

LETTER FROM CAIRO

TWO REVOLUTIONS

What has Egypt's transition meant for its women?

BY WENDELL STEAVENSON

*Hend Badawi, whose family punished her for protesting on Tahrir Square.*

The road from Cairo through the Nile Delta is uneven and choked with traffic. The roads leading off it become soft silt tracks, winding through villages that are strung along the ridges of levees, amid a maze of tributaries and irrigation canals. During the thirty years of Hosni Mubarak's rule, the population of Egypt doubled, to eighty million, and the hastily built towns have a makeshift, unfinished feel. Steel rebar pokes out from the flat roofs of many houses, in preparation for whenever there is money to build another story.

I had come to Banha, a university town an hour or so north of Cairo, with some eighty thousand students—among them Hend Badawi, the woman I hoped to meet. A friend of hers met me on the

outskirts of town, and told me that Badawi was taking an exam. It was June and she was completing a master's degree in education. We waited for her in the Rock, a trendy café on the corniche along the river. Inside, it was dimly lit and lined with faux stone. The menu advertised fried calamari and Chinese chicken. Students sat at the tables in groups, drinking cappuccinos and working on laptops. I noticed a few couples sitting very close to each other, hands entwined over untouched cups of coffee.

Badawi arrived, apologizing; her exam had lasted longer than expected. She is twenty-three years old and was dressed in the fashionable but conservative manner common among young Egyptian women, with black trousers

and a black-and-white blouse over a tight black turtleneck. She wore a voluminous head scarf in the Egyptian style, framing her face like that of a Russian doll. She was supposed to be at home—her family had placed her under a curfew—but she was eager to tell her story.

Last December, Badawi was accosted by soldiers while she was on Tahrir Square, protesting against the interim military government. They pulled off her head scarf and dragged her several hundred metres by her hair, punching and slapping her, groping her breasts and her behind, and cursing at her. "One told me, 'If my sister went to Tahrir, I would shoot her,'" she said. Badawi was taken to a room inside a parliament building, where she was beaten again, Tasered, and interrogated. Twelve hours later, she was taken to a military hospital, where she required twenty-five stitches in her head. Her left wrist and fingers had been broken, and her feet were so badly lacerated from being dragged across the rubble of Tahrir that she couldn't stand.

The following day, Field Marshal Mohamed Tantawi, at that time the leader of Egypt's Military Council and the country's de-facto ruler, paid a visit to the hospital with a state-TV camera crew. It was a photo op intended to show concern, but Badawi screamed at him, "We don't want your visit! We are not the ones who are the thugs! You've beaten us and ruined us! Shame on you! Get out!" Badawi grinned at the memory. "Everyone panicked," she said, and Tantawi and his entourage backed out of her room. "Inside, I felt serenity. I felt I was much stronger than he was."

The story of the girl who had yelled at Tantawi spread through the activist community on Twitter and Facebook. A couple of days later, when Badawi was moved to a civilian hospital—she was shackled to the bed—some of her friends managed to smuggle in a video camera to take her testimony. In the video, Badawi's hand is bandaged and she has a crescent-shaped bruise under one eye. The pain is apparent in her voice as she whispers what the Army did to her. The video went viral, and Egypt's independent TV stations used it to refute government claims that there had been no Army violence against civilians. After a few days in the hospital, Badawi was taken to court and arraigned on eight charges, including

assaulting security forces, throwing Molotov cocktails, and destroying public property. Then she was released.

Badawi's troubles did not end there. When a relative who is a former general came to see her at the military hospital, he told her, "You have shamed all the family. I cannot even look people in the eyes." Her family is sympathetic to the old regime. They were appalled that a young woman would draw attention to herself in this way. She hadn't told them that she had been going to protests, and they blamed her for what had happened. Her grandfather, who occupied a mayoral position as head of the village, told her that her actions reflected badly on the entire family: how could he now command the respect he needed to mediate disputes? The best thing she could do was to be quiet and forget the whole thing. Her family locked her in her room. Friends and activists were turned away. Her aunt, with whom she had lived since the death of her mother, a few years ago, scolded her frequently, and her brother, Ahmed, hit her. Maintaining contact with the outside world became a matter of strategy: Badawi hid her cell phone in the cast on her arm.

