

Tiba: Feminist Journal
English Edition
April 2025

Women and Sexual Violence



New Woman Foundation

New Woman Foundation (NWF)

in Special Consultative Status with ECOSOC since 2023

The New Woman is an Egyptian feminist non-governmental organization established in 1984 as an informal group, then registered in 1991 as a non-profit civil company under the name “New Woman Research Center.” In 2004, it was officially registered as a private foundation “New Woman Foundation” with the Ministry of Social Affairs under Law No. 84.

NWF upholds women’s civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights as integral components of universal human rights, and believes that the struggle for women’s rights is inseparable from the broader fight of nations and people’s rights for justice, liberation, and freedom from oppression.

Our Goals

- Contributing to building a strong organized women’s movement that empower women to demand, advocate and achieve their political, economic, and social rights.
- Contributing to deconstruction of the prevailing patriarchal and masculine culture in society and developing a feminist discourse that focuses on women's rights at the national, regional and international levels.
- Advocating policy change that addresses and resolves the obstacles women face in society, both in the public and the private spheres, with emphasis on strengthening and supporting marginalized women who suffer the most from the impact of various policies.
- Contributing to building a strong civil society and enhancing democracy through the full participation of marginalized and deprived groups in society.
- Contributing to building a global women’s movement, through forging partnerships, building networks and enhancing feminist solidarity efforts aimed at supporting women's exercise of their rights and rejecting all forms of discrimination, oppression and domination.



English Edition - April 2025

Editor-in-Chief

Mona Ibrahim

English Edition Editor

Amal Abdelhadi

Editorial Secretary

Yara Saleh

Editorial Board

Amal Abdelhadi

Mona Ibrahim

Nawla Darwisch

Advisory Board

Elham Eidarous

Emad Abou-Ghazi

Howaida Adly

Khaled Fahmy

Salma El-Naqqash

Salma Shash

Yasmin El-Rifae

Yousry Moustafa

All printing and publication rights reserved. This is an open-access work distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License (CC BY-SA 4.0), which permits sharing and adaptation with proper attribution and under the same license.

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/deed.en>



Feminist Journal

English Edition – April 2025

Published by the New Woman Foundation

Address : 19 Salem Salem Street, Agouzah, Giza.

Tel. : +202 333 82 706

E-mail : nwrc@nwrcgypt.org

Website : www.nwrcgypt.org

Designed by: Amani Abu Zeid, Ayman Hussien

Printed by : Promotion Team, Phone: +202 333 67 449

The views expressed in this issue do not necessarily reflect those of the New Woman Foundation



[newwomanfoundation](https://twitter.com/newwomanfoundation)



[newwomanfoundation](https://www.instagram.com/newwomanfoundation)



[NewWomanFoundation](https://www.linkedin.com/company/NewWomanFoundation)



[newwomanfoundation](https://www.youtube.com/newwomanfoundation)



[@nwf_woman](https://www.youtube.com/@nwf_woman)



[nwrcgypt.org](https://www.facebook.com/nwrcgypt.org)

Table of Contents

Preface		<u>5</u>
Papers		
Sexual Harassment against Women: A Cultural View on the Egyptian Scene	Hala Kamal	<u>9</u>
Fighting Sexual Violence against Women: Problems of Egyptian Legislations and Comparative Examples	Marianne Sedhom <i>Translated by: Elham Eidarous</i>	<u>27</u>
Imprisoned by a Tale: Virility, Lust, and Violence	Yousry Moustafa <i>Translated by: Nihal Nour</i>	<u>38</u>
Documents		
Combating Harassment and Violence against Women at Cairo University	Maha Al-Said <i>Translated by: Mona Ibrahim</i>	<u>55</u>
Book Review		
Revolution Begins at Home	Dalia Youssef <i>Translated by: Yara Saleh</i>	<u>67</u>
Authors & Contributors		<u>73</u>

Preface

Finally, after producing *Tiba* feminist magazine in Arabic for more than two decades, we managed to publish our first English version and we hope to continue this endeavor in the years to come. *Tiba* is an Egyptian feminist magazine published by the New Woman Foundation (NWF)* since the early 2000s. Twenty-two issues have been produced until 2024, each addressing one of the issues relevant to the Egyptian and Arab women's movement.

Contributing to the production of feminist knowledge that critically engages with prevailing discourses was - and still is - at the top of NWF's priorities. Since the early beginnings in the mid-eighties, research papers, studies, and the "New Woman Bulletin" have been the basic tools for providing a critical feminist vision of the prevailing discourses on women's issues. With the development and diversity of NWF's work, issuing a feminist theoretical journal has become an urgent task.

For us in NWF *Tiba* was part of our struggle against the wide spectrum of anti-feminist and patriarchal discourses prevailing in our contemporary societies. It is also comprising an important tool for building common feminist agenda, understanding our specific problematics within the patriarchal societies in our region, acknowledging our diversities and bridging the gap between different groups and generations of Egyptian and Arab feminists.

Tiba is also our tool for linking theory to practice, contemplating on the ever growing feminist activism in Egypt and the region. It aspires to provide a forum for feminist activist to reflect on their activism and make use of feminists struggles around the world, particularly in the Global South including feminist academic theorizing. It is not an academic magazine, in the standard meaning, yet it tries to abide by rigorous academic rules relating to deep analysis, sound methodologies and proper citation.

* The "New Woman" is one of the earliest feminist organizations that consisted part of the third wave of the feminist movement in Egypt that began in the mid-eighties of the 20th century. The Group began as an informal study group 1984. In 1985 the group announced its public presence through issuing the "New Woman" newsletter which attracted more members to the original founding group. By 1991, the group was registered as a none for profit civil company, the New Woman Research Center (NWRC). In 2004, the group was registered as the New Woman Foundation (NWF), under the Egyptian Ministry of Social Solidarity (MoSS).

For Long Decades Women in our region have been imprisoned in the stereotypes of vulnerability and oppression, rooted in the wider stereotypes about the backwardness, barbarism and primitiveness of Arabs/ Muslims. Unfortunately, such notions are not held only by “orientalist” writers, but also prevail within the Academic circles, including feminist studies.

However, Arab/Egyptian feminists needed to do their homework, that goes beyond the defensive attitude to a more engaging one through writing, reflecting, analyzing and theorizing about their own activism, and more crucially availing such work to wide circles of non-Arab speaking audience. We hope that *Tiba* will be our contribution in addressing this challenging task.

We chose the topic of “women and sexual violence” to launch our English version of *Tiba* because it conveys the interrelated struggles of feminists around the world on a tenacious obstacle to women’s enjoyment of their human rights. The articles provide varied perspectives addressing, theoretical, cultural, legal and activism in Egypt. We hope it will help our readers to get better acquainted with Egyptian feminist movement’s struggles.

Despite of heated debates, struggles and achievements in the past few decades, impunity of perpetrators of violence against women still prevail calling for more concerted feminist efforts. Yet, we are hopeful that a tangible change could happen and be felt not just by women but also by the whole community. Many factors contribute to that optimistic thinking, the strong global campaigns and influential activism, and the determination of women around the world to expose the sexual violence they are subjected to in the workplace, on public transportation, in the street, and at home.

Hala Kamal’ article “Sexual Harassment against Women: A Cultural View on the Egyptian Scene”, analyses, several incidents that received a great deal of public attention in Egypt in the past few years, whether in the official media, on social media, or within activist communities, and had wide repercussions. The article addresses challenges facing feminists in Egypt, and in many other countries within complex context of patriarchal societies and authoritarian states where the prevailing culture tend to acquit the harasser and condemn the victim. Her analysis raises an endless list of questions providing an agenda for feminist to engage with, specifically those related to alternative justice, and

how can its mechanisms ensure women's rights, which are not ensured by the law and how can we work towards gendering the laws to ensure women's rights?

Yousry Mustafa's article "Imprisoned by a Tale: Virility, Lust, and Violence" provides an interesting perspective to explain sexual violence against women beyond the prevailing dichotomy of dominance/subordination as often framed in the public discourse about violence against women. The article argues that the perception and types of violence against women are changing under the impact of historical, social, and cultural transformations and women's gains achieved in modern ages and the resulting "masculinity crises". He sees that Gender-based violence is largely not a proof of the male power / dominance but is rather a result of anxiety about and fear of losing it. "It seems like masculinity has bared its teeth, not because of its ability to be fully dominant, but may be because of its inability to be in full control, due to women's gains achieved in the modern age".

Marian Sidhom's article, "Fighting Sexual Violence against Women: Problems of Egyptian Legislations and Comparative Examples" provides a critical analysis of the current Egyptian laws and legal processes, with particular emphasis on specific challenges, e.g. like the burden of proof and concepts of consent and coercion. The article also provides a panorama of laws addressing violence against women around the world (India, Germany, Sweden, and other countries) in an attempt to inform legislative efforts in Egypt and other Arab countries, such legal reforms helped overcoming many of the obstacles that usually make women refrain from resorting to legal measures to obtain their rights in the incidents of sexual assaults.

In the Book Review Section, Dalia Youssef reviews "The Revolution Begins at Home: Confronting Intimate Violence Within Activist Communities". An important, insightful, timely, and provocative book. The book depicts a new form of resistance through storytelling and creativity weaving the different narratives into a cohesive "organic unity", while raising complex and problematic questions: "what happens when the abuser is a fellow activist, a respected figure, or your partner in the events and activities to resist and fight violence?" Does the victim feel safe filing a complaint with the police or the courts? Are activists' communities willing to acknowledge and address violations that may occur within their own spaces?

The Documents Section presents a pioneering initiative to combat sexual harassment in the Egyptian universities, the “Unit to Combat Harassment and Violence against Women at Cairo University”. Maha Al-Said, the founder and director of the unit, presents the circumstances of establishing this unit and the support, or obstacles, which confronted the group who contributed to establishing the unit. The importance of this unit comes from being the first unit established for this purpose in an Egyptian university, and its success has inspired other universities to establish similar units.

We hope this issue will provide you with a glimpse of how Egyptian feminists are addressing sexual violence within the Egyptian context not only in their activism, but also at the level of theorizing and cognitive contributions.

We look forward to your feedback

Sexual Harassment against Women: A Cultural View on the Egyptian Scene

Hala Kamal

Sexual harassment and violence are probably as old as patriarchy itself and its social structures. The term 'sexual harassment', however, has only developed to carry its contemporary meaning in the second half of the twentieth century. As a term, it has been established in Arabic in the past decade or so, and is now being widely used to replace earlier equivalents, such as 'innuendos' and 'annoyance' – all being oblique forms of sexual harassment experienced by women at the hands of men. In an important and pioneering study of the phenomenon of sexual harassment and violence in Egypt, entitled "Women as Fair Game in the Public Sphere" (2014), the various degrees of sexual violation which start with threats and stalking, culminating in gang rapes.^(*) The feminist authors Hind Zaki and Dalia Abd Alhamid, explain various degrees of sexual violation which start with threats and stalking, culminating in gang rapes. Zaki and Abd Alhamid thus, point out the manifestations of acts of sexual harassment and violence practices against women in Egypt. My starting point in this paper is from the spaces of sexual harassment of women in the public sphere, and I therefore divide my paper into several sections, each addressing a different location in the public sphere. In the first part, the paper focuses on the spread of sexual group assaults since in the beginning of the millennium in what could be identified as a social phenomenon, with particular attention to the contexts of political protest in the past couple of decades. I then move on to a discussion of sexual harassment in the street, highlighting the cases where women subjected to these acts have resorted to legal channels. In a more detailed section of the paper, I address sexual harassment within institutional contexts, where I discuss a specific case, publicly known as 'the email case', shedding light on its developments and repercussions. I finally end with reflections on emerging forms of resistance and confrontation of sexual harassment and violence.

* This paper was published in two parts in January 2014 on the website of Jadaliyya, in both Arabic and English.

Gang Assaults

The beginnings of the millennium saw a marked increase in sexual gang assaults against women in Egypt, the most significant perhaps (if not first) was the one known as the “Black Wednesday” on 25 May 2005, which took place during a political demonstration by the anti-Mubarak protest movement Kefaya (Enough), held at the entrance to the Press Syndicate in Cairo. The demonstration was organised in opposition to the attempts of the former president Mubarak’s regime to impose constitutional amendments that would enable his son to take over the presidency. It was common during such demonstrations to see groups of gangsters deployed to violently disperse the demonstrators and break up the demonstration; but the unusual feature of this case was that, for the first time, a group of gangsters was used in order to target women protesters in particular. On that day, women protesters were subjected not only to the usual beating, kicking, and dragging, but to direct acts of sexual assault – acts described below by Nawal Ali, member of the Press Syndicate who was subjected to sexual assault although she happened to be at the entrance to the Syndicate, without belonging to the Kefaya movement:

Their hands were fiddling with my breasts and touching my private parts. They tore my clothes and assaulted me with their hands ... I fell with my face to the ground only to find a large number of these gagsters on top of me, sexually harassing me again and fiddling with all my private parts. I started screaming out for help, and continued screaming until I lost consciousness. They were not trying to beat me up; they were sexually harassing me and tearing my clothes most evidently. It ended up with me being consequently almost completely naked. (Hanan El-Badawi 2013)

Nawal Ali’s testimony above is considered among the very first describing sexual harassment as a collective act with a political edge. Other similar testimonies of sexual assaults, perhaps even accompanied by more violence, have followed since the marked increase in women’s presence at political protests in the aftermath of the Egyptian January 2011 Revolution. Such acts of sexual harassment and assault have been particularly predominant in Tahrir Square and its vicinity, including the moment of the arrival of the Women’s Day Procession to Tahrir Square on 8 March 2011. Acts of verbal harassment had begun upon the start of the march from the entrance to the Press Syndicate towards Tahrir, and reached their peak upon the arrival at the destination in the square. This is where women were subjected to acts of direct sexual abuse, which were not

limited to verbal harassment, but involved placards carried by the assailants with sexually offensive illustrations and insinuations addressed to the women protesters.

The following weeks, however, witnessed a surge in the sexual harassment of women protesters, amounting to gang rapes in the vicinity of Tahrir Square, to which the society and most of the political entities either undermined or dismissed as trivial, and even doubted, grumbled and ignored – including the liberal and progressive groups alike! This attitude can be found in the efforts of groups of feminists to persuade the National Salvation Front to acknowledge the acts of sexual assaults against women. It was only in 2014 that the government officially recognized sexual assault on women in the public sphere when the newly elected President Sisi visited one of the survivors in hospital. She survived an act of sexual violence that was transmitted live during the presidential inauguration celebrations in June 2014, featuring mass attacks on women in Tahrir Square on that occasion.

It is worth noting here to quote the Egyptian feminist and political activist, Elham Eidarous, who warns us against “adopting the narrative that states that all assailants belong to organised mercenary groups” as she believes that they are organised though not all of them necessarily hired.* The acts of sexual harassment, assault, and violence, which repeatedly took place, then and there and beyond, acquired a different dimension in this particular case, compared to the forms experienced by women demonstrators and journalists participating in, and/or covering, political protests at the time. In this case, the sexual assaults did not occur within the context of a political opposition demonstration, but at a time of festivity and celebration! It can, therefore, be connected to another phenomenon experienced by women, at the beginning of the millennium, and specifically since 2006, as observed by informal citizen-media (Wael Abbas for example has documented those acts and published them on his personal blog), as well as the efforts of Egyptian feminist groups. Hind Zaki and Dalia Abd Alhamid (in their article cited above), identified the year 2006 in particular as the starting point of sexual group assaults against women in the streets of Egypt. Already then, the streets witnessed acts of sexual harassment and violence against girls and women, taking place during religious and national holiday celebrations, especially in downtown Cairo, and in the surroundings of cinema theatres and entertainment locations. This, in itself, raises the following questions: What is the connection between these two phenomena? Did the green light, given to thugs to attack women demonstrators and activists in front of the Press Syndicate in 2005, encourage these thugs to attack

* Elham Eidarous, “New Icons bring down the Illusions of the romantic Revolution” (2013).

women in the streets regardless of the occasion – political demonstration or social celebration? Or did that same green light given to gangsters encourage boys and men to violate women's bodies in the public sphere? The answers perhaps involve all of these aspects together.

