menial work, where one is obliged to obey others' (2009, p. 83). For someone of the lower classes to pick up work from the higher classes would nevertheless be impossible.

But, with the renewed interest of upper class youth in their country, there is ample suggestion that in future there will be more attention to the deprived situation of many Egyptians, rather than economic interests in rich areas like the past government had. Young Egyptians feel proud about their country, they are united and optimistic.

Unity and Optimism

You know before the revolution I had no hope in this country. I wanted to leave. When I went to Holland, I didn't want to come back. Like fuck this, I don't... you know... and then this happened in January, it was the first time in my life that I felt patriotic. I've never... ever ever felt patriotic. Ever. I didn't have any emotional attachment to my country. I loved my friends, I loved my city, but... but not the country. Not the nation. You know?

- Nancy

For the personality... eh... yes I think it's more patient now, more dealing with all kinds of people because in the square I talked with almost all ideologies, atheists, of course Christians and Muslims. They are... I mean from the daily life nothing is different between us, but all kinds of different thinking. We talked, we discussed, when you are at night there is a lot of time. So yeah somehow you know that your country is really big and people are really different. And... it's the same feeling when you start working after graduation for example, you're dealing with more people, outsiders from your circle. So this also helped. And yes I see

it's working and I see I'm more optimistic. Optimistic that it will succeed but not optimistic that they will end the violence.

- Amir

Here we see the change in the attitude towards Egypt. Nancy and Amir now have hope in their country and, therefore, feel related to Egypt again; and positive that their goals will succeed. This is due to the unity of difference in Tahrir Square and the revolution.

There was the visibility of difference *within* Tahrir square, but at the same time were these differences *without* the formerly attached social hierarchical positions and moral and cultural values just reserved for the upper class and elite. If we go back to Nancy's story, we see that class differences didn't disappear, since they precisely articulate and laugh about their differences; but that the relation and boundaries between different classes changed and were reconfigured. This happened through the shared bodily rituals of praying, chanting and marching with different people they never met before. Yasmin –and others- have mentioned that they became a different person; thereby they transcend boundaries of different classes that were before segregated.

Young people in Tahrir also transgressed the boundaries of their bodies, since Amir mentioned that he was eating and sharing a sandwich together with someone from a very poor area in Cairo. This created the new space Butler (2011) saw origination in the street protests. Jansen and Dresen (2012, p. 217) argue that: 'By sharing the same religiously imbued material substance, religious kinship and community are created'. I think this not only counts for religiously imbued material substance; but any material substance that people share creates community. Precisely this sharing and community we saw in Tahrir

Square. Hereby you see a conflation of the material (sandwich) and the symbolic (community).

Tahrir Square made people feel united, and precisely this unity created a new space between bodies in the Square that were together powerful. This unity among differences in the Square I have analysed as a liminal phase, which is according to Turner (1967) at the same time *against* the assertion of existing structures, with its segregation of class and gender; but also the *source* for (new) societal structures, possibility and creativity, where these boundaries of class and gender are crossed and transformed. Difference and unity in Tahrir Square is therefore not mutually exclusive, but both in need of each other. Unity only exists in relation to differences, and the articulation of differences, yet equality, in Tahrir Square was crucial for its unity.

In Tahrir people crossed boundaries of norms and behaviours that constitute the relations and friendships one normally has. This becomes clear in the friendship Nancy – and many others – have made with people from different classes and backgrounds. This reconfigured class belonging and meaning; and will change gender relations as well. As it is particularly in women's bodies that class belonging, meaning and boundaries are contained (De Koning, 2009). In the next chapter I will zoom in more on the relation and differences between women and men in Tahrir Square and their bodies. The unity of Tahrir Square is not the only aspect of the revolution that had an impact on one's daily life. The first days of the protests the Square had to be conquered from the police and its violence; and also after Mubarak stepped down, there were a lot of violent clashes and bloodshed. How has this influenced men and women's participation in the revolution and their daily live?

CHAPTER 4

Blood, Bodies and Violence:

Women's bodily experiences and symbolic meanings in the revolution

It is only my first week in Egypt, when Omar and Amir take me for a tour to Tahrir Square and around. At that moment, there are no big protests or marches, but the whole Square still breathes revolution: many street sellers with Egyptian flags, scarves and T-shirts; tents; a stage with a protest singer and supporters; dolls that represent Mubarak and Tantawi¹⁰ and maybe the most striking for Tahrir Square: no traffic. It feels like an amazing festival atmosphere with elated people, but signs of the violence that happened there are still very much present: some buildings in the Square are destroyed by fire, the Egyptian Museum is partly damaged, Amir points to the high rooftops from where snipers were shooting on the protestors, and the bullet holes in the buildings and street signs are uncountable. The blocks and barbed wires that were raised in the streets to prevent protestors from entering give me the feeling of a war zone. But only when Omar shows me the spot where he was hiding for the shooting from the military, and when he tells about a friend who died in his arms, I realize how violent it was for all the people involved in the struggles and how big the impact was on their lives.