I saw Badawi several times over the summer. We usually met after her exams, because her family let her out only to go to the university. In the short spells we had available, she spoke quickly and urgently. I would ask when her curfew was, and she'd say that it had already passed: "It's only another beating. I can take it."

Badawi felt that fighting the regime was only half the battle. As a woman, she had been struggling against the control and the constraints her family imposed on her since her teens. "When January 25th happened," she told me, referring to the beginning of the protests that brought down Mubarak, last year, "I had the opportunity to mix my inner revolution with the revolution of my country." For women like Badawi, Mubarak's fall has ushered in a transition full of paradox. On Tahrir Square, women protested alongside men, and many Egyptian women have been at the forefront of the struggle for democracy. Yet, so far, the revolution has not advanced the cause of women and may even endanger it. The Islamist movement the Muslim Brotherhood has dominated politics since the revolu-

tion. Its political arm, the Freedom and Justice Party, along with the more radical Nour Party of the Salafis, gained a parliamentary majority in the first elections, and, in June, the Brotherhood candidate, Mohamed Morsi, won the Presidency. There are worries that the Islamist ascendancy could curb women's freedoms. Furthermore, although Egyptian women tend to be educated and professionally active, society at large is overwhelmingly conservative. Mona Eltahawy, a feminist writer who caused uproar earlier this year with an essay in *Foreign Policy* about discrimination against women in Arab societies, told me, "The regime oppresses everyone, but society represses only women."

In Egypt, social class, religious observance, and the differences between city life and village life lead to enormous divergences of experience among the country's women. The professional, well-travelled young woman from an upper-middle-class Cairo family and the illiterate country girl from a conservative family seem to inhabit different countries—indeed, different centuries. Statistics underscore these contrasts. The literacy rate among female youth is relatively high, at eighty-two per cent, and in the past generation the fertility rate has fallen significantly, from 5.05 children per mother in 1985 to 2.73 in 2010. Yet, before female circumcision was made illegal, in 2008, up to ninety per cent of Egyptian married women are thought to have undergone genital mutilation. According to one recent survey, sixty-six per cent of women under thirty believe that husbands are justified in beating their wives if they are talking to other men.

In recent generations, as living standards have risen, more women have completed high school, gone on to university, and entered the workforce. Egyptian women run businesses, work as doctors, and serve as government ministers. A woman is the Vice-President of the Supreme Constitutional Court. But, in the same period, the social atmosphere has become more visibly conservative. Thirty years ago, at the start of Mubarak's rule, many women in Cairo went bareheaded and wore knee-length skirts and open-necked blouses. Now almost all women wear head scarves, and it is not uncommon to see



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the billowing black of the niqab, a robe that leaves only a narrow slit for the eyes.

In the last decade of Mubarak's rule, after years of lobbying by women's advocacy groups, several amendments were made to what are known as "personal-status laws." For the first time, women were allowed to initiate no-fault divorce, and were given enhanced child-custody rights. The minimum marriage age was raised from sixteen to eighteen, and female circumcision was outlawed. These changes were championed by Suzanne Mubarak, Egypt's First Lady. Since the revolution, her involvement has threatened to discredit the reforms. It is common for Islamists to decry the recent legislation as "Suzanne's laws."

I visited Nehad Abou el Komsan, who, in 1996, co-founded the Egyptian Center for Women's Rights, an N.G.O. She was recently elected secretary-general of the National Council for Women, which had previously been chaired by Suzanne Mubarak. Abou el Komsan's offices are in Maadi, a well-to-do suburb in the south of Cairo, and she met me in a suite of rooms with stacks of leaflets and posters awaiting distribution. She wore black trousers and a bright-yellow patterned jacket, and had a yellow scarf tied at the back of her neck. A trained lawyer, she has worked on women's issues for more than twenty years, and tried to distance her cause from Suzanne Mubarak. "The issue of women for the government was just a negotiating position," she said. "If they wanted to show the international community a human face, they made some changes in women's rights." She noted that improving the lot of women was less onerous for the regime than adopting other kinds of liberalization, such as guaranteeing freedom of expression or abjuring torture. She went on, "Women's issues were only a tool for the government. I see that there were no real gains and that now women are paying a high price for the image of Suzanne Mubarak."