Harassing Women in the Streets

Almost every girl and woman in Egypt has faced at least one form of sexual harassment, along various stages of women's lives and across class and appearance. At the same time, women resort to different resistance methods. I personally remember my awareness of unpleasant looks, annoying words, touches, and insinuations since a very long time in my life, even before I came across the term *taharrush* (harassment), which has only been circulating the past couple of decades. As girls and young women, we all shared this experience, but referred to it using a variety of other words such as 'teasing', 'staring', 'whistling', 'annoying', 'touching', 'rubbing', 'grabbing', and 'sticking'. These and other words have been now replaced by the term sexual harassment, which encompasses most if not all of these acts, and more. Sexual harassment has become a widespread practice and almost an entitlement granted by the society to every passing man – young and old – against every girl and woman – young and old. Still, we – women – continue to consider it an unacceptable violation and act of violence, as we cannot accept it as a societal norm! Therefore, the incident that involved Noha Rushdi, who caught her harasser in the street and dragged him in court, has become a significant legal precedence and a revolutionary moment in our lives, establishing sexual harassment as a culpable crime.

It all started in June 2008 when a young woman, Noha Rushdi, was walking with a (woman) friend, and came unexpectedly face to face with a pick-up truck driver who grabbed her by her breast, and causing her to fall to the ground. It was a narrow street, and Noha insisted on catching him before he could escape. She took him to court, and raised the first legal case of harassment against him, which ended up with him receiving a court sentence of three-years in prison in addition to paying a penalty of five thousand Egyptian pounds. This was a court sentence that became the first of its kind, described by the Egyptian (woman) journalist, Nahed Nasr, in an article entitled "The Lesson by Noha Rushdi", published after the court sentence, in which she says the following:

The importance of the court sentence received in favour of Noha does not only spring from her successful and unique courage in her battle against public humiliation and

disgrace. It is in the way she has conducted this case, providing millions of young women with a model to follow instead of resorting to silence in the face of forced harassment, whereas Noha faced it courageously. (2008)

Noha's incident has drawn much attention to sexual harassment in Egypt, and led to a close examination of the phenomenon, such as in the study entitled "Clouds in Egypt's Skies" about sexual harassment as a growing phenomenon.^(*)

Among the later similar court cases is the one raised by two young feminists, Gehad Raway and Rosanna Nageh, who were sexually harassed and subjected to verbal and physical abuse on the evening of the *Adha* Feast (21 August 2018), by two young men in the vicinity of Tahrir Square. They managed to get hold of the two young harassers and take them to the police station, where it turned out they were two brothers. The two young women filed a case accusing the two men of sexual, verbal, and physical abuse. The court declared the two young men guilty, and the sentence was reported by Mohamed Magdy in *Al-Shurouk* newspaper in an article entitled: "Gehad and Rosana .. The Story of Two Young Women Confronting Harassment and Battering on the *Adha* Day." The reporter elaborated on the matter as follows: "After two court sessions, the Kasr El-Nil Court of misdemeanor crimes has sentenced one of two young men to two years in prison for harassment, as well as three months in prison and two thousand pounds for physical assault, in addition to a fine of ten thousand pounds for verbal abuse. The court also demanded that the assailant pay twenty thousand pounds to the two young women in compensation for damages inflicted upon them, while it declared his brother innocent" (2018).

At the beginning of the year (2018) Rania Fahmy raised a legal case against a harasser in Upper Egypt, whereby this young woman was subjected to verbal and physical abuse in the city of Qena, at the hands of a young man, as she was on her way to the *souq* (local market). She received several bruises and hand ligament injury, so she managed to file the case against the assailant providing a video recording from one of the surveillance cameras of a shop overlooking the street where the harassment incident took place. The young man was sentenced to three years in prison. Received as a guest in Wael El-Ibrashy's popular TV programme "Ten PM" she commented on the incident, calling upon young women to revolt against harassment – a call that was reiterated in the *Al-Youm al-Sabe'* newspaper report entitled "The Woman Behind the First Case against a Harasser in Upper

* The study was conducted by the Egyptian Center for Women's Rights (ECWR), and can be accessed via the following link: <https://egypt.unfpa.org/en/publications/clouds-egypts-sky-en>

Egypt: I Felt Humiliated but I retaliated” (Ahmed Abdel-Rahman 2018). It is worth noting that the first case against a sexual harasser was raised by Mary Zakareya, a few years ago, in Assiut.

All of these cases raise questions about the role of the media, culture, and the law in confronting harassment. Does highlighting these cases in the media lead to an increase or a decrease in the phenomenon? Does the police and prosecution decision to proceed with the case, and does the judge's court sentence, depend on a traditional culture that finds in harassment an immoral act rather than a legal crime? Is the traditional conservative society more likely to punish the harasser on moral rather than legal grounds? Does the class and social background of the two parties involved in the harassment case have an influence on the court sentence? Do women belonging to the lower strata of the society get the opportunity to raise legal cases against harassers who belong to higher social rungs? Or even when both belong to the same social class? The reality on the ground indicates the intersection of gender, class, and culture as structures of power that influence the legal process in sexual harassment cases.

Perhaps the most prominent incident in this respect is that of Menna Gobran, known in the media by the name “On za run”, which happened (in 2018), when a young man of the upper middle class harassed her while driving his car, then used all his social privileges to add more damage to the young survivor of his sexual harassment. It is also worth noting that a survivor does not really feel safe from the harasser's retaliation, even when the assailant ends up criminally charged, as seen recently in the case of Somaya “The Mall Woman” who was later attacked by her harasser directing a chemical spray to her face, in revenge.

Sexual Harassment in an Institutional Context

Sexual harassment taking place in the streets and the wider social sphere has its political, legal, cultural, and social dimensions, as seen in the systematic harassment of women demonstrators or the general harassment in the public sphere, whereby women can officially only seek legal intervention. Sexual harassment reporting, however, that takes place within an institutional frame or in the workplace can face additional complexities due to the intersection of gender power relations with direct authority, represented in the professional hierarchies. This has been addressed by many institutions worldwide, which have included clear postulates in their internal bylaws, or issued institutional anti-harassment policies. We can reflect on some of the famous sexual harassment

incidents in the recent years to understand the extent of the complexity of dealing with sexual harassment. On the one hand, there is the incident that took place in Cairo during Eid al-Adha (August 2018), as two Egyptian young women were subjected to sexual harassment in the street. They reported the incident and took legal action, that ended in a court sentence against the harasser. On the other hand, there is the case of the journalist in a prominent Egyptian newspaper, who was subjected to sexual harassment by her boss, in addition to many other incidents which end with closing the investigations without pursuing a legal process. The complexities related to institutional contexts is the focus of my discussion below, where I refer to the so-called “Email Incident”, due to the details and challenges faced in this specific case.

The Email Incident

The “email incident” started with the circulation of an email message in November 2017 (that coincided with the start of campaigning for presidential elections in Egypt). The message (originally written in English, and then translated and circulated in Arabic) was soon widely spread via the social media such as Whatsapp and Facebook in January 2018. It was written by an Egyptian young woman telling about two incidents of sexual harassment and rape to which she was subjected within a civil society organization in Egypt a couple of years earlier. The first specificity of this incident that sets it apart from other incidents and crimes, is the fact that it was based on an email message, without resorting to the legal authorities; nor did the individuals involved belong to the same institution when the message was sent and circulated. Hence, there was not a single institution involved whose anti-sexual harassment policy could be used in handling the accusation of sexual harassment, although all the individuals involved in the case were working together in the same institution when the harassment and rape took place. What added to the complexity of the situation was the fact that the young woman complainer/survivor was not living in Egypt when she sent the email, which added to the difficulty of a direct personal communication with her. It is also worth noting that the email indicated two incidents: one that would fall under sexual harassment, while the other involved rape. The email was widely circulated among feminists, activists, and the social media public, whereby the feminists dealt with the email as an indicator pointing at a wide context of both sexual violation and violence against women.

The broader circles, however, handled the case differently, by separating harassment from rape, and attributing the public attention it gained to the fact that one of the two incidents was connected to a presidential candidate, and was therefore politically-loaded. Apart from this aspect, related to the email itself, the whole issue came at a politically critical moment when the accused in the harassment incident was starting his prudential campaign as an opposition candidate competing against the current president running for a second term. The candidate was subjected to pressures and threats to withdraw his candidature, including accusations of an indecent act expressing his joy at winning a legal case about the Egyptian state's handing over of the two islands Tiran and Sanafir to Saudi Arabia. The candidate was at the time working in a legal civil society institution, where he was both founder and director. He was also the legal representative of the founders of a left-wing opposition party in the process of establishment. While members of his political party formed the core of his presidential campaign, it additionally included large numbers of young men and women from various leftist and liberal democratic groups working for change.

Apart from the reports made against this candidate before and during his campaign, the party continued to be under threat, as a leftist political party still in the process of establishment, even after the end of his presidential campaign. A case was raised in court against the party's legal representative based on the fact that the party had initiated an internal investigation of a case of sexual harassment.^(*) Moreover, another case was raised in the administrative court demanding the closure of the party headquarters due to incidents of sexual harassment.^(**) The case was raised against the party, using the public statement issued by the party about the investigation into the harassment issue, as well as the statements published by feminist groups concerning the matter, in addition to the legal representative's (presidential candidate's) publically published letter of resignation from the party. These cases raised against the party at a later point indicate the importance of a vision of the future that is marked by a careful consideration of the political context and institutional commitment.

Furthermore, the email appeared at a moment when many young feminists joined the presidential campaign and were getting engaged in political activism, while both the campaign and the party

* For example, a report was published in the *Al-Youm Al-Sabe'* about a new case filed to the prosecutor demanding an investigation into sexual harassment, on 22 February 2018.

** A report was published in the *Al-Youm Al-Sabe'* about a new case raised in court demanding a ban on the Bread and Freedom Party based on allegations of harassment against a Party member, dated 17 February 2018.

continued marginalising women's issues in general, and both sexual harassment and violence in particular on their political agenda. This in turn indicated a schism between the feminists and the activists, as evident in the dismissal of the email complaints at the level of the campaign and party, amounting to a collusion in hiding the complaint. While, on the other hand, the young feminists, who had considered the progressive activist spaces a safe public sphere, found themselves face to face with the condescending discourse and patriarchal attitudes towards women and their issues, coming from their comrades in the campaign and the party. This consequently angered many young feminist members of the party, leading to their resignation. A young feminist activist, though not a member of the party, Ghadeer Ahmed, expressed her views on the matter, by pointing out the connection between this political crisis and the feminists' question about 'women in politics'. This is a significant question that had been raised by feminists from previous generations questioning the position of women's issues on leftist and liberal political agendas since the beginning of the twentieth century; though gaining more complexity within the current socio-political context.

Thus, in the absence of established mechanisms for dealing with sexual harassment complaints, and in the context of a critical historical moment, the immediate circle at the core of the presidential campaign ignored the "email" instead of addressing it immediately at the level of the campaign, acknowledging it worth consideration and handling, regardless of its veracity or mendacity. The immediate response, however, was that of ignoring it as a security tool used to smear the reputation of a presidential candidate of the opposition. Yet, due to pressures within the campaign, it started an internal investigation into the matter, which ended very soon upon the announcement of candidate's withdrawal from the presidential election. As the campaign came to an end, there was no longer any institutional frame for the continuation of the investigation, especially with the absence of any other institution directly relevant to the incident that would take over dealing with the complaint and pursuing an investigation about the email.

At that point, the party took upon its responsibility to continue the investigation, which was conducted confidentially and extended over a long period of time. The matter became even more complicated due to the fact that the circles at the core of the campaign who were members in the party did not disclose the email nor its content to the rest of the party members, nor did they declare the ongoing process of the investigation. This led to a situation where most of the party members got to know about the email from external sources, and were not informed of the members of the

investigation committee and its procedures except at a later stage. This excessive secrecy prevented the women members of the party, as well as the members of the committee for women's issues (an open group including feminists from outside the party), from addressing a matter that lies at the heart of feminism -- sexual harassment; while finding themselves getting information about the case from external sources. This in turn led the feminist members of the party to confront and question their leadership in the party, while at the same time losing the trust and support of their feminist allies working together on women's rights.

With the rising pace of events within the campaign and the party, it became clear that the case lacked a directly concerned institutional framework that would deal with the complaint, either at the level of the presidential campaign supporting the accused harasser, or the civil society organisation where he works, which also represents the workplace context of the two incidents. So, the whole case was picked up by the political party where the accused was a legal representative, forming an internal investigation committee of members with legal as well as human rights and feminist experience. The investigation took into consideration that the email involved two incidents. First, sexual harassment complaint against the former presidential candidate (also lawyer and director of the organization connected to the two incidents as well as the party's legal representative). Second, sexual violence complaint against a member of the party (who worked as a lawyer in the same organisation with the individual accused of harassment). This whole process was conducted in confidentiality and was further complicated by the hesitation of the complainer/survivor to cooperate with the investigation committee; which is an expected reaction to the psychological suffering resulting from the sexual assault, and the added pressures involved in the investigation, requiring the recounting of painful details! This hesitation and then refusal to proceed with the investigation led to undermining the credibility of the investigation itself, which ended up by relying on the text of the email alone. Moreover, the lack of cooperation, between the feminists in the party and those in external circles, towards developing an acceptable mechanism for dealing with the complaint and proceeding with the investigation, all led to undermining the investigation process altogether. In their statement about the elaborate investigation report, the party leadership tried to please everyone, but ended up adding insult to injury. It is true that, in consequence, the presidential candidate resigned from the party, in addition to the earlier resignation of the other individual accused of violence. In my opinion, the party leadership should have followed some precautionary procedures, such as for example freezing the memberships of the two party members upon the formation of the

investigation committee, and until the results were internally announced – as an expression of the serious handling of the email complaint.

This email case has in fact raised many questions, most of which remain unanswered until today. How can we impose and support any sexual harassment complaint as a matter of fact even after the passage of years? How can we take the matter more seriously and transparently when dealing with the circulation of information, when it concerns sexual harassment complaints, taking into account their feminist and psychological dimensions in relation to the problematic issues of women's silence and silencing about sexual violence, in addition to the effect of trauma with its long-lasting consequences? To what extent should feminists raise and uphold feminist cases that concern other women, especially when the woman concerned didn't file an official complaint and, is not willing to proceed? How can we develop mechanisms that prevent the targeting of the feminists who express solidarity with women survivors of sexual violence, and how to protect them from various forms of sexist patriarchal violence by those supporting the harassers and abusers? What are the conditions required for opening an unofficial investigation of a sexual harassment incident? What is the required institutional context that would ensure the integrity of an unofficial investigation? What are the conditions that ensure the credibility of an unofficial investigation, its mechanisms, and the implementation of its recommendations? When can legal authorities force an unofficial investigation committee to report the case to the state authorities? To what extent would such an action reinforce the values of feminist solidarity? What are the legal circumstances that could necessitate such action, even when the involved individuals or institutions do not wish to turn the internal matter into a judicial process? What mechanisms are available towards alternative justice without resorting to the official legal authorities in the light of the official patriarchal legal structures? How effective can these mechanisms be? How can we ensure that an unofficial investigation carried out on an institutional level would bring justice while it can only enforce disciplinary actions? To what extent does an unofficial investigation committee, handling a feminist case, have the right to reach a result that would oblige it to take official legal steps by reporting an internal sexual harassment complaint to the state authorities? What happens to an unofficial investigation that ends with a conviction? What is the relation between the law on the one hand, and institutional bylaws and policies on the other, and forms of alternative justice? The list of questions is endless ... Yet in the context of a patriarchal society where the law holds supreme power, and where sexual harassment is often legally difficult to prove, and where the individuals involved in the legal process tend to acquit the

harasser and condemn the victim, the main question remains as follows; how can the mechanisms of alternative justice ensure the women's rights, which are not ensured by the law? And how can we work towards gendering the laws to ensure women's rights?