They [the military] started to attack the people on Saturday night. For five days. Five days! The regime spent at these five days two. point. five. million. dollars. on the tear gas!! And it was very hard for me because I felt that at these days I was going to be killed. I think you

¹⁰ Field marshal Tantawi is since the ousting of President Mubarak the de-facto leader of Egypt.

were with me in Tahrir Square when I showed you the holes of the bullets in the walls... I was there, in this fight. And there was a poisoned tear gas. You know from the moment I smell the tear gas in Mohamed Mahmoud Street till now I feel that I am not normal. Yeah, I feel that. Especially the ten days after what happened in Mohamed Mahmoud Street. I was very tired, me and most of my friends who were there. Yeah. And now I feel that there is something that is not good inside me. I don't know what is it, but I feel that there is something abnormal, because of the tear gas.

- Omar

The first day I felt like I witnessed war. It was the 2nd of February, the black Tuesday, or black Wednesday. With the camels and horses... yeah it was really... war. You see soldiers everywhere... And even women they were doing something. For example after three or four hours of thugs attacking us from all around Tahrir square, I just sat and I see. Because you just see every two minutes somebody that is being carried away, and a lot of blood. Yeah I got... somehow I just sat there and I was watching. Maybe I was shocked. And then one woman distributing sandwiches came and said: 'Why are you like that and don't be desperate, we are powerful, and if they want to come inside to kill us, those people at the front lines will get tired. And if you get tired then we're not going anywhere, we will lose. So if they want to kill us, we will go and fight back.' Actually she really boosted me with energy and I just started again and I was going again... we were calling like 'come' and throwing either one or two stones and then go back.

- Amir

These are just two examples of the many experiences revolutionists had within violent clashes during the revolution. In this chapter I will focus on these violent experiences, the consequences it had for the revolution, for men and women, their bodies, and the differences therein. As we see in Amir's story, there was some kind of labour differentiation in the Square during the fights. At the frontlines it were mostly men who were fighting - more specifically ultra's (hooligans) from the different football clubs in Cairo. Others were

throwing stones, carrying injured away, distribute gas masks and antidotes. Many women were distributing food and drinks, and bringing in medicines. Young people were also filming, taking photographs and uploading everything on YouTube and Facebook. However, these lines of labour differentiation were not so clearly defined, as there were women protesting, fighting and throwing stones at the front lines as well. This became subject to discussions about women's acceptable role in the revolution - especially after everyone could see a YouTube film¹¹ where a woman was brutally beaten and stripped off her clothes by military forces.

In this chapter, I will discuss what particular consequences it had for women to participate in these clashes, as their participation became contested when their bodies were violated. Not only the symbolic meaning of these bodies is important, also the actual presence of men and women's bodies and the pains and damages inflicted on them (Butler, 2011). First I will focus on this bodily presence, the violence people experienced and how this influenced relations between people and the continuation of the revolution.

The violent clashes mainly happened at the start of the revolution when the Mubarak regime ordered the police to prevent people from entering and staying in Tahrir Square. They were however quickly defeated by the protestors, on 28th of January there were no policemen and officers anymore in the street. This was a great victory for the people, who, as I explained before, were suppressed by them for years. The military at this point was at the side-lines and pretended to be neutral. The Mubarak regime, however, still had other cards to play: they released criminals from prisons and ordered them to attack the protestors in the Square by horses and camels on the 2nd of February, also known as the Camel Battle. Also, these thugs got orders to sexually harass and touch female protestors.

¹¹ This shocking video can be seen on http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NFQu_ZDixtg, accessed on 11 August 2012

After Mubarak was ousted, the military forces (SCAF) were in charge, but the protests and sit-in's in Tahrir Square didn't stop. From March 2011 on, the military started to attack protestors in the Square as well, wanting them to leave. When in November 2011 there were big protests in front of the ministry of interior (also known as 'the second revolution'), the military started to attack protestors with bullets and tear gas for at least five days: the Mohamed Mahmoud clashes where Omar told us about.

"Every time I see more blood, I get more motivation to continue"

In the previous chapter I have discussed how so many different people in Egypt were united with each other and how this has transformed the lives of many participants. Not only the Utopian space of Tahrir Square was a key factor in this process, also the violence and the blood(shed) seen and experienced by the protestors played a big role. When I talked with people about the revolution, many mention the huge amounts of blood they saw on the streets, their clothes and on people. It made them even more motivated to continue the revolution, not despite, but *because of* the blood and the violence.

I would say the reason to be there... I would confess that, mainly when it gets tensed or violent I feel it's a must to go. Otherwise I get a very bad guilt that I'm leaving like brothers and sisters there and... although it's... when you logically think you cannot really do something but on the other hand, yeah one person does something. At least if I would throw some stones or treat people! Like giving them sprays for the tear gas. On those days, it was first the 9th of March, this was the first obvious attack by the military to protestors, when they took girls and did the virginity tests. And took guys and electrified them.

- Amir

Here, Amir speaks about brothers and sisters, something I heard many people do when they talked about their fellow protestors. Blood is one of the main bodily substances through which kinship or family relations are made or imagined. In anthropological studies (see Carsten, 2011) on kinship, blood is not approached as either a biological or cultural relationality, but *both*. It figures at the intersection of the physical or material and the symbolic (Jansen and Dresen, 2012). So as a combination of both bodily substance and cultural meaning, defined in that particular context and time, the blood of the revolution made people unite like brothers and sisters, like one big family.