Abou el Komsan said that Suzanne Mubarak's real views were fairly conservative and that she became a human-rights advocate only in 2007. "Everything was very cosmetic," she said.

Public-relations considerations, she felt, had greatly compromised the efficacy of the legal amendments. "We wanted a totally new law, and she aborted this effort," she said. "She made it impossible to have a discussion about a new law."

Abou el Komsan was fearful of what would happen under an Islamist-dominated government. "Women's issues are at the core of the Islamist movement," she said. "Like the Taliban closing schools for girls. It's why the first thing Khomeini did in Iran was to make women wear the hijab." This past spring, she had been aghast at talk among Islamist M.P.s of lowering the age of marriage for girls to twelve, undoing the divorce-law reforms, and rescinding the ban on female genital mutilation. Just as liberalization was once useful for the Mubarak regime's image, rolling back the reforms could now help an Islamist government put its imprint on a new era, bolstering the country's widespread social conservatism. Abou el Komsan pointed out, "Women are an area where you can plant a visible flag. Making women wear the hijab, for example, is easier than dealing with health insurance. It's a very quick change and it has a clear impact. In the longer term, they control society by controlling women."

Hend Badawi told me about the moment that she had first begun to feel that life was unfair for women. A boy in her class slipped her a love letter. She was unsure what to do, but when she got home she showed it to her aunt. "Her reaction was to beat me," she said. "I was sincere, and she reacted with violence and aggression. I never showed her anything like that again."

Badawi grew up circumscribed by "customs and traditions"—a familiar phrase in Arabic, which she used sarcastically. She was taught that good girls were demure and veiled and never talked to boys, that they went to school and got married and obeyed their husbands. She was beaten by her brother, she said, because the culture "gives him the need to declare his authority over me."

Badawi's family worried that the Internet is a bad influence and would liberalize youth, and she got access to it at home only

a few months before the revolution. She watched American TV shows, but her attitude remains one of modesty. Western women's lives on TV, she told me, seemed somewhat extreme. "According to Islam, these things are a bit out there," she said. "I do dream about the space and freedom they have, but within the context of my religion."

A few weeks after her arrest, Badawi wanted to return to Tahrir, to celebrate the first anniversary of the revolution. Her family kept her locked in her room, so she began a hunger strike, refusing all food and water for two days. At first, her aunt and her brother were unmoved. "So I began to escalate," Badawi told me, laughing a little. "I decided to have a revolution in my house, just as there was one in the square." She made placards and banners that read, "Hend wants to topple the siege! Down with Ahmed!" Her family asked the lawyer who had handled Badawi's case to reason with her, but she refused to hear his arguments for compromise. Finally, she agreed to eat, and she was allowed to return to the university. On her first day back, she tried to organize a protest in support of a general strike that revolutionary groups had called in Cairo. When her family found out, she was locked up again.

Mona Eltahawy, the author of the controversial *Foreign Policy* essay, told me that the revolution had made many women like Badawi question the strictures of their lives: "They realize that, if they can stand up to Mubarak, they can stand up to their fathers and their mothers and their brothers." She characterized this realization as a "double revolution." "They realize that there's a Mubarak in every home," she said. "They realize that we fight against the state, and we also fight against the culture and society."

Like so many other Egyptians, Badawi seemed simply to have stopped being afraid of authority. Still, living in a community so inculcated with obedience, she was constantly reminded of the price of her principles. Some people in her village had tried to prevent young women from talking to her, "as if I would infect them."