Resisting and Confronting Harassment

With the wide spread of acts of sexual harassment against girls and women, amounting to a phenomenon accompanying some group celebrations and street gatherings, during feasts and demonstrations, some groups of young women started developing methods to face this new phenomenon. Thus, groups of men and women were formed, with the purpose of identifying sexual harassment and using various intervention methods in order to provide the women with safety as well as psychological and legal assistance following their traumatic experiences of gang sexual harassment and assault, in addition to activities that raise awareness of this phenomenon and methods of its confrontation. It is worth noting here that the "HarassMap"^(*) initiative was among the earliest efforts done in this direction, which was established in 2010, founded on a vision of building a society that ensured everyone's safety from sexual and gender violence.^(**) Similarly, the taskforce "OpAntiSH" (Operation Anti Sexual Harassment) was founded in 2012, describing itself on its Facebook page as a group of individual volunteers as well as members of organisations and initiatives working towards immediate interventions to combat collective acts of sexual harassment and assault during demonstrations and political sit-ins.^(***)

After January 2011, many feminist groups were formed, and Nazra for Feminist Studies (established in 2007) was at the frontlines of feminist civil society organisations that adopted sexual harassment in the public sphere as a central issue. Nazra, hence, organised several meetings to discuss this emerging phenomenon, and issued reports and statements about the gang sexual assaults in the Tahrir Square area since the beginning of the January 2011 Revolution, with the aim of drawing attention to the phenomenon and building feminist alliances to combat it. It was through collecting the testimonies of women survivors of sexual harassment and violence that Nazra raised awareness, and then together with al-Nadim Center for the Rehabilitation of Victims of Violence and Torture,

* For more information about the initiative, see: (<https://harassmap.org/en>).

** The vision and mission of the initiative is explained on its website: (<https://harassmap.org/en/who-we-are>).

*** More information about Op Anti Sexual Harassment/Assault can be found on the Facebook page: (https://www.facebook.com/opantish/about_details).

that the two organisations sought to provide the survivors of sexual harassment and gang rape with the necessary support. They additionally issued and circulated flyers with information about the medical and psychological procedures that need to be followed in the cases of subjection to violence and rape, as well as ways of supporting women survivors of sexual assault.^(*) In some cases, this support would also involve offering legal assistance in reporting these incidents to the police and following legal processes. In 2017, Nazra published a report on sexual violence against women, about “The Spring of Violence and Struggle: The Development of Activism about Sexual Violence against Women after 2011”, which explains the role of the young feminist initiatives in dealing with sexual violence against women, as well as emphasising that “sexual violence is a political issue.” The report further highlights the positions of the civil society organization and political parties, that emerged in the aftermath of the January 2011 Revolution, vis-à-vis sexual violence.^(**)

On the other hand, there are acts of sexual harassment and assault that take place within institutions and the workplace, and are therefore different from those happening in the streets. The Anti-Harassment Unit at Cairo University offers a good example of anti-harassment institutional initiatives, the mandate of which can be found stated on the University website explaining the need for issuing an anti-harassment policy by stating the following:

Sexual harassment is considered to be a global phenomenon that violates the individual's right to safety and security. Until recently, many in the Egyptian society treated harassment as a sensitive issue that should not be spoken about, which led to silencing many victims of this phenomenon in fear of social blame or stigma. Yet, with the rise of the revolutionary tide since the beginning of 2011, the silence surrounding sexual harassment was gradually receding due to the sense of empowerment that many women developed with their participation in this revolutionary moment, which turned sexual harassment to a vice worthy of societal discussion. So, in response to the civil society demands, raised by groups aiming at confronting harassment, the government criminalized sexual harassment. This has encouraged a group of socially engaged academics to initiate the development of an anti-harassment policy at Cairo

* Nazra for Feminist Studies is an Egyptian organisation that has worked extensively on sexual harassment and violence against women. For more on Nazra, see (<https://nazra.org/en>).

** The Nazra report on sexual violence against women since January 2011, in Arabic, can be found on the website, see (<https://nazra.org/sites/nazra/files/attachments/vaw-and-movements.pdf>).

University, whereby the process of writing it involved student representatives as well as members of civil society organisations active in this matter.^(*)

The mandate of the Anti-Harassment Unit is not limited to specifying the procedures of dealing with cases of sexual harassment taking place on campus, but also extends to holding awareness-raising meeting to inform the students (men and women) of the activities of the Unit and its Policy. The Unit seeks also to explain the means of communicating with the Unit and of reporting incidents of sexual harassment and violence. Moreover, it is the Unit's duty to train the university administrative security in implementing the Anti-Harassment Policy on campus. The Unit has furthermore issued a booklet that includes the Policy, which is also available on its website.^(**)

In the Introduction, the booklet states the two main points addressed by the Policy. The first focuses on taking prevention and advocacy measures against harassment within in the academic community; while the second explains the necessary procedures that need to be followed in dealing with the act of harassment immediately, as well as its consequences. The Policy additionally includes a detailed definition of sexual harassment and its various forms, emphasising the responsibility of the university community as a whole towards implementing the Policy – university administration, faculty, and staff. It further refers to the various committees related to sexual harassments and violence against women, pointing out their tasks and duties, in addition to specifying the procedures taken upon receiving sexual harassment complaints. The punitive measures are listed elaborately, taking into account the position of the harasser – university student, faculty, or staff; or an outsider.

In developing its Policy, the Unit has sought the expertise of specialists from the Egyptian civil society, known for their engagement with combating sexual harassment and violence, including Nazra for Feminist Studies and the HarassMap Initiative, in addition to producing a short film about confronting sexual harassment. The film is posted on the Unit website, as well as on its Youtube channel,^(***) apart from having it screened occasionally on various screens across the university.

Due to the achievements of the Anti-Harassment Unit at Cairo University in the past few years, several Egyptian universities have sought the expertise of its founder and team in establishing similar units elsewhere. Yet this experience continues to raise the following questions. Does this

* For more about the initiative, go to the webpage: (<https://cu.edu.eg/anti-harassment>).

** The Cairo University Anti-Harassment Policy is published in Arabic and accessible online (<https://cu.edu.eg/userfiles/Anti-Harrass-Book-CU.pdf>).

*** The video is accessible on Youtube: (<https://youtu.be/zl3A7GA7Syg>).

mechanism in itself ensure the absence of any discrimination among the harassers themselves based on their social and academic status? Does this mechanism encourage the young women to report their harassing professors without fear of the consequences? Does it encourage the women staff and faculty to report harassers who occupy higher administrative or academic positions than theirs? Does it ensure the implementation of punishment against the students who prove to be harassers? Does it ensure the implementation against professors proven harassers against a woman student, staff, or faculty who occupies an inferior position to his? Does the mechanism ensure the absence of discrimination between the category of student, worker, employer, and professor in the implementation of punishments, given the difference in punishments according to each of these categories? In the case of applying the same mechanism in Egyptian national universities, how can local cultural elements interfere in the application and implementation processes?

Concluding Remarks

When we tackle the issue of sexual harassment in the Egyptian scene, we cannot dismiss the international context, but we need to consider sexual harassment within the contexts of the waves of Egyptian and global feminist movements. As argued earlier in my paper about the history of the Egyptian feminist movement,^(*) I explained that the issues of sexual harassment, violence against women, and women's bodies have been raised by the Egyptian feminist movement since the beginning of the millennium. These have been occupying a prominent position in the Egyptian women's struggle in the past years, which in itself stands as a clear indicator of the shift from the third to the fourth wave, preceding the current Western feminist discussions about a shift towards the fourth wave of feminist activism. I wish to add here that the focus on women's bodies as a feminist concern can be traced back in Egypt to the 1950s when the issue of FGM was publically raised, followed by various issues adopted by feminist along the decades, such as women's health and reproductive rights. Yet, these were not raised as priority matters in women's struggles for their rights; while the past couple of decades have witnessed the development of multiplicity of forms of activism related to women's bodies – most prominent of which is sexual harassment and violence. This marks a major step forward in establishing a fourth wave of the Egyptian feminist movement.

* Hala Kamal (2016), "A Century of Egyptian Women's Demands: The Four Waves of the Egyptian Feminist Movement" (<https://doi.org/10.1108/S1529-212620160000021002>). An Arabic version of the paper can be found under publications, on the website of the Women and Memory Forum (wmf.org.eg).

Confronting and combatting sexual harassment and assault in the streets and public sphere does not rely on organised institutional and feminist efforts alone, as women have resorted, across generations, to various mechanisms that expose harassment and shame harassers. The simplest perhaps of which are screaming and shaming harassers publicly in the streets, as well as through filming acts of harassment and then posting them on social media. Due to the tendency of patriarchal social structures to ignore complaints reporting harassment, as well as the common support of harassers, some women seeking legal intervention initially accuse the harassers of pickpocketing, so as to get assistance in catching the perpetrator and taking him to the police station, where they then accuse him officially of sexual harassment. Women, in addition, walk around armed with self-defence tools such as hairpins often used in public transportation to keep men away from touching women's bodies. They also carry pepper spray or electric shock devices to protect themselves and their bodies against sexual violations. The need to resort to such tools and methods only reveals the lack of women's sense of safety in the streets, and their need for self-protection from harassment and all forms of sexual assault. At the same it, it indicates the extent of this phenomenon in particular, as well as the necessity of facing it and criminalising all acts of sexual violence in general.

On the global scene, the #MeToo campaign, launched on the social media in 2017 with the purpose of revealing instances of sexual harassment, started when women started telling their experiences of sexual violation by famous men – some of which went back to many years before. The stories were widely circulating via social networks and hashtags, in addition to the legal actions taken by some of these women who started reporting the incidents to the authorities, seeking justice. The campaign that started from Hollywood soon reverberated across the United States, Europe, Asia, and Africa, as we followed the unfolding of the stories, their various consequences and outcomes, as well as the concomitant institutional punishments and political battles. Perhaps among the most prominent features of this campaign was (and is) the realisation that women have always been subjected to sexual harassment and violence – across history and geography; and that these practices have been normalised to the extent of silencing if not even accepting them! Yet, at the same time, this campaign has revealed the existence of a global state of feminist consciousness that pushes women towards confronting these crimes and deconstructing the values of global patriarchy. Feminist consciousness does not stop here at the level of awareness, but it moves beyond the cognitive dimension to combative action, by taking official and legal steps despite their consequences and the price that women have to pay in the process of exposing these crimes.

Feminist solidarity is perhaps among the most important values raised globally by the fourth wave of the feminist movement. It is a value that involves the solidarity of feminists with women survivors of violence, as well as the solidarity among feminists that moves beyond their social, institutional, political, national, regional, and international boundaries. It is a solidarity that brings women together towards developing mechanisms that ensure disclosure and accountability, as well as finding ways to legalise such mechanisms within the frames of official and alternative justice. Still, the question remains without an answer: Should we as feminists primarily seek to express solidarity and give support to each individual case of sexual harassment and violence, or should we simultaneously seek to build a feminist solidarity movement around sexual harassment and violence against women per se? And how can we build such a wide-ranging solidarity movement that would help us overcome the specificities of our positionalities, as well as the intersectionalities of our identities, ideologies, and cultures, let alone our personal attitudes and stances? Can it be achieved when each of us, feminists, comes face to face with a sexual harassment incident that requires solidarity, hence recollecting the feminist motto of the personal is political, and realising that sexual harassment is therefore a feminist political matter?

I wish to express my grateful thanks to my colleagues Elham Eidarous, Salma Shash, Salma El-Naqqash, and Ghadeer Ahmed for all the constructive comments they gave me at different stages of writing this essay. Saying this, I declare my full responsibility for everything written, and my apologies for any oversights.

Sources:

- Abdel-Rahman, Ahmed (2018). "Sahibat awwal hukm didd mutaharrish fi al-sa'id" (The Woman behind the First Court Sentence against a Sexual Harasser in Upper Egypt). *Al-Youm al-Sabe'*.
(<https://www.youm7.com/story/2018/2/19/3656754/-في-الصعيد-ضد-متحرش-كنت-حاسة-إني>).
- Anti-Harassment Initiative at Cairo University (<https://cu.edu.eg/anti-harassment>).
- Eidarous, Elham (2013). "Aikonat gadida tusqit awham al-thawra al-romansiya" (New Icons bring down the Illusions of the Romantic Revolution). *Correspondents.org*.

(<http://correspondents.org/2013/02/12/الر-أوهام-الثورة-سقط-جديدة-أيقونات>).

- El-Badawi, Hanan (2013). “Al-arba’a al-aswad: hall tatazakkar Nawal Ali?” (The Black Friday: Do You Remember Nawal Ali?). *The Blog: EIPR*.
(<https://www.eipr.org/blog/الاربعاء-الأسود: هل تتذكر نوال علي؟ فلنراجع إذن تفاصيل الحكاية>).
- HarassMap (<https://harassmap.org/en>).
- Kamal, Hala (2016). “A Century of Egyptian Women’s Demands: The Four Waves of the Egyptian Feminist Movement”, *Gender and Race Matter: Global Perspectives on Being a Woman (Advances in Gender Research, Vol. 21)*, Emerald Group Publishing Limited, Leeds, pp. 3-22. (<https://doi.org/10.1108/S1529-212620160000021002>).
- Nasr, Nahed (2008). “Dars Noha Rushdi” (The Lesson of Noha Rushdi). *Al-Youm al-Sabe’*. (<https://www.youm7.com/story/2008/12/10/%D8%AF%D8%B1%D8%B3-%D9%86%D9%87%D9%89-%D8%B1%D8%B4%D8%AF%D9%89/55611>).
- Nazra (n.d.) “Rabi’ al-‘unf wal-nidal” (The Spring of Violence and Struggle). (<https://nazra.org/sites/nazra/files/attachments/vaw-and-movements.pdf>).
- Operation Anti Sexual Harassment/Assault
(https://www.facebook.com/opantish/about_details).
- Zaki, Hind Mahmoud and Dalia Abd Alhamid (2014). Istibahat al-nisa’ fi al-magal al’am (Women as Fair Game in the Public Sphere). *Jadaliyya*, 8 January 2014. (<https://www.jadaliyya.com/Details/30055>) and 10 January 2014 (<https://www.jadaliyya.com/Details/30063>).

Fighting Sexual Violence against Women: Problems of Egyptian Legislation and Comparative Examples

Marianne Sedhom*

Translated by: **Elham Eidarous**

This paper sheds light on current body of legislation related to sexual violence, the shortcomings therein, and some comparative examples that may be consulted. It also points out other obstacles that confront women who decide to ignore legislative inadequacy and resort to the judiciary; as well as reasons for the delay in the adoption of legislation to fight sexual violence against women which may not be separated from challenges for the process of legislative reform in general.

Women's activism around the world contributed, and still does, to revealing their suffering from sexual violence and its perpetuity that reflects the hidden structural flaws in different systems. Such flaws exist even within activist groups in the public sphere who, despite holding progressive thoughts, remain part of a system of deeply rooted social repression and consequently include several forms of violence and "ideologized" exclusion of women and other groups based on presumed priorities of struggle, and the belief that "women's rights are not a priority now". There is also the presumption that these groups are progressive "by default," and hence they don't need to establish policies or regulations that empower women; guarantee their fair representation therein; or protect them from discrimination, exploitation and sexual violence.