In the previous chapter we have seen that a simultaneous involvement in bodily rituals like praying, chanting and marching makes people unite and transgresses classed differences of people. During violent events, something similar is happening. Because people are exposed to the same dangers and attacks on their bodies, class differences that before *divided* bodies and actions, disappeared during these events. The blood, as ‘common’ (everyone has, and needs it) and most visible bodily substance in violent clashes, was key in this. The blood in the streets is not from a poor or rich person, not from someone living in Cairo’s slums or in its most upper class areas. As I heard someone in Tahrir say: *It is my blood, what is there in the streets*. This blood made people realize that they are in the same position of being subject to be killed, there is no difference between them any more when being so close at the border between live and death. Thus, in addition to the bodily rituals discussed before, the violent attacks and blood(shed) is another factor causing the specific social situation in Tahrir Square: the unity across differences and the power this unity generated for the continuation of the revolution. For, it is not just about being brothers and sisters, but the fact that their brothers and sisters were *dying*, protestors were strengthened in their will and power to continue the revolution and the struggle:

And then we go back and we see a lot of blood in the streets, I can't forget this day. A lot of people have a lot of injuries. A lot of people are broken. Really, the streets were full of blood! And full of parts of the people, you know, like arms and legs. I don't know how the military is thinking... they go to war and they don't believe that the people who see that, will never forget what they [the military] did. And the people will be more positive! They are not going to be afraid. Especially because the people who... usually used to be closer to the conflict place, they are totally different people from the people who are outside. And the people who are outside are always supporting the people who are inside. And the people who are inside always will be positive till they get their rights. So it will never be finished. And there are a lot of people from outside that see what happened and they come inside! So it will never end.

- Omar

Afterwards when you have all this violence... there's no fear anymore. And you find that you just finished more than half the way, so are you going back now? The guy that died, he died for you to go back? Or for you to continue?

- Heba

With 'inside' Omar means the people who are close to or in the conflict zone, the ones that are close to the killings and the blood. As for his experience, those people are different from the ones that didn't see the violence and blood, those people have changed. This transformation results in the positive motivation to continue the fight, to continue what the ones that died fought for. We should not go back, as Heba implies. More and more people experience this positive motivation: *For every person killed, there will come 2 or 3 more people to the Square.* – Omar. Also, the blood in the streets changed the opinion of many people in Egypt that were before supporting the regime. The blood made visible the crimes and the violence perpetuated by the regime and the military, whereas before these crimes and the violence was hidden inside the secret investigation centres. When many people saw

this blood, they started to support the goal of the revolutionists: the removal of the regime and military. The blood in the streets, it shows the truth (Castelli, 2012).

Also for Omar personally, the violence and the blood changed him and his motivation for revolution as well:

The seeing of all the people with the blood, that changed a lot of things. That I will still continue, with that people, till we success or till I die. You know what I would like you to know... from the moment I see that guy who died in my hands... he gave me positive energy that I must get his rights back. It was a big shock for me because I was holding him, I didn't think that he is dying or he has bullets in his body... I just found the blood in my hand... Do you know till now the jacket that has a lot of blood of him, I still didn't wash it. I keep it. Just sometimes I use to look for it, and remember him, and remember his peace.

- Omar

When I asked Nancy what made her go to the violent clashes during the Mohamed Mahmoud events, she also explained how the blood and violence were key factor for her motivation:

Because of the blood I saw... and I couldn't... I mean the point when I was not in the Square, I could not do anything. I could not think of anything. The whole night I couldn't sleep. I mean at the office I couldn't work. All the time on Twitter and on Facebook, to see what's happening. I finished work, I go to the Square, and then I have to go back home I open the computer and I check everything... the next morning I was waking up with the computer on my lap! And this the whole week, from Saturday until Thursday. All of it. It's an obligation. It's an obligation that I have to go, it's not a choice. Even if I don't want to go down, I can't... I would feel guilty if I don't go down. The revolution became your life! Your goal, your cause.

(Do you know where this feeling of obligation or guilt comes from? - Kathrine)

I feel that people are dying in the streets and sacrificing their life, so that everybody in this country lives a better life. So I cannot sit and enjoy my daily life and not pay attention to this... Even if I don't know how to throw rocks or I'm not efficient in some way. But by being there... you know... I'm registering my position. I'm telling: 'I'm with you'. Even if they want just a tissue or water, if there's something like... this is why I went close... not staying in the Square but next to the frontlines because I could be useful, I could be more useful to them there than sitting outside. Even if I'm not throwing rocks or whatever. Yeah like, it's the blood, that... I feel that the blood is on our hands. And I can't look to myself in the mirror knowing that... you know... it's personal... We're continuing, no matter how many you kill of us, how many are injured. The pain makes us stronger, I mean, really every time they kill, every time I see more blood, I don't get discouraged. I get more motivation to continue.

- Nancy

So also for Nancy the blood and violence has changed how she shapes her daily life (all the time checking news about the fights, going every day to Tahrir) and how it makes her more motivated to continue the revolution. In this, it is not only about the fighting itself, but about *being there*, the actual and symbolical presence to show that you are supporting each other, as brothers and sisters. This feeling was particularly present during violent clashes and events, when the blood was dominating and the unity in Tahrir was strong again.

But what happened with the injured and deceased people, with their violated bodies, with girls who had to undergo virginity tests and guys who got electroshocks on their genitals. What did this do to the revolution and to the men and women involved?