If the cause of women in Egypt has an immediately recognizable face, it is that of Samira Ibrahim. In March, 2011, Ibrahim, who is now twenty-six, was one of seven female protesters who were arrested,



beaten, electrocuted, and forced to submit to virginity tests. Their hymens were inspected by a male Army doctor who left the door of his examination room open, exposing the women to the leers of the guards outside. Of the seven, only Ibrahim was willing to bring a lawsuit against the Army. The response of the generals echoed the typical chauvinism of mainstream Egypt. The Army did its best to discredit her story, initially denying that the incident had occurred, and then casting aspersions on the morals of the women involved. "The girls who were detained were not decent girls like your daughter or my daughter," one senior general told a CNN reporter, and asserted that not all of them had been virgins. Ibrahim was taunted in the street and vilified online. But, last December, she won her case, and a court ruled that virginity tests were unlawful. Graffiti portraits of her started to appear all around Tahrir Square, and, a few months later, *Time* named her one of the world's hundred most influential people.

I met Ibrahim earlier this year, at Groppi's, a café in downtown Cairo. Groppi's was once at the heart of cosmopolitan Cairo and was famous for its French pastries; now it is owned by a conservative businessman, and is distinctly down at heel. Ibrahim was wearing jeans, a T-shirt, a cardigan, and a frilly pink head scarf fastened with a diamanté pin. Under each eye was a bright stripe of aqua eyeliner. As we started talking, she overheard a man at the next table mutter something to his companion. "Samira Virginity," she said, repeating the gibe. "Virginity has become my surname."

Ibrahim spoke with an insouciance that belied the scale of the task she had undertaken. Like Badawi, she comes from a conservative rural background, but, whereas Badawi's family supported the military regime, Ibrahim's father is a member of Al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya, a militant Islamist group. He had been arrested and tortured many times under Mubarak, and she told me that, when he came to see her in the hospital after her ordeal, he said, "So history is repeating itself."

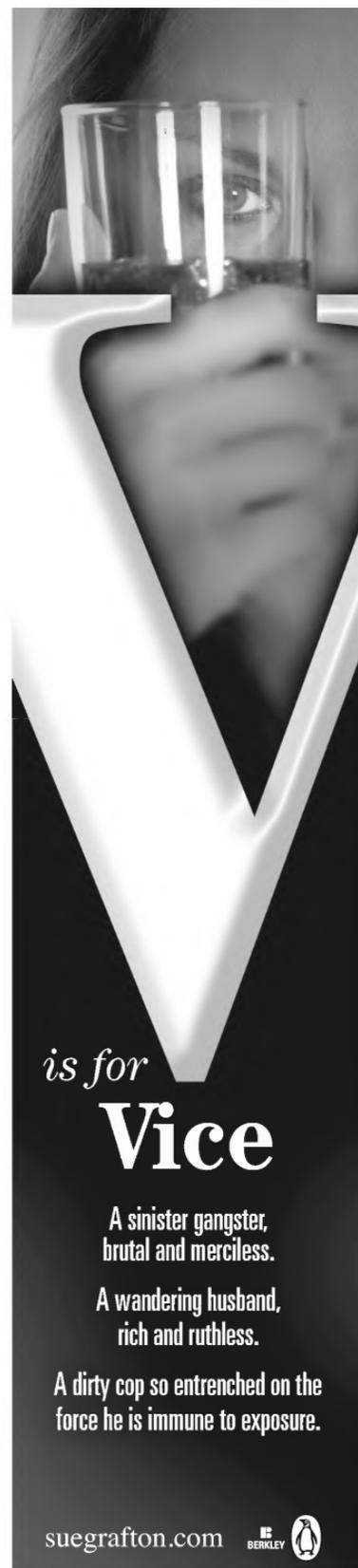
The support of Ibrahim's family enabled her to publicly take on the Army. Ahmed Hossam, a prominent human-rights lawyer who has advised Ibrahim, told me that he was not surprised that the other women had been reluctant to do likewise. "The girls fear to take legal

proceedings for anything to do with sex," he said. He mentioned the case of the woman who came to be known as Blue Bra Girl. She was dragged and beaten by troops on Tahrir, who pulled at her clothes, exposing her bare midriff and sky-blue bra. A photograph of the incident, last December, appeared on front pages around the world. Hossam said that he knew who the woman was—a conservative, hijab-wearing student from Cairo was all that he would divulge—and that he could see why she had not come forward to sue her assailants. For one thing, she had never told her family that she was going to protests on Tahrir. "She fears the bad reputation," he said. "And she was exposed." In the weeks after the photograph was published, there was much debate about whether Blue Bra Girl was to blame for wearing insufficient undergarments.