These groups may confront the state with violations it commits or criticize its reluctance to act. But otherwise, they iterate reactionary discourses and marginalize progressive ones whenever a woman is subjected to discrimination or harassment within their own circles. In such cases, we find these groups call upon women to resort to the criminal justice system and stick to established laws, although they usually denounce the criminal justice system and call for the change of legislation deeming them unsuitable to reality.

* Marianne Sedhom is an Egyptian lawyer and researcher. She worked for several civil society institutions.

Everyone keeps calling on women to stop resorting to libel on the internet, to refrain from trying to socially stigmatize the accused and to resort to the judiciary. The question is whether current Egyptian legislation do justice to victims of sexual violence?

Sexual Violence in Egyptian Laws

In 2014, the Interim President of Egypt Adly Mansour, issued a law to fight sexual harassment for the first time in the history of Egypt. The Presidential Decree no. 50 for 2014 amended some of the provisions of the Penal Code to toughen punishment for sexual harassment acts. Article no. 306 *bis* was added to the Penal Code creating sexual harassment as a legal concept. Later, certain policies and measures were adopted including the establishment of women's police force against sexual harassment working especially in the holidays.

Although Egyptian laws list a number of sexual violence crimes like indecent assault (the term in Arabic literally translates to "breach of honor"), rape and sexual harassment; laws currently in force are not based on a gender perspective. Moreover, they are obsolete, contradictory or lacking. Some laws don't have specific definitions of crimes, leaving them to what is established by the jurisprudence of the Court of Cassation in particular cases. Even with the possibility of making analogy, cases take a long time to be settled. Having clear definitions would encourage complainants to resort to the criminal justice system, make times shorter for litigants, and facilitate the court's job to reach a decision in a case. Lack of such definitions certainly hinders the realization of justice.

For example, article no. 268 of the Egyptian Penal Code does not provide a specific definition of the crime of sexual assault. It actually includes several acts under one crime. Several feminist organizations proposed the addition of the crime of sexual assault so that it includes "any act that approaches the survivor and would degrade them or make sexual acts against their will that don't amount to rape." such addition would bridge the existing gap in legislation which results from lack of clear definitions.

Article no. 267 tackles the crime of rape. However, it does not use the term "rape" but "having intercourse with a woman against her will." It also does not provide a clear definition of the criminalized act, but it was established for a long time as meaning penetration of the vagina by the penis. The defendant is not considered a rapist if he penetrated the vagina with an object like a

finger or a stick, even if it led to the perforation of the hymn as this would be considered an indecent assault. This is a significant flaw in the Law, which should consider all the said acts as rape because they all result in the same social and psychological impact. Moreover, article no. 17 of the Egyptian Penal Code allows a judge to reduce the punishment by two degrees. It states that “in felony counts, if the conditions for the crime for which the public action is brought necessitate the judge’s lenity, the penalty may be replaced.” This is a general rule that applies to all crimes. However, lenity is often used when there are certain circumstances pertaining to the victim that contradict dominant patriarchal and sexist norms. If a man is proven to have raped a woman and he was sentenced to a life sentence, the judge may according to the law reduce the sentence to imprisonment.

There are precedents of husbands who were imprisoned for indecent assault on their wives. However, the reasons for such judgments are anal sex (which is contrary to Islamic sharia), and/or cases in which the act led to severe injuries. Such judgments do not rely on the concept of consent in sexual relations or the right of women to control their own bodies as the husband has an absolute right to have sex with the wife as long as the marriage is lawful and officially registered.

Conceptual and Procedural Problems

This section tackles some essential procedural and conceptual problems of legislation pertaining to the ways with which they deal with sexual violence. These problems relate to five points that clarify to what extent Egyptian laws are effective, as follows: One) Submission of Complaint and the Health and Psychological State of the Victim; Two) Psychological State of the Defendant and Its Relationship to Criminal Intent; Three) Concepts of Consent and Coercion; Four) Burden of Proof (the Onus of Proof Rests on the Claimant); and Five) Not Providing Protection to Victims of Sexual Violence.

One: Submission of Complaint and the Health and Psychological State of the Victim

According to the provisions of article no. 3 paragraph b of the Criminal Procedure Code (Criminal Lawsuits), unless otherwise stated by law, no complaint may be accepted after the elapse of a three-month period as of the date the victim is informed of the crime and of the perpetrator thereof⁽¹⁾ Moreover, the law considers that a sexual assault should have tangible physical impact like wounds, injuries and blood that may be revealed by forensic examination. This usually makes sexual assault

hard to prove, especially that the victim often needs an unspecified time (sometimes amounting to years) to recover and become capable of making a complaint. It also makes it hard for other victims who were subjected to violence by the same person years ago to join the original victim in her claim.

This has to be taken into consideration in legislation, as sexual violence is one of the acts that lead to trauma and often makes victims suffer post traumatic disorders (including depression, suicidal thoughts and attempts, etc). Sexual violence may make victims resort, for long or short periods of time, to some defense mechanisms like denial (saying that ‘it was not an assault or rape,’ ‘he didn’t mean it,’ ‘he is my Godfather,’ ‘nothing happened,’ ...). Victims may be captive for a while to a false feeling of guilt. Recovery from such feelings may take several years before the victim arrives at a stage where she is fully aware of the assault she has been subjected to and able to identify the attacker as an attacker.

Two: Psychological State of the Defendant and Its Relationship to Criminal Intent

Criminal Liability, or what is sometimes called “attribution competence,” is established if the perpetrator -at the time of committing the crime- had awareness and perception on one hand and the ability to choose (free will) on the other hand. When there is awareness and will, there is criminal liability. Without them, or one of them, there is no liability; and the perpetrator may not be held responsible even if he actually committed the crime described by law. Criminal intent means that the will of the perpetrator was directed to committing the crime while cognizant of its legal elements. Criminal intent in homicide is different thereof in robbery for example.

However, the psychological state of the defendant does not preclude his criminal liability. It may rather be an aggravating circumstance. For example: if the defendant was drunk, he is to be punished twice (first for what he committed, and second for being caught in a state of drunkenness). The punishment will be aggravated if the perpetrator intentionally made himself drunk or under drug in order to commit the crime, i.e. that he benefited from such a state to strengthen his determination. The perpetrator may also be liable for unintentional responsibility on the basis of negligence and lack of caution, and for the degree of such negligence or lack of caution, which is embodied in using such substance while knowing the effect it may have on him and that it may lead him to commit the crime.

If the psychological state of the victim is unstable, she was drunk, or she wasn’t drunk but went

with the defendant to a private place even if not for having sex; her stance before court may be weakened and she may bear some or all responsibility and the defendant may be acquitted or have his punishment mitigated based on dominant social norms.

Three: Concepts of Consent and Coercion

The law uses the concepts of consent and coercion in a very simplistic manner. It presupposes the existence of violence and clearly visible signs of resistance. Otherwise, atypical cases are considered in some sort of gray area, especially when there is a personal relationship. As stated earlier, the Egyptian Penal Code doesn't criminalize forcing the wife to have sex either based on Islamic sharia or social norms. However, many countries criminalize marital rape and date-rape when one party to the relation refuses to have sex. Rape is also criminalized in the context of commercial sex, as the plaintiff may refuse to have sex.

In 2018, the Spanish government submitted a draft law⁽²⁾ establishing the rule "yes means yes" and anything else -including silence- means no. Similarly, several states in the USA apply the legal rule (yes means yes)⁽³⁾, but silence or indifference does not mean that the element of consent is implicit. This is to establish consent as a standard for sexual activity. Moreover, university hostels have awareness raising activities regarding the concept of consent like "No' doesn't mean 'please convince me.'⁽⁴⁾ Agreeing to have sex under the influence of alcohol or drugs does not count as consent.

In July 2018, Sweden approved a new law regarding sexual violence crimes based on the concept of consent.⁽⁵⁾ This law was proposed by the Swedish government to the Legislative Council at the end of 2017. It doesn't require use of violence or taking advantage of the victim's vulnerability to convict perpetrators of rape. The new legislation added two new crimes that the punishment thereof may reach four years in prison: 1) Negligent rape; and 2) Negligent sexual assault. Negligence is established when the other person is not having sex voluntarily and the first person is aware of the risk at hand that the other person is not having sex voluntarily yet he continues to have sex with them.

Four: Burden of Proof (the Onus of Proof Rests on the Claimant)

Proof is a burden because it is a heavy weight on the shoulders of the plaintiff. Parties to a case, especially in sexual assault allegations, may not have the means they need to prove the crime. Although many people call for abiding by the rule of “the onus of proof rests on the claimant”, rules of burden of proof are not a matter of public order⁽⁶⁾. So, the law may change them and transfer the burden of proof explicitly or implicitly.⁽⁷⁾

The burden of proof in civil matters is different therefrom in criminal matters. In civil matters, the burden of proof lies on the plaintiff as s/he claims something that contradicts the manifested origin of matters. However, placing the burden of proof on the plaintiff is not suitable for all conditions. A more precise rule was made in this regard that has two dimensions and responds to the nature of things. It is said that “s/he who clings to what is already established may not be required to prove it. But s/he who claims something that is contrary to the origin has to bear the onus of what s/he claims.” In criminal matters, the burden of proof falls upon the plaintiff represented in the Public Prosecution, and this burden may not be alleviated from the shoulders of the Public Prosecution except in certain cases explicitly mentioned by the law.

Every now and then, “new rules are issued to create provisions that are different from those that used to regulate the issue of proof.” For example, the legislator may require a simple, or decisive, presumptive evidence for certain crimes, and thereby exempting the Public Prosecution from proving an element of the crime and moving the burden of proof to the defendant or vice versa. It also may establish new methods of proof or grant some degree of authoritativeness to certain documents.⁽⁸⁾ It is not logical to make the plaintiff bear the onus of proof regardless of the nature and specificities of certain crimes.

At this point we may shed light on the laws of different countries to benefit from their experiences, as follows:

The German Law

According to the German Law AGG (General Act on Equal Treatment of 2006)⁽⁹⁾, in case a person makes a complaint from being subjected to harassment, sexual harassment or direct or indirect discrimination in a company, institution or an entity by another employee, the direct boss, the

employer or any third party because of occupational activities, the context they are performed in, or because of age, religion and belief, race, ethnicity, disability, gender, or sexual orientation, and in case the plaintiff is capable of presenting the facts; the other party (the defendant) has to prove that s/he didn't violate the law by committing discrimination.

The French Law

According to French Law no. 73 issued on the 17th of January 2002,⁽¹⁰⁾ the alleged victim merely needs to submit the facts that refer to harassment taking place, and the defendant has to prove that his/her actions don't constitute harassment and that his/her decision is justified by objective criteria that have nothing to do with harassment. Then, in an attempt to re-balance the burden of proof amongst all parties; Law no. 6 issued on the 3rd of January 2003 obliged the alleged victim to submit facts to prove harassment. Nevertheless, Law no. 88 issued on the 8th of August 2016 brought back the rules to what was stipulated in Law no. 73 for 2002 provided that the alleged victim submits "facts that refer to the existence of harassment". Thus, the rules were mitigated in favor of the employee (or the nominee for a job or internship) similarly to the anti-discrimination system (article 1 - L1154 of the Labour Law).

The Indian Law

Neither the Indian Law issued in 2023⁽¹¹⁾ relating to the prohibition of sexual harassment of women at the workplace nor the special regulations include any specific directive principles pertaining to what may be considered an evidence in cases of sexual harassment. Most cases of sexual harassment take place in privacy, and may not include any written evidence or direct witnesses. Courts in India considered that criteria of proof that should be used in internal complaints are preponderance of probability, i.e. the narrative being logical, the existence of multiple complaints, or testimonies of acquaintances about the behavior of the said person, etc. All or some of these criteria are to be relied on.

The preponderance of probability theory is based on the idea that there is a fact that could be verified when the court believes that it exists or that its existence is highly probable, and the rational person may assume that it exists in the circumstances of a certain case. It also necessitates that the complainant may not be required to submit detailed description of sexual harassment except in

front of a specialist and after making sure that this is suitable to her psychological status. It also refuses the discussion of the complaint in the presence of both the complainant and the defendant, and necessitates getting rid of previously established bias.

So it is not logical to continue to absolutely rely on the rule of “the onus of proof rests on the claimant”; or to claim that otherwise would disrupt the balance of justice without taking into consideration the special nature of these cases and the power balances in society and under dominant cultural norms. Such arguments don’t open any door for contributions or revisions that may help protect women; and assume that it is women’s duty to protect themselves and avoid being subjected to acts that laws are incapable of dealing with.

Five: No Protection Provided to Victims of Sexual Violence

Victims of sexual violence are subjected to blame and harm because of the dominant social norms in the circles they live in, by the media or even by those who receive the complaints in the police. Victims, as well as witnesses, are also subjected to threats from perpetrators because they are not given any protection and their surroundings are not protected. So, women are forced to withdraw their complaints; risk being harassed after submitting the complaints, or risk being fired or pressured to quit the job. They also risk not being hired at other jobs because they are deemed to be troublemakers. So, having a legislation in place that criminalizes harassment or rape doesn’t necessarily create deterrence as long as protection is not provided to complainants. The result of all this is that very few women resort to the judiciary.

When we look at comparative law, we find that legislation can provide protection in several phases of the legal process starting from the submission of the complaint. For example, the Swedish Law of 2018⁽¹²⁾ stipulates the provision of protection to victims of sexual violence in an early phase and the provision of defense to the aggrieved party as soon as the preliminary investigation begins after the complaint is made. The Swedish law also stipulates that employees have to be protected from reprisal by employers. This law grants special protection for workers from reprisal when they report serious irregularities. It came into force on the 1st of January 2017. It deals with cases in which the employer takes retaliatory actions against employees who report sexual harassment to a government agency or the media.

What Else Makes Laws Ineffective?

Legislation is certainly important in fighting sexual violence against women. However, there are obstacles against legislative reform in this field including the fact that parliamentarians may not be aware enough of the full dimensions of such issues, or that they are busy implementing the so-called national plans proposed by the executive authority without having the freedom that their role requires. Moreover, most laws are issued by decrees from the President, i.e. draft laws don't follow their normal cycle of being proposed by the Parliament or the Government, then going through all stages of legislation including social dialogue.

Moreover, we lack a comprehensive system to guarantee the implementation of legislation through policies. In case a new legislation is issued to fight violence against women, this requires adopting strategies and allocating parts of the budget to implement it for things like installing CCTV cameras, conducting mandatory awareness raising activities in schools, etc. This actually reflects lack of political will not only on the part of the government, but also from the agenda of politicians and political parties who never discuss fighting violence against women.

Furthermore, there are other obstacles that face women victims of sexual violence if they decide to resort to the judiciary including:

- Personnel who receive these complaints are not trained to deal with these incidents and they have sexist and patriarchal beliefs deeply rooted in them.
- The confidentiality of victims' information is not guaranteed, which exposes them to danger and makes them refrain from submitting their complaints.
- Lack of places equipped for receiving and protecting victims.
- Law is not enforced in areas away from security presence or control.
- Not taking the victims' psychological state into consideration when they go through forensic examination in order to prove the assault within a limited time period.
- Forensic search takes a long time.
- Moreover, the Public Prosecution is an entity that does investigation, prosecution and referral.

This legal model almost disappeared from the world. Moreover, there is no role at all for civil society and governmental institutions to support victims or to fill the gaps left by investigation authorities from a gender perspective.