Bodies in the Revolution

Besides blood as signifier and substance of family bonds, blood is also related with martyrdom. Blood in the streets shows the lives that are sacrificed in the struggle or war, as Castelli (2012) discusses. In Egypt, those people that died in the revolution are martyrs,

because they gave their life for a cause: a better Egypt. *The blood is not just worthless blood, I mean they are paying their blood for something.* - Nancy. Whether this is religiously seen as a legitimate cause to become a martyr, is not very much important here. In the interviews and talks I had with people, as well as in popular revolution songs¹² people talk about the *martyrs of the revolution*. These multiple meanings of blood as family bond, as motivation to continue and as martyrdom reinforce each other. Because people felt related with each other as Egyptians and as brothers and sisters, the ones that died could be seen as martyrs *for* Egypt. And because these martyrs offered themselves to the country, people felt more motivated and obligated to continue the struggle of the martyrs for a free Egypt.

This martyrdom, however has a particular masculine image. As you could see in the revolution song all the martyrs that are portrayed are male, with their mothers mourning him. When my informants talk about martyrs, implicitly we talk about men. The only female martyr that is often portrayed in media, graffiti or newspapers is Sally Zahran. However, this caused major controversies about the legitimacy of her being a (female) martyr. In the original account, she was killed on the 28th of January 2011 by a thug hitting her on her head, while she was heading towards Tahrir Square. But when her story became more known, it began to change. Newspapers suggested that she actually was not in Cairo at all on the 28th, and 'details emerged that conflicted with the iconic image of Zahran slain in battle', as Walter Ambrust (2012) describes in his discussion of the image of Zahran as martyr. Another story goes that she died accidentally by falling from a balcony and was not killed at all. So debates emerged what then was the meaning of her being a martyr, or whether she could be considered a martyr at all (Armbrust, 2012). Also questioned was her status as veiled woman. The picture which was distributed widely showed Zahran unveiled; however, the

¹² For example: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7TfsxXQW5M8&feature=fvwrel>, accessed 10 August 2012

many requests of her family or other Egyptians to replace this picture for one where Zahran is veiled, could suggest that as a woman to become a martyr, one should at least be veiled?

Considering the meaning of blood that is important for being a martyr, Willy Jansen and Grietje Dresen (2012) argue that while in comparison with other bodily substances (like milk and semen) blood seems gender neutral, but it is not. Blood has a different meaning for men and women, hence the different attitudes towards a woman as martyr. For, male blood is mostly seen as holy and as a conscious bloodshed (one is dying for the nation and being a martyr), whereas female blood is polluting and unconscious (like menstruation blood). Also, because of menstruation female blood is more related with fertility and sexuality than male blood (Jansen and Dresen, 2012). Blood on the streets, as 'matter out of place' (Douglas, 1966) is disordering the social order, yet this disorder has different meanings for men and women. In case of male bloodshed it is interpreted as a sacrifice and in case of female bloodshed it is polluting and it needs to be removed (as Zahran's image as martyr is often removed) or she needs to be controlled (by picturing her with a veil, which she in fact was not wearing). Blood is therefore often limiting women's social and religious space, even after death. It is placing men and women on a different position on the hierarchical ladder, the one as full martyr, the other as victim or false martyr.

Thus, when women become victim of attacks from the military or police, it is about their sexually violated bodies, not their martyrdom. These sexually violated bodies are regarded much more ambiguous and much less heroic than the images of the masculine martyrs. Thus, as women's participation in the revolution is ambivalent and sometimes contested, this is particularly true in violent events. For the military female bodies were a strategic site to pin down the revolution. They perpetrated virginity tests on women, where they investigate her body if she is still a virgin (and thus a 'good' woman) or not (and can

thus be put in jail). This fear and humiliation demotivated and withhold many women from protesting, as well as the danger to be harassed by thugs. This demotivation is exactly the aim of the military. But it didn't only demotivate women, but also men, as I will discuss below that the female body is not merely a physical body but it also represents the society and the men of that society¹³.

Women's bodies as symbol for society

Mary Douglas (1966) in *Purity and Danger* argues that the body serves as a symbol of nations or societies, and that boundaries of bodies symbolize the boundaries of these societies. This is accompanied by rituals inflicted in the body that reflect the concerns about the dangers exposed to the nation's boundaries: 'We cannot possibly interpret rituals concerning excreta, breast milk, saliva and the rest unless we are prepared to see in the body a symbol of society, and to see the powers and dangers credited to social structure reproduced in small on the human body' (Douglas, 1966, p. 115). This suggests that the body is not only treated as a discursive symbol, but that there are actual rituals or actions performed on the body that can cause pain or blood, but also humiliation or shame, as is apparent in for example the virginity tests female revolutionists had to suffer.

Because women are the ones that sexually reproduce the society or nation via pregnancy, child bearing and breast feeding; their sexuality is of main importance for protecting the nation. Women's bodies are the gates of entry in a particular society. Moreover, the general opinion is that women's sexuality has to be secured and protected, in order to protect society (Douglas, 1966; Zarkov, 2007). This means in practice that often men

¹³ This is, as is sometimes suggested, not particular for Middle-Eastern or Muslim countries, but found everywhere. Look for example at the liberty statue of the United States (a woman) and the symbol of Volksmoeder (the mother of the nation) of Afrikaner nationalism in South-Africa (McClintock, 1997, p. 101).

have to protect women and control their sexuality, in the form of virginity and adultery penalties. Women should only have sexual intercourse after marriage, because then it is controllable and women's purity and avoidance of pollution is secured (Douglas, 1966). Therefore the use of thugs in the Egyptian revolution to harass women and the militaries that are perpetuating virginity tests is used as a weapon, since it sexually de-purifies the revolutionary women, and at the same time the whole society where these women belong to. This society here refers to the Egyptians that are active in or sympathize with the revolution and opposition against the regime and military.