Ibrahim was proud of the stand she had taken but exhausted by the public profile it had brought her. She understood that she would continue to pay a high personal price for her defiance. "Even now, they attack me when I walk in the streets," she said, and she pulled out her cell phone to show me a stream of invective against her on Twitter. She said that some of the younger generation support her, but that general opinion was mixed: "A lot of people trust me. Others don't want to even see my face. Most of the people who attack me are men."

Two months earlier, in a military trial, the doctor who had performed the virginity tests was acquitted of any wrongdoing. Ibrahim said that she had expected the verdict: "The trial was in front of the military judiciary; it was a natural outcome." Her new plan was to take her case to the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights, but she was having trouble getting the Egyptian government to release the paperwork she needed. She shrugged off such setbacks, though, and felt that she had shown that personal rights could no longer be traduced with impunity. "In the end, the military will think a thousand times before doing something like this again," she said.

This spring, Mohamed Morsi's Presidential-campaign platform gave a commitment to reviewing legislation—including laws pertaining to women's rights—to insure that it was "in accor-



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dance with Islamic Sharia.” Along with calls by Salafi members of parliament to roll back the Mubarak reforms relating to women, this was a cause for considerable alarm among liberals, and there was a storm of protest when Azza Al Garf, a female M.P. from the Muslim Brotherhood’s Freedom and Justice Party, appeared to defend the practice of female circumcision in an interview.

One day, I drove out to meet Al Garf, at a Muslim Brotherhood office in Sixth of October, a satellite city in the desert near Cairo. (Its name commemorates the 1973 war with Israel.) Al Garf is forty-seven, with a heavy, rumped face. She wore a white head scarf that reached her waist, a gold watch, and gold rings on her fingers. At the start of our conversation, a man set up a video camera to record us. Her controversial comments on female circumcision had embarrassed the Brotherhood, and she was careful not to repeat them or to stray from the party line. She spoke forcefully, thumping the table for emphasis. I asked her to explain her position and that of the Brotherhood on female circumci-

sion. She said that it is illegal and, when pressed, yelled, “It’s a shame that you are asking these questions when you see what this country is going through! I don’t want to talk about it anymore.”

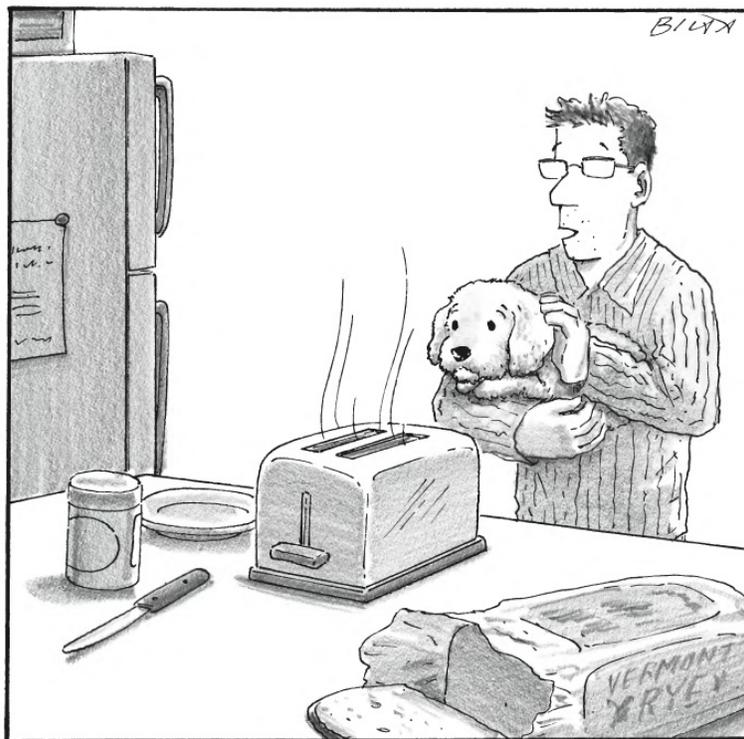
Al Garf became involved in the Muslim Brotherhood when she was fifteen, attracted, she said, by its “total framework for life,” which did not distinguish between religious and social matters. She studied sociology at university; after getting married and graduating, she did social work and wrote magazine articles, while bringing up seven children. She first ran for office in the 2010 elections—which she called “the forged elections,” because Mubarak’s party, the N.D.P., had, among other electoral abuses, mandated a quota for female M.P.s and, she said, “practically appointed” sixty-four women to these seats. By contrast, in the parliamentary elections at the start of this year, only nine women were elected, but, Al Garf said proudly, the women “won by their own personal efforts, in the same way a man would win.”