Conclusion

This paper tried to shed light on some legislative inadequacies and the process of making and implementing of through the following: First, understanding how Egyptian laws tackled the concept of sexual violence and articles relating to it; Second, explaining legal problems that treat crimes of sexual violence similarly to other crimes ignoring their special nature and the special circumstances in which they are committed and presenting comparative legal experiences from different countries; Third, providing a summary of obstacles that limit the effectiveness of legislations and prevent women from resorting to the legal system since the enactment of the law; and Finally, affirming that sexual violence against women is widespread in public and private spheres. Its forms and modes change, making current legislation ineffective against it. Women's suffering from sexual violence continues. However, comparative models that are known for everyone are available and may be easily adopted.

Notes

- (1) For an Arabic version of the Criminal Procedure Law of Egypt no. 150 for 1950 (as amended by Law no. 189 for 2020), visit: <https://manshurat.org/node/14676>. For an English version, visit: https://static1.squarespace.com/static/554109b8e4b0269a2d77e01d/t/554b9890e4b029f0ef3a188d/1431017616683/Egypt+Criminal+Procedure+Code_English_Final.pdf
- (2) Spain, Only yes is yes law/ *ley del solo sí es sí*, 2022. https://noticias.juridicas.com/base_datos/Laboral/737111-lo-10-2022-de-6-sep-garantia-integral-de-la-libertad-sexual.html
- (3) “Enough is Enough” LAWS OF NEW YORK, CHAPTER 76, ARTICLE 129-B, 2015, New York's college students law. Ny.gov.
- (4) Sexual assault. Senate Bill No. 967 Student safety, CHAPTER 748, 2014 https://leginfo.ca.gov/faces/billNavClient.xhtml?bill_id=201320140SB967
- (5) Sweden, Sexual offence legislation based on consent. Swedish Prosecution Authority. 2018. <https://www.aklagare.se/en/affected-by-crime/sexual-offences/>
- (6) Public Order is a set of rules and principles that govern society. Legal rules therefore are *jus cogens* rules that people may not agree to contravene and anything that contravenes them is considered void.
- (7) Abou Amer, Mohamed Zaki. (2005). *Rules Related to Proof: Criminal Procedure*. Al-Jameea Al-Jadeeda Lel-Nashr. (Arabic)
- (8) Atteya, Ahmed Ibrahim. The Penal Code, 6th ed. (n.p., Year Unknown).

- (9) Germany, AGG (General Act on Equal Treatment), Federal anti- Discrimination Agency, 2006. <https://www.antidiskriminierungsstelle.de/EN/about-discrimination/order-and-law/general-equal-treatment-act/general-equal-treatment-act-node.html>
- (10) France, LOI n° 2002-73 du 17 Janvier 2002. <https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/jorf/id/JORFTEXT000000408905>
- (11) The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013. India
- (12) Sweden, The Act on special protection for workers against reprisals for whistleblowing Concerning serious irregularities /the Whistleblowing Act, 2016. <http://www.nordiclbourjournal.org/i-fokus/in-focus-2016/collective-decision-making/article.2016-11-14.2173050896>

Imprisoned by a Tale: Virility, Lust, and Violence^{*}

Yousry Moustafa

Translated by: **Nihal Nour**

Compared to any point in history, violence against women today is more in focus than ever. Sexual violence has become a crime on par with crimes against humanity, and allegations of sexual harassment are now enough to cancel politicians, artists, athletes, and intellectuals. Laws have been passed and strategies implemented to combat violence against women. And recently, two activists have been awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for their efforts to end sexual violence: the Iraqi-Yazidi Nadia Murad, a sexual violence survivor turned activist and Denis Mukwege, a Congolese doctor, who dedicated his life to defending survivors of sexual violence. Feminists have historically spearheaded this fight, but now more social sectors are involved too: Civil society organizations, the media, research institutions, the academia, social and youth movements, and even religious institutions and governments. There is no doubt that the veil is lifted, and that traditional justifications for violence are rapidly unraveling. That said, violence against women remains an epidemic, with vast numbers of women still being subjected to various types of it from catcalling to rape, “honor” killing, domestic violence, bodily mutilation in the name of customs, and sexual exploitation in what is now known as modern slavery.

Violence against women is undoubtedly an age-old problem. Throughout history and across different societies, patterns of violence are similar. Violence, however, changes in response to historical and social transformations, in terms of its types, justifications, and the population’s awareness of it. Many manifestations of violence in historical and social contexts used to be viewed as “normal.” This does not suggest they were not, in fact, forms of violence, but means that they were not perceived as such. For instance, wife beating is accepted as “normal” in some contexts but considered unacceptable violence in others. Female genital mutilation (FGM) did not elicit strong reactions as a form of violence but remained for centuries (and still remains to a great extent) “normal,” preferable. And

^{*} All quotations from Arabic sources have been translated into English by the translator of this article.

without it, a woman's identity as desirable and socially acceptable is erased. Once its downsides were exposed, an increasing number of groups now believe that it is a form of violence, that it is 'unnatural,' and not 'religiously sanctioned.' Millions of women are not yet free from violence, and this is a reality, but it is certain that violence is losing its legitimacy, and is now perceived as a crime, a sign of backwardness, retrogression, and exploitation.

Here I examine the issue of the shift in perceptions of violence against women due to historical, social, and cultural transformations, and how those affect the patterns of violence and its justifications. My primary hypothesis is that, in its contemporary manifestations, violence is no longer solely an issue of male dominance and female subordination as often framed in the public discourse about violence against women. This traditional duality has changed today, and the change can explain many forms of violence. Traditional masculinity, though still protected by social, religious, and political modes and social customs, has entered the realm of alienation, thanks to historical and social transformations, and in its alienation, it resorts to violence. This does not signal the end of the control, but rather means that it is losing ground in areas that once were its exclusive domain, and the prestige that it once seemed to have which previously made it out to be part of the natural order. In the whirlpool of its alienation, it invokes the past, trying to preserve its legitimacy, and, at the same time, invents new ways to take on the guise of modernity.

It is my contention, therefore, that though violence against women continues, its landscape must be viewed historically and within its context. Some forms of violence have endured, some are declining, and others are changing, in addition to new forms of violence that were not known in the past. Female circumcision, or female genital mutilation* (FGM), for instance, is in decline, though at a slower pace than desired. Even justifications for FGM and its providers have taken a different turn. Religious reasons are in decline, at least on the level of official discourse. Social reasons, on the other hand, such as fear of spinsterhood, are at the top of the list. Midwives', barbers', and nurses' role as service providers is decreasing while doctors now are the ones at the forefront, in what is known as the medicalization of FGM. This also applies to the rate and nature of honor killings which have not ended but are considered an inevitable punishment for every woman who loses her virginity or

* Female genital mutilation (FGM) is the term used by the World Health Organization, a term that entails removing some or all parts of the external female genital organs. However, in the Arabic language, the term "female circumcision" is used in official writings, including government statements, religious teachings, and the media. At the community level, the term *tahara* (purity) is used. Since the mid-nineties, the term female circumcision is increasingly replacing "*tahara*." However, female circumcision is not similar to male circumcision. On the contrary, they are radically different both anatomically and culturally. They socially serve different goals: enhancing males' sexuality and curbing females' (editor).

engages in out-of-wedlock relations. In addition, sexual harassment is alarmingly on the rise, to the extent that some people lament the past that was free of harassment.

The Crisis of Masculinity

The discussion of violence against women in our societies centers around fundamental concepts, most notably masculinity, male dominance, the Eastern world, and customs and traditions. However, masculinity is losing its historical legitimacy, and male dominance is in decline. Many contemporary forms of violence are difficult to justify solely through the lens of customs and traditions. Gender-based violence is largely not a proof of the male power of dominance but is rather a result of anxiety about and fear of losing it. Therefore, the public discourse surrounding male dominance and female subordination, while not without merit, no longer accurately reflects reality. I have grappled with this issue in a previous study about the masculinity, postulating that the prevailing perspective in feminist discourse about the dominance/subordination dichotomy “overlooks the historical shift in relationship dynamics between the two genders and the resulting women’s gains, which are usually overlooked as feminist discourse tends to fall in the trap of sweeping generalization. It seems like masculinity has bared its teeth, not because of its ability to be fully dominant, but maybe because of its inability to be in full control, due to women’s gains achieved in the modern age. This issue has started to surface recently as more studies are starting to tackle the crisis of masculinity.” (1)

Therefore, the view that masculinity is still able to manifest and impose itself as part of the natural order on collective consciousness has become questionable. Al-Sayyid Ahmad ‘Abd al-Gawwad, the famous protagonist in Naguib Mahfouz’s *Cairo Trilogy*^{*} was the epitome of male dominance, and, in contrast, his wife Amina was the embodiment of female submission. ‘Abd al-Gawwad, in fact, never beat Amina, but he was dominant as a man, and she was submissive as a woman, with no need for physical violence. ‘Abd al-Gawwad’s domination was never threatened, and he did not need violence to assert it. These dynamics are in decline and are unable to defy the zeitgeist. Amina is no longer submissive.

Masculinity in its traditional manifestations is being challenged. A growing number of men are attempting to reinforce it through presenting themselves as powerful men and asserting their strength and ability to be controlling and dominant. As Amal Qarami posits,

* *The Cairo Trilogy* is a trilogy of novels written by the Egyptian novelist and Nobel Prize winner Naguib Mahfouz, and some of the most important works of his literary career. The three novels are *Palace Walk*, 1956; *Palace of Desire*, 1957; and *Sugar Street*, 1957. (translator)

Men's anti-feminist discourse seeks to protect masculinity from being undermined, a discourse that is articulated by decision-makers. It is also evident in contemporary Salafists' rejection of socio-political and legal change which led to the transformation of women's status and relationship dynamics between the sexes. This resistance does not stop there. It seems like 'male resistance' manifests itself in several daily practices which highlight the tension in the structure of the relationship between men and women. It is a tension that can develop into physical, verbal, and symbolic violence. When the man's status in the public sphere is threatened by women's development, he becomes keener on asserting his power on the domestic level. Men then see themselves as the undisputed masters, whose orders are obeyed and who have all the authority, and their wives must be the subordinate followers. As men continue to deny their crisis and ignore their different sufferings, they exercise more violence against women, driven by overcompensation and defensiveness. (2)

Thus, if we assume that the strategy of male dominance has, at least largely, become overcompensation—meaning the use of all means to preserve the traditional status of men—it is no wonder that many forms of violence against women serve as key tools in this strategy. This is done to preserve a status that is losing its ground and to seek revenge against women, who are seen as responsible for the undermining or distortion of the image of masculinity. In the fight to defend men's status, stereotypes of superior masculinity and submissive femininity are invoked in the cultural and religious traditions. Some may view this as a step backward, but in fact, it is an attempt to position the past in the present and to use it to legitimize a masculinity that cannot find support in contemporary paradigms which now are increasingly derived from human rights principles.

Indeed, overcompensation is not limited to modern masculinity. Modern femininity, in many ways, is part and parcel of this duality. Playing the role of the soft female through using body care and fashion still factors in the construction of the image of the tough male figure. It is still important not to conflate "softness" with "submissiveness." Many girls and women play the soft female figure role (as opposed to tough masculinity), but do not play the traditional role of the "submissive" woman. This is another challenge faced by contemporary masculinity which conflates softness with submissiveness, like how it used to be in the past. To be more specific, I am talking about conflating softness with readiness to be submissive. Masculinity is not exercised on passive submissiveness but manifests itself in the processes of "subordination" and ability to tame the woman.

As is known, the construct of masculinity is built on *qiwama*, roughly translated as “authority in the household,” in the political and social senses and “virility” in the sexual and biological senses. In both cases, discrimination against women is essential to the constructs of *qiwama* and virility. Any attempt to prevent discrimination against women represents a threat to this image which leads to violence. Discrimination is violence, but efforts to end it do not resolve the conflict, but often exacerbate it.

Qiwama may be rooted in religious discourses and social conventions that are reflected in man-made laws, especially personal status law. But virility or sexual dominance are always attributed to a purely natural state and require female acknowledgement. Virility does not exist in a vacuum; it does in acknowledging it. Reducing women to eroticized, sexual beings has had negative repercussions for men. Perhaps they wanted women to be sexually attractive, but women have also become a menace, a threat to male dominance. Anxiety over losing control at the social level pertains to an existential dread of the erotic woman. This explains many manifestations of violence against women.

Fear of Women/Gynophobia

In essence, fear is a normal emotion that is closely tied to life and its continuity. It protects us from imminent dangers and is an important component of human relationships. It is always appreciated when we show concern for someone we care about. But there is also pathological fear, or phobia, which sometimes evolves into collective fear rooted in self-interest, misconceptions, false beliefs, and stereotypes. Fear, in this case, is linked to an underlying hatred for an “Other” and is not the result of the concrete actions of the said Other. It is the hatred of an identity. Perhaps xenophobia—fear of difference be it in religion, race, or gender—is one of the most well-known forms of this fear. Manifestations of this hatred have become increasingly noteworthy as they represent forms of racism and are a source of political and social violence.

Fear of women, or gynophobia, is a pathological fear. It is entrenched in a fear of women’s identity, driven by stereotypes and false beliefs, and leads to various forms of violence. Never has a phobia been justified on the levels of society, culture, and religion like gynophobia. And victims have never fallen due to a phobia as is the case of victims of gynophobia throughout history and virtually in all societies. Gynophobia is rampant in societies and cultures considered “masculine.” Masculinity’s *raison d’être* lies in demonizing women’s bodies, and it has spread this belief. The phobia turned

into a cultural and social reality: Men are not faking their fear; they are genuinely afraid. It is the syndrome of masculinity, anxiety, and fear. As stereotypes of superior masculinity proliferate, gynophobia runs rampant through expecting women to be excessively feminine.

Gynophobia is about beliefs associated with women and their sexual capabilities. Women are seen as having traits that align with their nature: they are masters of cunning and seduction and have naturally high libidos. These perceptions which view femininity as a “perpetual weakness,” the notion perpetuated in the discourse surrounding Islamic *fiqh*, are the same perceptions which granted women superior sexual capabilities. They have reduced women to their bodies to both exclude them and, at the same time, desire them. This is how masculinity became in constant confrontation with the demon of feminine lust, produced by the same masculine culture. As a result, the perception of women became twofold: it is rooted in fear, which causes men to be cautious of women and hate them, and fascination, which leads to courtship and a sense of possessiveness. Fascination does not actually mitigate the fear but exacerbates it. In fact, one meaning of the root *al-fitān* in Arabic is “the devil.”