Douglas mentions the gender specificity of different pollution patterns in different societal structures, and that these patterns are there to secure the stability of society and structure. This translates in men's anxieties of women's (sexual) behaviour, which is considered polluting for men, the family or for the society at large. There are specific rules for relations with women, the clothes they wear, contact with unknown men, to be virgin, to be pure, to prove that they are 'good', unpolluted women, and thus belong to a 'good' – in Egypt's case revolutionary – society.

In *The Body of War* Dubravka Zarkov (2007) analyses images of female bodies in the media after the war in former Yugoslavia. She argues that at the location of the female body, the nation is produced through notions of masculinity, femininity and heterosexuality. The female body represents, creates and protects the nation; so rape of women in the war in former Yugoslavia was not rape against a woman, but against a whole nation. Also, rape of women is seen by men as a sign of their male impotence to protect their women. The rape of a woman is more an act against her husband or father than to her own, since the female body represents the honour of a man, as well as the honour of the nation. With rape, the masculinity of men and of the nation is affected. The body of the woman is a ceremonial

battlefield (Zarkov, 2007). Also Nira Yuval-Davis (1997) and Anne McClintock (1997) argue that women represent the honour of the society by guarding society's boundaries. 'Women, in their 'proper' behaviour, their 'proper' clothing, embody the line which signifies the collectivity's boundaries' (Yuval-Davis, 1997, p. 46). Moreover, according to McClintock (1997) women are also denied national agency and excluded from direct action: 'Women are typically constructed as the symbolic bearers of the nation but are denied any direct relation to national agency' (p. 90).

Zarkov (2007) and Enloe (2004) criticize these feminist theorizations about rape and war where (Muslim) women essentially are assigned with the role of victim, are denied action and agency and are portrayed as traditional, very religious and suppressed by men. Women are not only victim of rape, but they are also active agents in organizing for example women's movements and memory forums, and being politically active. According to Zarkov (2007), the female body is at the same time a space where dominant masculine ideals are represented, but as well a space for self-determination and self-representation: autonomy¹⁴. In Egypt, Aliaa, a woman who posed naked on a photo which she uploaded on Twitter and Facebook as political protest, can be a clear example of this autonomy and self-representation. According to Aliaa¹⁵, her naked body was a symbol for the new nation of Egypt to come: racist free, sexist free, and free of corruption.

Nancy describes the changing attitude towards the participation and violations of women's bodies in the revolution:

¹⁴ This, however, does not become clear in her book, as she similarly does not discuss women's stories and experiences, but stays rather close to her media analysis.

¹⁵ On her Facebook-page: <https://www.facebook.com/aliaaelmahdy>

On 8th of March the women's day, there was a protest, a march for women's rights. Of course it was a disaster. They were attacked. Not by thugs or anything but by normal people saying 'ah it's not the time now to ask for women's rights, you should sit at home' and they were sexually harassed and it was a mess. Come to compare that, with December. The photo of the woman, like with the blue bra, it hit us off the spot. It is a matter of honour now. Look, you know, and this is because of the patriarchal society. Because when they saw the photos of the men being beaten they were not so affected as the woman. It has of course advantages and disadvantages, when they saw that you know... it's not acceptable that you... it's an honour crime. It's... and this is why it mobilized so many... and it was at a point when the moral was very low, for the revolution. And the women's march, it basically gave it back. When I saw after the march or during the march, seeing some guys, friends from Tahrir, they're like 'You lit up the square, please come every day please come...' They were so happy and they were coming to us I remember one guy and he came to us and he said that 'thank you! Thank you so much for making this march because they're saying we're thugs and seeing the images of the thousands, tens of thousands women marching with us, they would know that we're not thugs.' Because not all of these women are thugs. And after this protest, after this march he, in the, you know... during the march the TV people were asking 'what do you think of the statement that SCAF released?'. SCAF released a statement, apologizing to all the women of Egypt and saying that an investigation would be done about blablabla. This is very... you know... this means that we pressured them he! We put them in a... you know, it was a successful march because we got a response!

- Nancy

So here we see women's bodies as symbol for the society (the woman with the blue bra) and the actions and response this generates among many Egyptians in the form of a huge women's march with men and women participating; while before this incident a women's march was deemed undesirable. Also, it shows the agency of many Egyptian women who protest, discuss and take action against (gender) violence and social justice.

Also, what becomes clear is that bodies are crucial in protests and revolution. First of all, the body is the *means* of revolution, without all those bodies in the square, there is no revolution. So bodies have both a physical and symbolical importance in this revolution and these both reinforce each other. Physical, because without these bodies being present in the Square, there would have been no revolution. Because there is the chance to get killed, to get your body injured. The consequences were physical; people died because of blood loss, bullets in their body, or they lost their eyes. Amir also tells me that protestors have written their name and their family's telephone number on their arm; in case they are killed. People were protecting each other with their bodies, even people they didn't know. This exposure to violence united people and made them as brothers and sisters. Also, the inflicted violence on female and male bodies made visible the symbolic meanings of especially women's bodies as guardians of the society.