Al Garf maintained the standard Muslim Brotherhood line that proposed

changes to the personal-status laws were “all rumors.” So far, the Brotherhood’s default position has been to refer contentious legal matters to the Islamic Research Center at Al Azhar University; scholars at Al Azhar have ruled on Islamic jurisprudence for centuries and the institution is considered a model of moderate Sunni doctrine. In the spring, Al Azhar asserted that Mubarak’s reforms did not conflict with Sharia, and Islamists stopped talking about the subject. Just days before the Presidential runoff between Morsi and Ahmed Shafik, a former commander of the Air Force, Morsi told a press conference that nothing would be changed. “Laws protecting women are already in place,” he said. “I am not going to make any modifications.”

This shifting stance seems at odds with the Brotherhood’s conservatism, and it may owe as much to political caution as to a real evolution of belief. When I talked to Islamists about the issue, their arguments often lacked clarity. Some told me that although female circumcision is not a religious obligation and is illegal, its use should be left up to a girl’s parents, or to her doctor, or to the girl herself.

The issue of legislation is in abeyance, pending new parliamentary elections. (Parliament was dissolved after the Supreme Constitutional Court ruled that elections had been partially invalid.) In the meantime, battle lines are being drawn over the place of women’s rights in the drafting of a new constitution for the country. The constitution has long deferred to Sharia law, though usually in a way that allows considerable latitude of interpretation. For instance, Article 2 of the existing constitution, from 1971, states that “principles of Sharia are the principal source of legislation,” and it seems likely that this wording will remain in the new constitution. But activists are concerned about Article 68, the current draft of which reads, “The state shall take all measures to establish the equality of women and men in the areas of political, cultural, economic, and social life, as well as all other areas, insofar as this does not conflict with the rulings of Islamic Sharia.” According to Heba Morayef, the head of Human Rights Watch in Egypt, the choice of the term “rulings” leaves little room for the judiciary to interpret the law in a progressive way. “It’s



“Are you as excited as I am?”

one of the issues where the liberals on one side and the Salafis on the other have the widest gulf," she said. "I'm not sure how much space there is for compromise." The Brotherhood has not taken a public position on the matter. Morayef told me, "My sense is that the Brotherhood are treading very carefully because they are trying to negotiate between the Salafis and the liberals." She was worried about Islamist family law becoming enshrined in the constitution.

Many activists I spoke to feared that the Muslim Brotherhood would use Morsi's Presidency to install its own people in public office, setting up a new Islamist political elite that would erode women's choices and impose more conservative strictures in schools, in universities, and throughout public institutions. Dr. Iman Bibars, the founder of an N.G.O. promoting women's rights, warned about a takeover by Islamists. "They will repeal our laws," she said. "They will keep us at home. People say this will never happen in Egypt, but they will not do it like Iran. They will not force us to veil, but they will allow people to harass us in the street if we are not veiled." She said that, since the revolution, her assistant, a Christian who lives in a poor neighborhood, has covered her hair every night on the bus home. Bibars went on, "I know of an incident when a microbus was stopped and two girls who were not veiled were beaten up. This is the way. If the fundamentalists continue to rule alone, then the situation will become worse and worse." Ibrahim and Badawi, too, worried about an Islamist rollback. Ibrahim told me that although she is committed to wearing the head scarf, as a token "of something religious inside me," she would strongly oppose any move to make head scarves compulsory: "If there is a law to impose the hijab on women, I would take off my veil."