The exaggeration of women's lust and concomitant fear of it is a phenomenon that transcends cultures, and in all case, women's higher libido; summons the devil to be associated with the female. These beliefs are found in both Eastern and Western cultures, as Eve's original sin shaped the perceptions of women across them. As a result, “this became women's Cross to bear, and some considered women partners of the Devil, and others believed they were purely evil. This is not solely found in Arab-Islamic cultures but human culture in general. In this worldview, women occupy the margin, while men claim the center. Between the margin and the center, there are threads of ebbs and flows, of seduction and desire . . .” (3) In the same context, Sufiya al-Sahiri adds, “of the narrative mentioned in a Tabari work; ‘When a woman approaches, the devil sits on her head and adorns her for those who look, and when she turns away, he sits on her back and adorns her for those who look.’” Al-Sahiri adds that, “There is no doubt that comparing women to the Devil is not meant to be literal, as devils are of the *jinn*, but it means that women are the source of seduction par excellence, and that the Devil manifests in her as a sexual symbol, tempting men to perform illicit sexual acts, i.e. adultery, which is religiously forbidden and goes against the established order.” (4)

Similarly, the history of Western sexuality also perceives women as such. In Iskandar Mus'ab's Arabic translation of Jacques André's *Aux origines féminine de la sexualité*, and under a section named

“The Gate of the Devil,” André indicates that these ideas can be traced to Greek mythology. He states, “To resolve the dispute about who experiences the pleasure of sex more intensely, men or women, Zeus and Hera, the Greek god and goddess, ask Tiresias, the mythical creature who was transformed from a man into a woman, thus experiencing both sexes at different points. Tiresias answered, ‘A man enjoyed one tenth the pleasure and a woman nine tenths.’” André also adds that these ideas transcend ages and cultures. In a nineteenth-century medical dictionary, under the entry for “libido” in the chapter “Women,” it is said that a woman’s libido, on average, equals two men’s and a half! This disparity essentially indicates that “women are a danger to themselves and men.” This echoes the curse from the Book of Ecclesiastes of the Old Testament: “I find more bitter than death the woman who is a snare whose heart is a trap and whose hands are chains. The man who pleases God will escape her, but the sinner she will ensnare” (7:26). (5)

There are psychological and social reasons for violence that is built on gynophobia too. In Habib Nasr Allah’s Arabic translation of Michela Marzano’s *Dictionnaire du corps*, the phenomenon is viewed from a bio-psychological perspective. She states,

Generally, the man penetrates, the woman is penetrated, an act that connects their deepest selves. Even if masculinity is thought to be superior for conquering the woman’s body and can be tied to fantasies of power, it does not, however, erase the anxiety and fear that unravel when a man is with his intimate partner and when they both bare their bodies. Being rude or violent are sometimes nothing but a way for the man to reassure himself he is still masculine, and that, as a male, he is never at women’s mercy. From here stems, if not fantasies of rape, then at least fantasies of dominance that affirm masculinity and reinforce a man’s sense of winning over a woman’s body. (6)

In cultural and social terms, the feminine desire, perceived as “frightening” is no doubt integral to the cultural construct of gender relations. Kholoud al-Siba’i posits,

Feminine desire is not naturally inevitable. It is more of a social construct governed by a symbolic system where culture grants it significance beyond its simple biological level. With that, masculinity and femininity become rituals and fantasies shaped by different cultures, which assigned men and women their role and their status and gave each certain ways of expressing the lust of their sexual pleasure. The ‘mysterious’ female body plays a central role in triggering men’s anxiety and fear of the feminine desire, and these emotions can be summarized as follows:

* Translations of Bible verses were taken from www.biblegetaway.com (translator).

Men fear women's expression of their sexual desire because this shatters the ideal image of the mother, and this causes unconscious emotional pain. Men fear lacking the ability to satisfy this sexual desire which leads to questions and doubt about their masculinity. (7)

Since male dominance is a social construct, not a human nature, the establishment, reinforcement, and safeguarding of this system remained a collective responsibility in masculine societies, and its collapse is also a collective fear. Either way, this protection requires both preventative measures and punitive ones. Many of the preventative measures, meant to neutralize the evil of femininity, can be found in different cultures, such as FGM, *tasfiḥ*,^{*} and breast flattening as practiced in some African communities. These procedures are done under the guise of protecting chastity and purity. Beside such preventative measures, the punitive ones target women who violate social and moral codes governing the relationship between the sexes and sexual norms in society. Punishments include exclusion, public shaming, and even killing. Sufiya al-Sahiri states, "The caution is organically tied to her sex life. Al-Ghazali asserts the importance of protecting wives' chastity, saying 'a man's vigilance [over his wife] must vary based on her need for protecting, as protecting her is his duty.' It is believed that women's libidos are more natural and potent than men's, and if it is not controlled, it will cause a *fitna* (temptation) that poses a threat to the social order. Women's libidos are kept in check through sexual fulfilment and male dominance. Al-Ghazali recommends that a man has sex with his wife whenever possible, or once every four nights at a minimum if he is married to four women, otherwise he will be unable to fulfil his woman's sexual needs." (8)

Men are also punished in case of their impotence or homosexuality. A man who 'betrays' his masculinity is excluded and marginalized too. Fear of women is rooted in fear of impotence or homosexuality, in betraying the myth of male superiority by being impotent or turning into a penetrated woman as a homosexual man. Here, the violence is more severe and more unrestrained. To a lesser extent than homosexuality, sexual impotence is considered a disgrace that must be hushed up. Men may find no way out but to withdraw quietly from the world of men and women, or resort to extreme violence against his partner, overcompensating in this for his impotent manhood, and punishing her for his own personal shame.

* A virginity protection ritual practiced in the Maghreb (translator).

The Case of FGM

FGM stands as the most prominent example of a masculine society's measures to control women's lustful bodies and mitigating their threat. To conceal this primary goal, narratives of purity, cleanliness, and chastity—concepts rooted in disciplining the woman's body and, by extension, her morals—are promoted. This supposedly serves to 'suppress the *fitna*' and safeguard the social order. As Kholoud al-Siba'i notes, "These widespread beliefs about female sexuality—as a source of disruption, chaos, and disorder—have resulted in practices that 'erode' the female body through a set of obligations and constraints. A woman has been deemed a source of *fitna*—whether she intends it or not—and her mere existence as a 'woman' is enough to constitute a threat to men and the entire social system. Thus, it was decreed that she must remain 'pure' to preserve the purity of men." (9)

FMG indicates 'purity.' A body that is desirable and safe according to religious teachings and social codes must be pure and chaste, and these two qualities have standards that must be upheld. Purity means "freedom from filth, impurity, and every shameful quality. A menstruating or postpartum woman is pure when she ceases bleeding or cleanses herself with water or other means to purify herself. Cleanliness for boys means to circumcise them. Purifying a canal or waterway means to clear away silts and deposits..." (10) The Arabic word *tahara* (purity) encompasses every act that cleanses impurity, dirt, and harm, as in *tat-hir* (purifying) cuts and the mouth. This pertains to the physical body, but physical purity is a prerequisite for purity of the soul. As for the notions of '*iffa* (chastity) and '*afaf* (integrity), they mean "abstaining from that which is forbidden, be it in speech or deed. Someone has '*afaf* when, if they are poor, they do not ask for help, nor take that which is not theirs. And '*iffa* is restraining desire and safeguarding one's body from unlawful penetration." (11) As widely known, the link between women and purity in certain cultures rises to level of an obsession. In those cultures, women are always accused of being dirty, and purity is linked to cleanliness. An impure body is an unclean one. As we will see later, an uncircumcised girl is considered unclean.

Genital mutilation is also sometimes called *khifad* in Arabic, literally "lowering." It is derived from the root *khafd*, which means "calm ground." Therefore, the link between genital mutilation, which lessens and lowers women's sexual desire—if not completely eradicates it—and *khafd* (calm ground) is evident here. *Khafd* calms the ground (society) and alleviates society's fears of women, whose body has lost its libido and desire which lead to *fitna*." (12)

Temptation is the disease, and purity, its cure. To be pure is not only the result of removing filth and dirt through washing rituals. Women's reproductive organs must be cut and mutilated to purify her body, soul, and society. FGM represents a sacred violence that is necessary to safeguard society, preserve men's superiority, and even protect women from their evil—or at least unsettled—selves. A study sponsored by the Anti-FGM Task Force in the nineties, following the International Conference on Population and Development, concluded that “Men's anxiety springs from an exaggerated perception of women's sexual abilities. The potential of suffering from sexual impotence is another deeply concerning issue for men. They thus experience anxiety about their inability to fulfil women's sexual needs due to their impotence. As a result, FGM weakens a woman's sexual ability and power, allowing men to fulfil their needs. All men's statements about their masculinity, identity, and perception of women sought to justify their supportive attitude towards FGM.” (13)

Men's fear, or rather anxiety, is self-centered. They are anxious about their image as socially and sexually superior, or as the study indicates, they are anxious over the lack of acknowledgement of their virility, an acknowledgement that must come from their female partners. This acknowledgement is crucial, as masculinity, just like femininity, is not self-referential, but needs to be acknowledged. In fact, the said acknowledgement is subject to social standards and perceptions of the meanings of masculinity and femininity. This non-negotiable requirement compels men to enact socially desirable masculinity, while women play roles that render them socially desirable, and importantly, socially 'non-threatening.'

Men's anxiety is often rooted in a subjective concern regarding the recognition of their virility. In contrast, women's fears are multifaceted. They encompass the apprehension of exclusion, particularly the prospect of remaining unmarried, as well as the anxiety associated with deviating from established sexual norms and their responsibilities in upholding the social order. It is evident that women are active agents in constructing, nurturing, and protecting the power of masculinity. Conditioning the female body to conform to the rules of modesty, purity, and honor is entrusted to women themselves. According to Maha Muhammad Hussein, based on a sample of women's opinions, girls who were subjected to FGM in the collective mind are seen as “girls with a degree of purity, cleanliness, and moral integrity, ones who do not engage in any act of which society disapproves. They can maintain themselves and follow social codes at the same time, and do not do anything that changes that. They are the ideal, well-behaved girls, of good character and conduct,

and have a calm temperament.” Hussein quotes some of the women participants in this study whose statements reflect their stances toward girls who were subjected to FGM. They said, “People always say they are respectable girls, decent, clean, their bodies are pure and will do nothing wrong.” Others said, “They are respectable girls who will not do anything wrong, and if they are made to watch pornography they will not get aroused, and if they were left alone in a room full of men, they will never be tempted.” (14)

In contrast, Hussein also cites the women participants’ perceptions of girls who were not subjected to FGM, stating, “Popular perceptions about uncircumcised girls carry a hidden social stigma, ‘they are immoral’, and are ‘like a ticking time bomb... ready to explode at any moment’. Those girls would use any chance to show off their bodies. They are impure, unclean, deviant, mimic men, and engage in forbidden relationships in public and in private. According to these perceptions, an uncircumcised girl is seen as capable of losing her honor and cannot protect her and her family’s honor.” Similarly, Hussein quotes some of the participants, who said, “Uncircumcised girls are horny and loose, they have no self-control and can be easily aroused. Poor things can’t resist arousal or young men approaching them.” They also stated that “Girls who were not circumcised do immoral things with men, they do things to themselves like masturbation,” and that “they do a lot of forbidden things, like *shudhudh* with uncircumcised girls like themselves, and you can tell who the uncircumcised girls are.” (15) The collective mind never looks at FGM as a crime against girls. On the contrary, it is girls retaining their normal bodies that is considered a crime against society and girls. We may not have heard such opinions from a sample of women in past traditional societies, but it is noticeable that the women’s statements include contemporary terms such as: porn, being among men, and *shudhudh* (sexual deviance), terms that were not known in the past. Perhaps we can say that, in the past, FGM was taken for granted, not subject to discussion or justification. But now, it requires a series of justifications that do not often refer to religious sources, which indicates that violence and its justifications reflect their historical and social reality. FGM is losing many of its supporters. However, it is not clear to what extent this decline correlates with the fear of women’s sexuality.

Contemporary Fear

Change has occurred undoubtedly. The men of today are different from those of yesterday. It is true that contemporary men still defend masculine superiority, but they do so in a different context,

for different reasons, and using different strategies. Some have changed, some are changing, and some are more aware of women's rights than some women who are still slaves to conservative ideas. Amal Qarami states, "A sense of self-confidence has grown among some women, and simultaneously, feelings of pride and strength have seen a relative decline among certain groups of men who have taken on a different view of masculinity. These men have distanced themselves from aggression, instead leaning toward peacefulness and building reciprocal relationships based on equality." Qarami adds, "Additionally, we observe instances today where strict adherence to gender stereotypes that justify gender discrimination is decreasing. There are cases where we see a shift away from traditionally masculine values and a tendency toward femininity, including caring for one's appearance, using cosmetics, choosing clothing that reflects femininity, or imitating women in aspects such as use of language, way of speaking and expressing oneself, posture, using perfumes, and other semiotic markers that traditional culture typically assigns to women." (16)

But I cannot generalize and say that this is some sweeping social change. Ultra conservative views exist, and so do open-minded ones, and in the middle, we find overlap and we see confusion. Perhaps a critical issue that gives contemporary violence its special nature is the gap between ideas and reality. In past traditional societies, ideas largely aligned with their reality to a large extent. In our contemporary societies, however, there is a gap, and there is confusion characterizing ideals of womanhood (largely traditional) and the reality thereof. Women's reality is different; they are agents in the public sphere now and are competing with men in fields that were once exclusive to them. It can be said that much of the contemporary violence can be attributed to this gap between what men (and society) believe and what the new reality dictates. Fear is no longer the mere anxiety about protecting sexual dominance, but it is now a fear of losing control and social superiority. As Aziz Al-Azmeh states,

Literary, religious, and everyday discourse has stripped women of their humanity, agency, personhood, and independence, reducing them to their femininity, perceived as excessive emotionality, casting their reality to the realm of the unnatural. It has become difficult to place women in their reality, or deal with them based on it. Instead, [society] is labeling this position as a deviation from femininity—enhancing men's insecurities of losing dominance—and renders the real woman a curse, a temptation, or a demon, all of which are causes for anxiety and hatred. (17)

Here we see the importance of discovering the dialectic of the perceived and the reality as complex and multi-layered. That which is perceived carries a lot of old, traditional ideas. Reality is nothing but the contemporary status quo. I agree with Amal Qarami, who said that men's stances toward women have changed, and that this is linked to the said men's perceptions of rights and freedoms in general. However, this open-minded and liberal view is not the majority's. In fact, some consider it the exception, not the rule. Most men (and even women) are still lingering in the tenuous zone between that which is perceived and reality. Rejecting women's work in the public sphere is not only a reality but is the fruit of a persistent mindset. This rejection may turn into institutionalized discrimination, as in when male judges gatekeep the job from women. On the more popular level, a man may benefit from his wife's labor and may be dependent on her. Even with that, he may still believe that women belong in the home and may even be violent toward her if she does not support him financially or because she does not do domestic work.

While traditional violence, represented in FGM, declines, thanks to increasing awareness, expressions of masculinity have become violent, especially in the public sphere. Perhaps that explains the decline in FGM and the rise in sexual harassment. It is true that both are linked to proving masculine superiority and achieving victory over the female body. Harassment, however, remains an individual act, performed in the context of courtship and self-imposition, causing intentional harm to women, or fantasies of power and ownership. If FGM is an old collective strategy organized mainly by women in order to reshape the female body and remove its inherent threat to men, family and the social system; sexual harassment is a purely masculine act that women disapprove of and do not play a part in, perhaps only in some women's relative tendency to blame other women for the harassment they were subjected to.

Traditionally, harassment is considered a disruption of the social order because it is seen as an assault on the community's honor carried by the woman who was harassed. Therefore, it is difficult to consider it a legacy of traditional culture. It seems like the distorted shift from traditional community cultures to today's urban society has led to masculinity breaking free from some restraints that it imposed on traditional relationship dynamics, ones which considered assaulting women an assault on the boundaries or property of other men or other communities. However, in urban societies, and with the unraveling of traditional relationship dynamics, women now exist in environments free of the constraints imposed by tradition. They, however, still lack the protection of modern laws and

codes of the civilized society. In this void, sexual harassment has become a phenomenon, one that aims at asserting a lost masculinity that wants to prove itself through the delusion of ownership and the desire to assert dominance through causing harm.

It is indeed paradoxical that rates of sexual harassment are highest in societies that emphasize excessive morality, chastity, and modesty. This emphasis implicitly places the responsibility on women, framing harassment as a consequence of violating the standards of modesty and chastity-standards that primarily concern women. It is not seen as a violation of rights and freedoms that concern everyone equally. While some argue that sexual harassers do not distinguish between women wearing the hijab, niqab, or women who do not wear either, the notion persists in the collective mindset, pushing most women to accept specific limitations on their clothing, movement, and speech. Women's compliance to modesty and chastity manipulations and impositions explains why hijab is widespread; it is a form of compliance with the demands of masculinity. However, modern fashion remains a territory for women to play in, as hijab (a symbol of modesty and religiosity) can be compatible with clothing that is fashionable and feminine. This is not a combination of the old and the modern, but a response to a cultural status quo. Even in extreme forms of dress, like the niqab and excessively revealing clothes, both are forms of reducing women to nothing but their bodies.