Judith Butler (2011) also discusses the importance of bodies and the *space between* bodies in street protests: 'Bodies congregate, they move and speak together, and they lay claim to a certain space as public space'. This public space is thereby not a given, but precisely that what is contested in demonstrations. The action that is accomplished in these protests is action in the space *between* the people, between their bodies. So that means that action is only possible when there are several bodies together, not just one. These were women's and men's bodies together, but, as we have seen, these women's bodies were highly contested and ambiguous.

Public Space, Ambiguity and Protection

At the beginning of the revolution until, I don't know... I would say April, yeah it was the... we call it the 'leh eh midan', Square of virtues. It was like that for the whole period, because

usually you know, in any big numbers or gatherings, the guys at least they would say some words like 'hey you' or something like that to women. Verbal harassment. But this did not exist at all. And girls were completely comfortable, I mean even if guys accidentally touched them or something, they know that he didn't mean it. And even with those with a niqaab¹⁶, because usually you know they are...they isolate themselves from other guys. Some of them even don't like to raise their voice. But this was not the case.

- Amir

Amir was not the only one who mentioned that harassment completely disappeared in the Utopian space of Tahrir Square. It seemed completely normal for women to participate in the revolution and to be visible in public space, whereas before public space was highly structured by patriarchy and the danger of being harassed (Shoukry and Hassan, 2008).

According to De Koning (2009) the spaces in Cairo where upper middle class women could move freely are determined by class. In the upper middle class circles women's public appearance was normalized, even crucial for being upper middle class. However, women being public presence in other 'lower class' areas could also mean that they are sexually and morally 'loose'. This is depended on the gaze of the classed other; more precisely the men of lower classes. Thus, De Koning (2009) argues, 'concerns about women's movement focused on her unscathed passage through public space. Not the presence of these [upper class] women in public was seen as problematic, but *rather the kind of dangers that being in public presented*' (p. 150, emphasis added). This can mean sexual dangers, but also the violence perpetuated to revolutionists by the police or military forces. So, even though women's participation was accepted in the Square and it was relatively safe without harassment, still women face dangers in public, like hired criminals who are ordered to harass women, or the

¹⁶ A veil that fully covers the body and face of a woman.

material and symbolic violation of their bodies in violent clashes, attacks by the military or virginity tests¹⁷.

This can explain the at first sight seeming contradictory statements of my informants about women in Tahrir square as something completely normal, but, as Amir told me: *it's not a place to take your sister with*. It shows the ambiguity women face while participating in the revolution, as well as the fact that many men feel the need to protect women. This, however, does not mean that women are silenced or victims, since they react and take action against these dangers in public.

This symbolical meaning of women's bodies and the fact that many men protected women in the marches and protests – for example by forming a human shield around women – was also valued very ambiguous among the women I spoke with. *We are in conflict with ourselves*, Nancy explained. By this she, and others, mean the space between accepting the protection of men and contesting the patriarchal norms behind it:

It is not for protection, it is not that I cannot protect myself; I hate it when others think they should protect me. But it is just a signal that women should still come to the revolution, that

¹⁷ Also, many women were because of this not allowed to get out at all. Jessica Winegar (2012) sheds light on these experience of Egyptian women in the revolution. Against the iconic male image of the revolutionary, she shows the experience of the people, specifically women, who stayed home during the revolution. She describes the frustration of not being able to go there, due to the violence and the children they have to take care of. This sheds light on the classed, aged and gendered aspect or the privileges to participate in Tahrir square and describes the guilt and frustration they feel; and the difficulty of managing the household when schools and bakeries are closed. She argues that by major political changes, also a focus should be on the home as space of (political) action, for instance the supporting with food cooking and medicine. 'To be the iconic revolutionary in Tahrir, one either had to be poor, without anything to lose, or privileged in certain ways' (Winegar, 2012, p. 69). Winegar discusses the privileges (age, gender, no children, income from permanent employment, health) one needs to have to be able to participate in Tahrir, this is very much true for the young Egyptians that form the core of my research.

they don't need to be afraid of the violence. It is just a signal and it only lasted for a while, after that the men didn't stay around the women anymore.

- Heba

(And you said that during the protests men wanted to protect women, what do you think of that? What are your feelings about this? – Kathrine)

Of course, of course. I don't know, I felt we are a great nation. I don't know. I felt eh... I felt good you know, I'm safe to protest I'm safe to express myself, without any harm, so it was really good.

- Noha

So the protection of women was a sign of safety so that women could protest without fear of being attacked by thugs, at the same time some women experienced it as a patriarchal form of control over women by men. According to Yasmin, the protection of women by men also had positive gains for the revolution, as she experienced that when there are a lot of women protesting, this urged more men to go protesting as well. Followed by a stronger power of the revolutionists to combat the military and the police:

Also when girls were hit or beaten, I think it attracted the emotions of the people. You know. Like the girl beaten in such bad way, you saw it. I think this is gathering more and more people and they attract more and more people, by emotion. Men come with her to protect her, of course. This role, I think it's so so so effective in the revolution. I think also in videos, I noticed that the places that were full of girls, on the day of the revolution, it was the places that attracted people and have a very very very tough fighting. Because, girls attracted more people, so at the other side, the military forces, they want the people to stop gathering. Ok? They want to separate people. So the places that have very tough fights and tough resistance, were the places where the females are! Ok? To protect the girls from the army and the police. - Yasmin

Hence the ambiguity of women and their bodies in the violence and revolution; it was at the same time completely normal and accepted in Tahrir, but also dangerous for women, which generates the opinion that women should rather stay at home or that they need to be protected. However, as Yasmin does, we should also try to see the positive sides of this ambiguity for women themselves and for changing gender relations in Egypt.