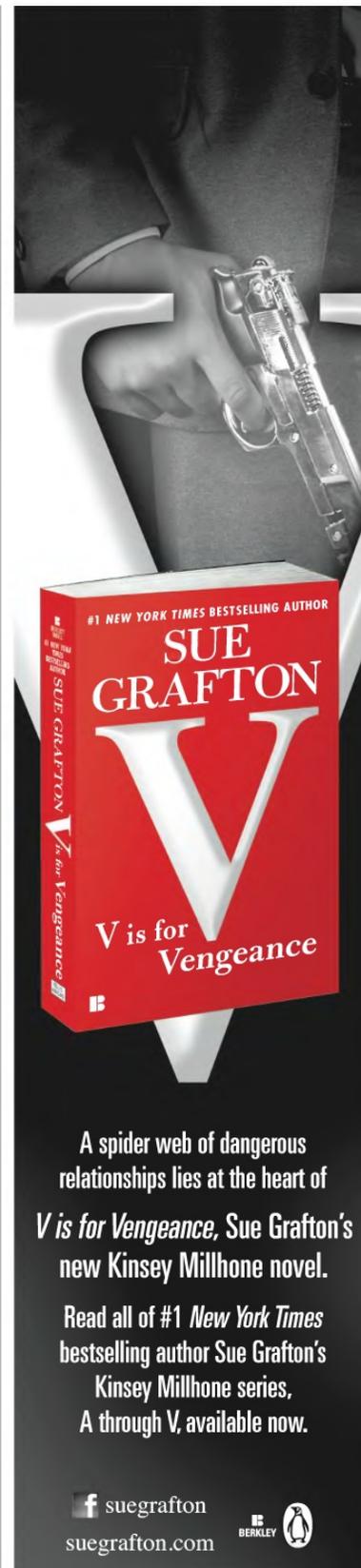
Throughout what Egyptians now call the "eighteen days"—from the first demonstrations, on January 25, 2011, until Mubarak's fall, on February 11th—Tahrir Square appeared to be a mixed and tolerant utopia. Cosmopolitan girls wearing Dolce & Gabbana sunglasses stood next to bearded Muslim Brotherhood men and to women in full niqab. People marvelled that women slept each night on the square and that there was

not a single reported instance of sexual harassment. But things soon changed. The night that Mubarak fell, Lara Logan, a CBS News reporter, was sexually assaulted by a mob on Tahrir, and many women reported similar experiences. Heba Morayef, who was groped on the square at the time, told me, "From that moment, the square was not safe in the same way, and you saw, over the following year, a deterioration in terms of risk for women."

Sexual harassment is endemic in Egypt. According to a 2008 survey, sixty per cent of Egyptian men admit to having sexually harassed a woman, and every Egyptian woman I met had a harassment story. I asked each woman I talked to how she dealt with it. Morayef said, "If I'm on my own, I don't confront it. I've seen how situations in the square can get tricky." Bibars told me that she didn't walk down the street anymore. Some fifteen years ago, she reported having been harassed to a police officer, and the officer said that it had happened only because she was beautiful.

Engy Ghozlan keeps a tally of sexual-harassment incidents through an interactive Web site, HarassMap. She couldn't tell me what it was about contemporary Egyptian society that made harassment so prevalent. "You talk to researchers, psychologists, women's groups—well, no one really has any answer why," she said. "It's a power dynamic. I don't think it's about sex; I don't think it's about economics." She dissented from the common theory that young men, unable to afford marriage, are left full of sexual frustration.