In short, it can be said that the masculine culture continues to revive the old narrative: the story of the superior male and the submissive female, the myths of chastity, purity, and honor, and the illusions of the cunning, lustful woman. It is true that some men and women have freed themselves from the shackles of this narrative, but the overall culture, parenting methods, and religious and moral teachings continue to reproduce the narrative in new forms. It seems that modern societies have not solved the dilemma of anxiety and fear, and perhaps have even exacerbated it. The mental image of 'masculine virility' and 'feminine lust' has taken a new turn, as it has become a fertile ground for consumer culture. The beauty industry, which employs stereotypical images of masculinity and femininity, is a vast industry that includes cosmetics companies, medical specialties, and media institutions.

Conclusion: The Story of the Genie and the Maiden

The One Thousand and One Nights recounts the tragic tale of Shahryar and his brother Shah Zaman. When they both discover their wives' infidelity, they decide to leave: "Let us go hence and fare forth to seek our destiny upon the road of Allah; for we have no right in royalty, nor shall have, until we have found someone who has met a fate like ours: without that, in truth, death would be better than our lives." (18)

Their journey begins with the tale of "The Genie and the Maiden," where a storm leads a dark column to rise from the sea to the sky which frightened the brothers. They climbed a tree to investigate and saw a genie, tall in stature, broad in forehead, and wide in chest, with a box on his head. He came to the shore and went to the tree they were on, sat down beneath it, and opened the box. He took out a small container, out of which a beautiful, radiant maiden emerged who was like the shining sun. The genie had kidnapped this maiden on her wedding night and locked her in the container within the box. When he let her out, he lay down and slept on her knees. She looked up and saw Shahriyar and his brother, so she asked them to come down, or she would wake the genie up. They got scared and went down, and she got up and started seducing them and threatened them she would alert the genie and incite him against them if they did not obey her. She took a bag out of her pocket which had a necklace adorned with 570 rings and said, "The owners of all these rings did what I commanded them in the genie's absence." And she asked them to give her their rings, which they did. She continued, "This genie kidnapped me on my wedding night, and then he put me in a container inside a box, and sealed the box with seven locks, and threw me into the depths of the tumultuous sea. He did not know that when a woman sets her mind to something, nothing can stop her." When they heard this, they were astonished and said to each other, 'If this genie went through something even worse than what happened to us, then it entertains us.' Shahriyar and his brother returned home, and the latter began his journey of violence and revenge. After he killed his wife, concubines, and servants, he married a virgin every night and then killed her, until Shehrazade came along, beginning the tales of *The One Thousand and One Nights*. Only then Shahriyar became imprisoned by a tale, as per the Fairouz song.

The 'man' of the modern masculine culture is still imprisoned by the tale of "The Genie and the Maiden," which sums up many of the reasons women are subjected to violence: temptation, cunning,

and demonization. The tale has changed, however, and the mythical genie has become a real one: The genie of historical change, the one who does not care for traditional values, the genie of the change in women's relationship to their bodies, that body which is now able to reshape itself, thanks to advances in modern medicine (such as hymen rejuvenation procedures). Also, the maiden is no longer the maiden of the past who has nothing but her cunning. She has become the maiden who has more opportunities for independence, saying yes or no, basically the maiden who cannot be owned. We are living in an age where all roads lead to reinterpreting and adapting that which is traditional, just so it remains without losing its legitimacy. Notions that used to be stable are now vulnerable to deconstruction, doubt, and questioning. It is no wonder for questions like "What is the meaning of *qiwama*?" "Is it acceptable to beat and discipline wives?" and "Is FGM religiously permissible or not?" to abound.

Masculinity tries to maintain its legitimacy through violence, without a doubt, but also through adaptation, to justify its existence and distance itself from some forms of violence that were once considered natural and acceptable. The modern Shahriyar is imprisoned in a new tale: how does he maintain his traditional control while being modern and civilized? It is a real crisis.

Notes

- (1) Moustafa, Yousry. (2014). "al-Abawiyya fi al-khitab al-mu'asir: hawl naqd Hisham Sharabi li-l-nidham al-abawi al-mustahdath" [Masculinity in Contemporary Intellectual Discourse: About Hisham Sharabi's Critique of the Newfound Patriarchy], in *Khitab al-naw' al-igtima'i* [Gender Discourse], edited by Yousry Moustafa. Network for Women's Rights Associations, GIZ, 1st edition.
- (2) Qarami, Amal. *Tasaddu' binyat 'al-dhukura al-muhaymina wa-muhawalat inqadhuha* [Collapse of the Hegemonic Masculinity Structure and Attempts at Saving It], women researchers, 12th book (2006–2007), al-Markaz al-Thaqafi al-'Arabi, Beirut, 100–125.
- (3) Eghlan, Hassan. (2018). *al-Jins wa-l-siyasa: al-tadbir al-siyasi li-l-jasad fi al-Islam* [Sex and Politics: Political Control of the Body in Islam], al-Markaz al-Thaqafi al-'Arabi, Casablanca/Beirut, 1st edition, 104.
- (4) Bin Hataira, Sufiya al-Sahiri. (2008). *al-Jasad wa-l-mujtama': dirasa anthrupulujiyya li-ba'd al-i'tiqadat wa-l-tasawwurat hawla al-jasad* [The Body and the Society: An Anthropological Study of Selected Beliefs and Perceptions of the Body], al-Intishar al-'Arabi, 1st edition, 46.
- (5) André, Jacques. (2009). *al-Nuzu' al-jinsi al-unthawi* [Female Sexual Tendency], translated by Iskandar Mus'ab, al-Mu'asasa al-Jami'iya li-l-Dirasat wa-l-Nashr, Beirut, 1st edition, 28.

- (6) Marzano, Michela. (2012). *Mu'jam al-jasad* [Dictionary of the Body], volume 1, translated by Habib Nasrallah Nasr Allah, Mu'asasa al-Jami'iya li-l-Dirasat wa-l-Nashr, Beirut, 663.
- (7) Al-Siba'i, Kholoud. (2011). *al-Jasad al-unthawi wa-huwiyyat al-gender* [The Female Body and Gender Identity], al-Jadawil, Beirut, 1st edition, 166.
- (8) Bin Hataira, Sufiya al-Sahiri. *al-Jasad wa-l-mujtama'* [The Body and Society], 65.
- (9) Al-Siba'i, Kholoud. *al-Jasad al-unthawi wa-huwiyyat al-gender*, 258.
- (10) Al-Sayyid, Amin Ali. *al-'Ami al-fasih fi al-mu'jam al-wasit* [The Formal Colloquial in the Wasit Mu'jam], the Academy of the Arabic Language, Arab Republic of Egypt, 1st edition, 2005–2006, 108.
- (11) Ibid, 127.
- (12) Bin Hataira, Sufiya al-Sahiri, *al-Jasad wa-l-mujtama'*, 62.
- (13) Wasif, Nadia and Mansur, Abd Allah. (1999). *al-Bahth fi anmat al-dhukura wa-khitan al-inath fi Misr* [Research on the Patterns of Masculinity and FGM in Egypt], translated by Nawala Darwish, The National NGOs Center for Population and Development, 222.
- (14) Hussein, Maha Muhammad. (2010). *al-'Udhriyya wa-l-thaqafa: dirasa fi athrupulujiya al-jasad* [Virginty and Culture: A Study in the Anthropology of the Body], Daal for Publishing and Distributing, Syria, 1st edition, 200.
- (15) Ibid. 201.
- (16) Qarami, Amal. *Tasaddu' binyat 'al-dhukura al-muhaymina wa-muhawalat inqadhuha* [Collapse of the Construct of Hegemonic Masculinity and Attempts to Save It], 100–125.
- (17) Al-Azmeh, Aziz. (2017). *al-'Unf li-l-rajul wa-l-shabaq li-l-untha* [Violence for Men, Libido for Women], al-Jadid Magazine, issue 32, 25–42.
- (18) The Thousand Nights and One Nights, rendered into English from the literal and complete French translation of Dr. J.C. Mardrus. By Powys M., Volume I, 2nd edition, 1964. by Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd.

Combating Harassment and Violence against Women at Cairo University

Maha Al-Said⁽¹⁾

Translated by: **Mona Ibrahim**

The 2011 revolution broke many barriers of silence on issues of human rights and freedoms, the most important of which is the sexual harassment. In response to the demands of civil society organizations in the form of groups aimed at countering harassment, the Government had passed a law criminalizing sexual harassment. This has prompted a group of interested academics to initiate the submission of a policy to confront sexual harassment at Cairo University. It was drafted with the participation of student representatives and some civil society organizations active in this field.

Based on the literature, the creation of a public policy requires the following:

1. A cause
2. An enthusiastic group that can form a critical mass.
3. Participation of all stakeholders.
4. The actual drafting of the policy.

The above were the steps taken to establish Cairo University's anti-harassment policy. The anti-harassment policy clarifies what harassment is and the procedures for the making of a case of harassment. The process included a series of meetings of a group of interested academics, some civil society organizations, and students.

Background:

Sexual harassment is a form of gender-based violence, a violation of an individual's right to security and safety. The different articles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948, include the right to human dignity, equality, security and physical integrity, freedom of movement and residence, personal liberty and privacy. However, the imbalance of power between men and women in society and in patriarchal cultures has led to the violation of many women's rights and the spread of gender-based violence.

Unfortunately, the phenomenon of sexual harassment is a global phenomenon that is not limited to a nation, religion or race, but it is one of the manifestations of violence against women, which is often overlooked, leading to the spread of this phenomenon. Sexual harassment is directly caused by the imbalance of power between men and women, so – most often, in different cultures – we see societies largely tolerant of the harasser while the victim is blamed. Therefore, it has become necessary to deal with this phenomenon from a human rights perspective that does justice to women, and deals with causes rather than symptoms.

Due to Cairo University's commitment to providing an educational environment in which male and female students are appreciated, respected, and equal in rights and duties, Cairo University has taken the initiative to combat sexual harassment among its students and staff by issuing an anti-harassment policy that is the first at the level of all Egyptian universities. The main purpose of this initiative is to create a safe environment for all.

Cairo University Policy for Combating Harassment:

After conducting research on different models of policies followed in other countries, it was necessary to develop a policy appropriate to the context of the university and the Egyptian culture. The procedures and reporting mechanism in the event of harassment and the penalties imposed on the harasser are thus derived from the Egyptian Universities Regulation Law.

Cairo University's anti-harassment policy is divided into six sections: 1- An introduction that clarifies the goal and vision, 2- Definition of sexual harassment as stated in Egyptian law, 3- Determining responsibilities of members of the university community, 4- Means of reporting, 5- investigations' procedures, and 6- Penalties.

The policy is based on two axes:

The first axis focuses on taking measures to prevent and raise awareness against harassment in the academic community. The second axis is mainly about the necessary measures to deal with the act of harassment in the event of its occurrence, and to address its effects.

The administration has considered that the existence of a policy only is not enough to combat harassment. The idea developed from the mere existence of a policy to the establishment of an anti-harassment unit in order to activate this policy. The unit of combating harassment and violence against women was thus established at Cairo University, under the decree of the President of the University, No. 873 of 2014 issued on 22/6/2014.

The unit is an administrative unit affiliated to the Office of the President of the University, and is specialized in combating harassment and violence against women, and is assisted by the coordinators of units in all faculties and institutes of the university. The coordinators report to the unit technically, and to the dean of the college or institute, administratively.

Mission, Vision and Objectives of the Unit:

First: Mission of the Unit

Providing an educational environment in which faculty members, staff, and students are appreciated, respected, and equal in rights and duties. In addition, it shoulders the task of the application of policies to combat harassment, and activate the necessary measures for prevention, awareness and taking appropriate actions to deal with the act of harassment, and to address its effects.

Second: The objectives of the unit

- To create an academic and scientific community characterized by peacefulness and collegiality that is free from harassment and discrimination
- To take the necessary preventive measures and raise awareness against harassment and violence against women
- To spread the culture of respect and equality in the university community
- To build trained and effective cadres in the field of combating harassment and violence against (detailed brochure of the Unit, is displayed at the end of the article)

Egyptian Universities Anti-Harassment Network:

After the success of the Anti-Harassment and Violence against Women Unit at Cairo University, the unit, in cooperation with Harassment Map^(*), decided to organize the first workshop for universities. The aim was sharing knowledge, transferring Cairo University's experience in implementing the policy against harassment, and discussing opportunities and challenges of applying the experience in other universities. The workshop took place in the period from 27 to 28 November 2016 as part of the activities of the "16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence" global campaign. 18 faculty members from 10 universities attended the workshop that was held at the Guest House of Cairo University.

In response to the demands of the faculty members who attended the first workshop, and the increasing need to establish anti-harassment and violence against women units in universities, the second workshop was held; "Involving Egyptian Universities in Creating Units and Implementing a Policy to Combat Harassment and Violence against Women" The workshop was held from 19 to 20 April 2017 at Cairo University's Guest House, in cooperation with Harassment Map. It was attended by 20 faculty members representing 10 universities. During its sessions, the recommendations of the first workshop were reviewed, and the challenges facing each university in order to achieve the best application and provide technical support to the participating groups were discussed. It was clear from the discussions that all Egyptian universities were keen on promoting the concept, "a safe academic community for all".

To enhance the role of the Anti-Harassment and Violence against Women Unit at Cairo University in transferring expertise and networking between Egyptian university units, a third workshop was organized from 8th to 10th February 2018 at Cairo University's Guest House. The main aim was establishing a network of universities and building the capacity of members of the university community to combat sexual harassment. Eleven universities, 27 faculty members, heads of anti-harassment units in universities, in addition to representatives of the National Council for Women, attended the workshop.

* HarassMap is a volunteer-based initiative founded in late 2010, and works to engage all of Egyptian society to create an environment that does not tolerate sexual harassment. <https://harassmap.org/en/who-we-are> accessed 1/12/2024 (editor)

After lengthy deliberations between a number of units in Egyptian universities, it was decided to establish a supportive network that brings together anti-harassment and violence against women units in Egyptian universities. The network is expected to have a number of functions and aims that help to guarantee a university community that is safe for all.

Vision:

A supportive and effective network of Egyptian universities committed to combating harassment and violence against women.

Mission:

Developing a strategy with achievable and measurable objectives to combat harassment and violence against women and Supporting the efforts of anti-harassment units in creating a safe university community.

Values:

The network promotes the values of teamwork, equality, respect for diversity, credibility, and accountability.

Objectives:

The network works to achieve the following:

- Raising awareness within the university community about harassment and violence
- Building effective communication tools between network members
- Sharing and learning from different experiences
- Supporting various units in the field of partnership building
- Building the capacity of units' members

The Cairo University's Anti-harassment Policy

Introduction

Cairo University is committed to providing an educational environment in which male and female students enjoy appreciation, respect and equality in rights and duties. Sexual harassment is one of the most dangerous acts that hinder the achievement of these principles, as it contradicts the ideals sought by the university community. All major universities in the world are keen to have clear anti-harassment policies in universities, and to adopt well-defined measures to decrease the occurrence of these incidents and punish harassers.

In view of the widespread occurrence of sexual harassment in the Egyptian society, and in line with the trends of the Egyptian legislator to address this epidemic that is gnawing at the roots of human relations between the citizens of the same country, and referring to the amendment of the Penal Code issued recently, which defines harassment and sets deterrent penalties for it, Cairo University decided to initiate the issuance of an anti-harassment policy in Egyptian universities. The aim is to activate the necessary measures for prevention and awareness, spreading a culture of respect and equality, as well as establishing an anti-harassment mechanism and responding appropriately to help the victims.