For example, the contested image of Sally Zahran as martyr, doesn't necessarily have to have a negative interpretation. As Armbrust (2012) suggests: 'Sally Zahran was more productive than any other martyr because she highlighted social tensions. She functioned as a prism refracting the light of events; a kind of medium, in other words, that redirects meanings'. The revolution created space to re-think the place of women in society, as Sally Zahran's martyrdom has showed us. Sally Zahran is seen as a 'flawed' martyr, but therefore she could precisely move people to action (in the field of women's rights, religious activism and/or anti-government protests) since her martyrdom was contested and inspiring for many people to articulate their views (Armbrust, 2012). This action takes place in a new space, which is created in the revolution and continues till today.

A New space of Creativity and Possibilities

According to Droeber (2005) prevailing gender relations and roles ascribed to men and women are more flexible in times of rapid change; and women are the main actors in these changing gender roles. This results in greater possibilities and options for women in education, workforce and politics. In the Egyptian revolution notions about what is appropriate for women as symbols of society are not stable anymore and are highly discussed. In this – in between – status of society's rules, roles and codes, women were able – to some degree – to create a new space of (political) action where before this space was

invisible or less available. Therefore, I do not only want to see the body as symbol of the nation, as Douglas (1966) and Zarkov (2007) suggest. Rather, the body also serves as an active agent to accomplish change, to create a new space literally and symbolically.

How the women were involved, it was basically stating the obvious. Stating that... women are part of society, I mean they have a role to play just like the men have a role to play. And, once they got their space, they're doing it. But of course after the revolution, a new space has been created. For example, something like a story from Samira Ibrahim for example, the girl... one of the girls who were subjected to virginity tests in March. She came out, told her story and sued the army! Before the revolution this would never ever ever be possible for someone to come out and say that something like that happened, a woman, and she's from Suhag, from upper-Egypt a very very conservative place, her dad was a Muslim brotherhood. This space has been created after the revolution! Something like the women's march, for example, I mean this was completely spontaneous he, we started out as not more than 20-30 people and then thousands! And women from all walks of life, with their children, fully covered, Christians, young women old women, women walking in the street and then joining us after hearing the chants and seeing the photos. New space has definitely been created.

- Nancy

This new space, however, does not undermine an existing patriarchal structure or does not removes the symbolical meanings from women's bodies. Ibrahim, according to Egypt Independent Newspaper¹⁸, stated after she lost the trial against the military: 'She agreed with commentators that the judgment is an injustice to the country and not to her person. "No one violated my honour; it's Egypt's honour that's been violated," Ibrahim posted on her Twitter account following the verdict'. Also in Libya, Nadjie Al Ali speaks about the rape of a revolutionary women: 'her rape is not only meant to violate and harm an individual

¹⁸ <http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/%E2%80%98virginity-test%E2%80%99-doctor-acquittal-reveals-military-judiciary-shortcomings>

women, but it is a way to humiliate and violate entire communities. What made this case so different from the many others that go unreported is that Iman al-Obeidy did not allow herself to be silenced by prevailing notions of shame and codes of honour' (Al-Ali, 2012, p. 29).

So in the revolution, due to women's participation in the public sphere and in the violent clashes, emerged a new space to speak out; and this has inspired many young women to become active in women's or social movements. Because of the accomplishments of the revolution, men and women realize that they can *change* something in their country, also gender norms and relations. Noha and Mona are now for instance members of the Women's Union and Nancy is active in community development.

CONCLUSION

Social Change:

“This is what’s really going to build a new country”

In this thesis, I have discussed the particular experiences young revolutionists have in the revolution in Egypt. The unity and solidarity of Tahrir Square, the violence and the bodies; but also the corrupt politics of the older generation. The revolution not only caused political change, as this change was not what the revolutionists intended: *Tantawi is equal Mubarak* – Omar. The revolution was about a much bigger social change in Egypt. The daily lives of young protestors have changed greatly because of their participation in the revolution. This is not only something found during for instance the 18 days of protest in Tahrir Square, but the unity and mutual care still lives in the continuous activism of the youth of Egypt.

Through the unity in Tahrir Square, this activism developed. The being there together with one goal and a simultaneous bodily involvement in rituals like praying, marching and chanting. Because of these different bodies together in the Square, there was a unity created. These rituals are according to Turner (1967) transformative; also they are not merely religious but intertwined with political demands. The Salafyo Costa movement wants to continue this unity through their movement and religious dialogue. Hereby fixed categories and dichotomies like religious versus secular, which separate people; are crossed and transgressed. The public space becomes, like Salafyo Costa is, more inclusive.

This unity from Tahrir was extended in the violent clashes, since everyone was equal and was exposed to the same dangers and attacks. The blood that was everywhere in the

streets created a relatedness of brothers and sisters among the protestors. The blood furthermore made people even more motivated to continue the revolution, not to have the blood already spilled been for nothing. Also, many of them mention they feel no fear any more since the violence in the revolution. It is impossible now to 'stop' while there have already so many martyrs died. That means also that young people oppose corrupt politics, which is often the way of the older generation.

In this way, young people create a dichotomy between their 'new' young generation, and the older generation. Before young people were seen as the 'lost' generation, but now they became the generation that sparked the revolution. This made them very proud and able to articulate and differentiate their generation with the older generation. Many young people became furthermore interested in their country and its development, whereas before most of them wanted to leave Egypt. New contacts and friendships have emerged in Tahrir Square, also among people from different classes that before the revolution never would meet each other.