Under a corrupt and brutal regime, corruption and brutality can spread by example through society. Many activists pointed to an incident in 2005, which became known as Black Wednesday, as the moment when the state's violence against women seemed to sanction similar behavior in society as a whole. On Black Wednesday, plainclothes police beat and sexually assaulted female protesters on the steps of the journalists' syndicate. Similar incidents followed. In 2006, on the night before the Eid festival, there was a spate of mob attacks on lone women in downtown Cairo. In the protests and demonstrations since Mubarak's fall, women have often been sexually harassed and jeered at by security



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forces. This past June, several female demonstrators and a British journalist were assaulted on Tahrir Square: men ripped their clothes off and raped them with their hands. Anti-harassment marches have themselves been attacked.

Last November, during a protest, Mona Eltahawy was sexually assaulted by riot police and her left arm and right hand were broken. She told me, "When the state sexually assaults women, it gives a green light that women's bodies are fair game." She said that harassment on Tahrir discouraged women from political expression. She rejected the view that is sometimes put forward, that men harassed women who dressed immodestly. "I think the more women cover up, the more men harass them," she said. "Women blame themselves for being dressed wrong. Men blame them for being dressed wrong. And yet the majority of women are covered! Then they say, 'Oh, that wasn't proper hijab—it's tight, it's orange, it's red.' We have taken the responsibility, not them."

Some weeks after Morsi was elected, Badawi, still suffering beatings, left home. She went to Cairo and found an apartment in a poor neighborhood, which she shared with a friend. Her family did not know where she was. For several weeks, she lived in dread of being discovered. She began working at the Hisham Mubarak Law Center, a collective of human-rights lawyers and activists, where she helped put together a campaign against torture by the police and the security services. In October, she went on Egyptian television to tell her story. She appealed for the prosecution not just of the officers who had beaten and humiliated civilians in demonstrations but also of their leaders, the generals who sat on the Military Council. Her family tracked her down and insisted that she come home. She refused but was relieved to be back in touch.

The last time I saw Badawi was a few weeks before she left home. We were in the Rock café with a few of her friends. Samar, a young woman studying chemistry at the university, had gone to Tahrir a few times with friends but had stopped after her father told her that it was becoming too dangerous. Hana, a woman in her thirties, had approached Badawi after her story spread online. "I

thought, This is a girl from my town!" she told me. "I thought she was an example to be proud of."

We talked about women in society and women in the revolution. Then Ahmed Taha, a Muslim Brotherhood student, arrived. As Brotherhood members invariably do, he reiterated sentiments about respect for women's role in society, but he was conciliatory when Hana challenged him over the possible repeal of the no-fault divorce law. "We have had positions that might have been unjust to women," he said. "We're trying to fix mistakes and improve our performance." The conversation turned to female circumcision, and Taha prevaricated while Badawi and Hana tried to pin him down. It seemed that perhaps what the Egyptian revolution has so far delivered most successfully is an atmosphere of open discussion, something that was unthinkable under Mubarak.

I asked the group if they thought that women's participation in the revolution had changed women's position in society as a whole.

Hana replied carefully, "We showed society through the revolution that we exist, that we are here. They didn't know that before. Our role was known as 'home, cook, kids.' Yes, we were educated, we have jobs in certain fields, but there are social limits that have contained our role. But now, with the revolution, there is no such thing as its being shameful for a woman to go to a protest."

I asked them if they thought that the revolution had helped women in Egypt. Hana said, "Yes."

Samar said, "Not yet."

Badawi said, "Absolutely not."

Badawi had been offered the opportunity to study in Australia, but she was torn. "Constraints and traditions of the countryside forbid a woman to travel and live alone in a foreign country," she said. She hesitated to broach the subject with her family. She knew that there was legally nothing they could do to stop her, but she was loath to leave without their permission. Besides, her role in Egypt's double revolution made her reluctant to abandon the struggle. "I am not leaving Egypt without fighting for my rights," she said. "I can't just leave the path halfway through. I am fighting a bigger battle. My mind tells me to go, but my heart tells me to stay." ♦