Through the liminality of Tahrir Square and the absence of normally available structures –like inequality-, new creative ideas, friendships and relations have arisen (see also Turner, 1967). This unity in Tahrir Square is something particularly found in the 18 days of protest in Tahrir, but this does not mean that it does not have any influence on the activities after that period, as the new initiatives suggest. The revolution does not stop at Tahrir Square; it is a process and continuity in the daily lives of young protestors, as the activities like Salafyo costa, community development, women's marches, film evenings and new NGO's show.

This also created a new space to speak out, like Samira Ibrahim did about the virginity tests, and the massive women's movement where men and women participated in. This new space has particularly become visible after women participated in violent clashes. This does not mean that gender relations are completely reconfigured since the revolution, but that there is a continuous transformation, crossing and redefining of these gender relations. Especially when women's bodies are violated the ambiguities become clear; at the one hand it is completely normal that women participate in the revolution, but at the other hand they need to be protected or stay at home when it is dangerous. When this ambiguity becomes visible, for instance through bloodshed or women becoming martyrs, it becomes at the same time subject to be changed by women.

It makes visible how women and their bodies are a symbol of society, and therefore these societal structures can be changed and contested. Women are not only victims, but also active subjects in changing these gendered norms of society, through for instance women's protests, films and speaking out and appearing in public. This creates the new space available for women in society. This new space and these new initiatives cross boundaries of class, gender and religion, as was also the case in Tahrir Square.

So revolutionists not merely confine to existing structures and norms and (patriarchal) structures in society, but change them through their activism, protests, new movements and new space of speaking out, like Samira Ibrahim. These changes force us to reconsider the definition of revolution, as the revolution in Egypt is not a revolution where one ideology is replaced for the other, but an open-ended process of creativity and civil liberties, as we have seen in the new initiatives and bonds that were forged and that generates an ever-expanding public space (Dabashi, 2012).

No, no, no, this needs to... this needs a cultural revolution. And this is the thing about this revolution now; we're demanding a completely different life. A completely different country and a completely different life doesn't mean that we only change Mubarak and that we change the government; that we have the right to protest, that we don't have corruption, violence, no. A real revolution is a revolution in everything. And the first revolution is a revolution with yourself. You know, before you change... if you don't change yourself the revolution will never succeed. Because the nation is made of individuals and if we change the system and the individuals are the same, it would be another reproduction of the old regime. And this is what people fail to understand. No, of course we're still in a patriarchal society, but I'm hopeful... not in the sense that... I'm hopeful because I'm hopeful in everything. I mean, I think that the workers will get their rights, the farmers will get their rights and the women will get their rights. Because you know, now there is an empowerment, a feeling of empowerment among all the citizens. Regardless of their cause. So in this aspect I think yes we will have more rights, more cultural change. The problem now is that some people are saying, they're afraid, and especially the West, and it pisses me off! And even some friends of mine! They say, 'the Islamists are gonna take this over and they're gonna fuck women.' But you're talking... you're completely disregarding the social combination of the country, and you forget... if we have learned anything from this year is that the government should be afraid of the people. We should never be afraid of the government. We should never be afraid of the Islamists, or the army, any of this! If we don't like them we will beat them down, just like any other regime. And with the Islamists, you know if they try to oppress women it will backfire on them! If they try to oppress the workers, any kind of oppression! They will be digging their own grave.

- Nancy

You know, before the revolution it was I, I, I, I, I, I don't care about you. Nobody cared about each other. Now this social change, and this is even more important than the political part, you know. This is... this is what's going to really build a new country.

- Nancy

Also, as Nancy argues, these new initiatives and the social change are the most important in building a new Egypt, not the political change. Young people in Egypt finally have a goal in their lives. *This is what the revolution has gained* –Nancy. This creativity and these liberties manifest itself mostly in the *daily life* of the protestors. So this daily life is, I argue, an important location to study social change, gender, religion and revolution.

These conclusions of my research in Egypt show us that what the revolution has meant to people, is not something easily to describe or to grasp in one definition, binary or category; particularly not for women's experiences in the revolution. It is a much more ambiguous and continuous struggle. So, which other questions should we ask in relation to gender, religion and social change to be more productive and close to local realities?

There are different opinions among men and women about women's participation in the revolution, as well as different feelings towards gender relations within men and women themselves. I argue that it is more relevant to study *how* these ambivalences towards women's participation in revolution and clashes is constructed and contested, rather than placing the 'outcome' of the revolution for women in either 'emancipation' or 'modesty', as Moghadam (2003) proposes. The daily life is an important location to study societal changes, as it will show the realities women and men face in daily life; as well as the activities they undertake to change conceptions and norms in society.

The body is hereby also a crucial aspect, for when the body is involved and violated, opinions and sentiments about women as symbol of the society change. In women's bodies we are able to precisely see those ambiguities and struggles, as well as the transformations they actively undergo; like speaking out, posing naked on Facebook and the congregation of bodies for a women's protest. So the body is important in the study of religion, gender and

change, not only as *symbol* for the nation, as has been researched already very often -and is still very apparent-, but also as space for action of women and men themselves. After years of oppression by the brutal regime, this space for action finally led to the social change Egypt is facing now, and which will shape a completely new country.

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