This policy is based on two main axes: the first axis focuses on taking measures to prevent and raise awareness against harassment in the academic community, and the second axis includes the necessary measures to deal with the act of harassment in the event of its occurrence, and to address its effects.

Definition of harassment:

Sexual harassment is any form of unwelcome words and/or acts of a sexual nature that violate someone's body, privacy, or feelings, making them feel threatened, afraid, humiliated, or violated. The definition of sexual harassment also extends to sexual or pornographic gestures, suggestions, insinuations or acts via any means of communication, including telecommunications.

Sexual harassment can take different forms and may involve one or more forms at a time, such as:

- Sexually suggestive gestures, appeals, or comments, stalking, or tracking
- Making invitations of a sexual nature implicitly or openly in exchange for benefits, favors, or abuse of power
- Online harassment such as sending unwanted, offensive or inappropriate comments, messages, or videos through the different means of communication
- Touching, groping, poking, scratching, getting too close, holding, pulling or any kind of unwanted sexual cues toward someone
- Nudity: showing nakedness in front of someone/in someone's presence against their will
- Threats and intimidation: threats of any kind of sexual harassment or assault, including threats of rape
- Sexual assault: coerced and/or coercive sexual acts against someone

The responsibility of the university community:

All members of the university community must work to create an academic and scientific community that is peaceful and collegial, and free from harassment and discrimination. We must also take all necessary measures to prevent cases of harassment, continuously raising students' awareness, and reporting any act believed to constitute sexual harassment as specified in this policy.

1. Responsibility of the university administration represented by the University President:

- The President of the University assumes the total responsibility associated with the availability of a supportive administrative and organizational environment at the university level, which contributes to facilitating the implementation of all aspects related to this policy.
- The President of the University is responsible for taking the necessary measures to protect the university community from sexual harassment in all its forms and its spectrum.
- The President of the University shall delegate the responsibility related to this matter to the agreed positions.

2. Responsibilities of faculty and staff:

- Informing students of the items of the anti-harassment policy
- Raising students' awareness of anti-harassment
- Encourage students to raise any concerns or complain in case any of them is assaulted or abused
- Report direct or indirect exposure - meaning that another party has been exposed to- any act contrary to the university's policy on harassment

Following the procedures of the anti-harassment policy

- Reporting any kind of discrimination resulting from a harassment complaint
- Cooperating fully with the Anti-Harassment Executive Committee by fully and explicitly responding to all questions raised during the investigation, and providing advice and consultation with the committee on complaints procedures

Supreme Committee to Combat Harassment and Violence against Women

The Supreme Committee for Anti-Harassment and Violence against Women at Cairo University has been formed with the Cairo University President as chair and the membership of the Deans of the Faculties of Arts, Law, Media, Economics and Political Science, the Secretary of Cairo University, some professors and specialists in this field

The Supreme Committee shall have the following functions:

- Adoption of anti-harassment policies
- Allocating the resources and capabilities required for the proper functioning of the work
- Facilitating the work of the Executive Committee for Anti-Harassment
- Supervising the work of the Executive Committee for Anti-Harassment

The Executive Committee of Anti-Harassment and Violence against Women:

This committee is affiliated with the Supreme Committee for Anti-Harassment headed by the President of the University. The Executive Committee for Anti-Harassment and Violence against Women at Cairo University includes nine faculty members and

junior faculty members of those who are interested and experienced, as well as a representative of the Students' Union. 75% of the members of the committee are to be women.

The Executive Committee shall have the following functions:

- Implementation of anti-harassment policies at the university
- Managing the daily work of the office of the Anti-Harassment and Violence against Women Unit
- Developing action plans for training and awareness programs
- Coordination with the Psychological Support Unit at the Faculty of Arts and the related units at the university
- Coordination with representatives of the Executive Committee for Anti-Harassment and Violence against Women in Cairo University faculties and institutes
- Considering complaints and taking the necessary measures
- Coordination with the Students' Union and Students' Groups
- Coordination with civil society organizations
- Supporting state institutions and civil society in combating harassment and violence against women

Representatives of the Executive Committee of the Anti-Harassment and Violence against Women Unit in the different colleges:

The Executive Committee of Colleges is represented by two faculty members and the assisting body in all faculties and institutes of the university who enjoy a good reputation and a neutral relationship with students.

Duties of representatives of the Executive Committee in colleges:

- To coordinate awareness programs and trainings in the college
- To receive harassment complaints
- To take measures to assist victims of harassment
- To submit a monthly report on the college to the Executive Office

Procedures for the complaint of the harasser

All complaints of harassment are taken seriously and taken into account, and complaints are thoroughly and confidentially investigated, ensuring that information

is available only to those concerned.

The University prohibits any kind of discrimination that may occur to those who file a complaint related to harassment, or participate in submitting such a complaint, or in an investigation committee concerned with it. Those who are exposed to any discriminatory act in this regard must immediately resort to the Executive Office of the Committee of Anti-Harassment and Violence against Women, in accordance with the following procedures:

1. The complainant contacts the representative of the Executive Office for Anti-Harassment and Violence against Women who is responsible for receiving complaints at the college or institute.
2. The complaint is handled in a framework characterized by complete confidentiality, respect for privacy and an understanding of the sensitivity of the situation.
3. The complainant may want to resolve a problem informally. In this case, the harasser is summoned and given a verbal warning. This shall be done in strict confidentiality.
4. In the event that the complainant wishes to proceed with the official procedures, witnesses to the incident and any other means leading to the act of harassment (text messages, confetti, photos, etc.) must be present.
5. The representative of the Executive Office assesses the seriousness of the complaint based on agreed criteria.
6. If the seriousness of the incident is proven, the matter shall be referred to the Executive Office for consideration and investigation.
7. When the seriousness of the incident is proven, the matter is referred to the legal affairs at the university, to apply the following provisions.

First: If the harasser is a student:

The provisions of Article 136 of Executive Regulations No. 809 of 1975 of the Universities Regulating Law are applied. The article states:

Disciplinary measures are:

- Cautioning orally or in writing
- A warning
- Deprivation of some student services
- Deprivation from attending the lessons of a course for a period of not more than one month

- Dismissal from college for a period not exceeding one month
- Denial of sitting for exam in one or more courses
- Suspension of student registration for a master's or doctoral degree for a period not exceeding two months or for a whole semester
- Canceling the student's exam in one or more courses
- Dismissal from the college for a period not exceeding one semester
- Denial of exam in one or more semesters
- Depriving the student from enrolling for a master's or doctoral degree for a semester or more
- Dismissal from the college for more than one semester
- The final dismissal from the university. The decision of dismissal is communicated to other universities and results in the student's invalidity to register or take exams in the universities of the Arab Republic of Egypt

It is permissible to order the announcement of the decision issued with disciplinary sanctions within the college. The decisions must also be communicated to the student's guardian.

The decisions issued for disciplinary procedures, except for oral warning, shall be kept in the student's file, and the University Council may reconsider the decision issued for a final dismissal after the lapse of at least three years from the date of issuance of the decision.

Second: If the harasser is a faculty member:

The harassing faculty member shall be referred to a disciplinary board to apply the provisions of Article No. 110 of the Universities Organization Law No. 49 of 1972, which states:

The disciplinary sanctions to which faculty members are subject:

1. Alert
2. Censure
3. Censure with delay in the due bonus for one period or delay in appointment to the higher position or the like for a maximum of two years
4. Termination of employment while retaining pension or gratuity
5. Dismissal with deprivation of pension or gratuity within the limit of one quarter

6. Any act that insults the honor of a member of the teaching profession or that violates his/her integrity or violates the provision of article 103 shall be punished by dismissal.
7. In all cases, a faculty member may not be dismissed except by a ruling of the Disciplinary Board.

Third: If the harasser is a staff member, but not a faculty member:

The provisions of Article No. 157 of the Universities Regulating Law No. 49 of 1972, which stipulates the applicability of the provisions of civil servants in the state to university workers who are not faculty members, shall be applied, in what is not provided for in their own laws and regulations.

Fourth: If the harasser does not belong to the university:

In the event that it is proven that the harasser does not belong to the university at all, the matter is referred to the competent authority to implement the provisions of the Egyptian Penal Code No. 58 of 1937 as well as Law No. 50 of 2014 amending the provisions of the Penal Code regarding the penalties prescribed for sexual harassment.

The Revolution Starts at Home*

Dalia Youssef

Translated by: **Yara Saleh**

Romantic relationships are the sanctuary of comfort and safety we aspire and run to when pressured by life's hardships. They are meant, supposedly, to provide support, protection, and passion. However, in some cases, violence becomes part and parcel of the relationship, and even a decisive factor in shaping its dynamics. Although violence takes many forms: psychological, physical, and sexual, yet, they all operate through a common line leading to a common result. The aggressor, often grappling with psychological, mental, or sexual disorders, resorts to various types of assault against his victim to assert control. In such toxic dynamics, the aggressor drains his victim emotionally to sustain his own existence, drawing his strength, vitality and stability from the victim's weakness, low self-esteem and loss of poise and independence.

Escaping such relationship is both challenging and entails considerable danger. It can even prove fatal, as the aggressor often refuses to relinquish control over the victim. Meanwhile, the victim, drained of energy and stripped of self-worth, may not find the strength, energy, or resources needed to escape. Even if she musters the courage, she might lack a supportive system needed to ensure her safety and provide essential resources required to rebuild her life.

Understanding the dynamics of violence in relationships, along with strategies to resist, confront, and reduce it, has been steadily growing. This shift is further supported by efforts to identify and clarify the behavioral patterns of partners inclined toward violent practices.

Considering this growing awareness, books that explore the complexities of violence in relationships have become increasingly significant. One such work is *The Revolution Begins at Home*, a 368-page collection of true accounts from survivors of violent relationships, along with psychological insights

* The Revolution Starts at Home: Confronting Intimate Violence Within Activist Communities. Ching-In Chen, Jai Dulani, Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha. Eds. AK Press; Second edition (August 30, 2016)

and practical advices for navigating critical situations. What makes this book particularly significant is its focus on a specific and unexpected context; the activists' communities. Activists are usually seen as the closest allies to victims and the most deeply aware of the devastating consequences of violence; thus are the least likely to indulge in abusive relations or perpetrate the very behaviors they stand against. Yet, as the book reveals, abusive dynamics are also prevalent among activists' communities, which makes the narratives profoundly unsettling, provoking a mixed feeling of intrigue, horror, and deep sorrow.

Where to go when you are part of the entity responsible for providing support and protection for the victims of violence? What happens when the abuser is a fellow activist, a respected figure, or your partner in the events and activities to resist and fight violence? Survivors critically engage with these complex and problematic questions through their lived experiences—a process comparable to navigating a minefield or disturbing a hornet's nest. The situation is challenging because the intricate web of social, psychological, gender, and legal dynamics are amplified when the abuser or the victim are activists.

The book adopts a therapeutic approach rooted in storytelling, where narrating one's experience enables the victim to process the chaos of her traumatic experience, and extract meaningful lessons. This approach is reflected in the extensive use of the first-person pronouns, the past tense, and a confessional tone throughout the narratives. One of the book's most significant strengths is the survivors' remarkable courage in confronting themselves first, and then the readers—regardless of who they might be—while reconsidering their painful experiences. The narratives provide detailed depictions of fear, pain, hesitation, and self-doubt, which often defines the experience of being in a troubled relationship.

One survivor, who chose to remain anonymous, recounts how she doubted her professional abilities as a psychotherapist after experiencing violence in a personal relationship. Her inability to recognize the signs and protect herself left her questioning how she could effectively help others. This reflection underscores the unique dimensions of the experiences documented in the book, distinguishing them from more commonly recognized cases of violence. Additionally, the narratives explore systemic challenges, including the role of law enforcement and the legal system response, which take on added complexities when either the victim or the abuser is an activist.

Another survivor recounts the immense difficulty she faced when considering turning to the police for protection. As an activist, she frequently encountered the police as adversaries during marches and events, which rendered the notion of seeking their protection fundamentally at odds with her principles and experiences. This paradox underscores how addressing violence within activist communities often requires unique mechanisms that remain consistent with the principles and values of activism. This challenge extends beyond interactions with the police to encompass legal authorities too. Multiple legal loopholes remain unaddressed, enabling perpetrators to evade accountability. One survivor recounted her own experience, describing a situation where the harm inflicted on the victim was not explicitly addressed by legal statutes. For example, in cases where a victim suffers from a chronic illness, such as heart disease, and the abuser deliberately subjects her to extreme psychological pressure that exacerbates her condition, she may find herself unable to seek justice. The lack of explicit recognition of indirect harm, such as psychological abuse leading to physical deterioration, significantly complicates the process of proving such claims. Furthermore, the prolonged legal proceedings required to substantiate these cases impose substantial burdens on the victim, risking both her well-being and safety.

The narrative resorts to free writing and stream-of-consciousness, where the language echoes the speaker's emotions rather than merely describing them. Repetition is intensely used throughout the text conveying multiple layers of meaning, being trapped in the closed cycle of violence and oppression underpinned by degrading verbal assaults. One survivor exemplifies this when she says:

“Everything I was, everything I wanted, was wrong wrong wrong wrong”.

The repetition of “everything” and “wrong” captures the stifling atmosphere of a relationship built on judgment and devaluation of the victim's identity, desires, and aspirations. In this example, repetition echoes the repeated blows the victim has received on a psychological level, causing immense harm.

The book also features creative writing as in the poem titled ‘*Infestation*’, a title that carries the meaning of an ‘affliction’, while it also evokes the imagery of a parasitic infection, serving as an insightful metaphor for the abuser and the abusive relationship as a whole. This poem merits detailed and thorough analysis, which cannot be fully undertaken here. Nevertheless, I would like to point out one of its most compelling aspects; the transformation of the narrator/victim from a

state of submission and pain to one of confrontation and retribution.

The poem opens with the striking line “*our predators lie in sheep’s clothes*”; as a metaphor for deceptive appearances. This assumes a particular significance within the context of activists’ communities, those who are entrusted to protect and support, not harm. The writer then vividly portrays the victim’s state:

She weeps, heart drumming itself into shock.
Weeps, streetlamp saint she
She weeps, as angels splatter against the windshield In
Rush hour traffic
She did not ask for this martyrdom
She was unaware.

Repetition emerges again as a rhetorical feature in the use of the word “weep” to convey profound sorrow. The writer’s use of religious imagery (angels, saints, and martyrdom) underscores the suffering of the innocent victim. It is not about idealization of the victim status, as she didn’t seek such status or martyrdom, but helps to reflect the dramatic shift in the second half of the poem, where the language and imagery become violent and insulting

I don’t care who the fuck you are!
You don’t have any right to be
an asshole
a sexual predator
Fuckhead
rapist
Pillager
Thief-
a poser fronting as a partner in the cause-
You sack of limp balls and groping claws swaggering around
Young flesh.
We will
Exterminate the infestation.

In these lines, it becomes evident how language serves as a tool for both resistance and countering attacks. Enlisting negative qualities deepens the reader's aversion toward the aggressor. The writer deliberately uses language that aligns with the aggressor's own demeanor-one steeped in insults and violence- effectively communicating in the language he is most likely to comprehend.

A thorough reading reveals how the different narratives in the book are intricately interconnected, achieving what is often described as "organic unity", a profound connection of ideas and imagery that transcends the surface level. Although the book compiles texts by different writers, the shared experience of pain and suffering serves as a unifying center, weaving the narratives into a cohesive and resonant message.

For instance, in the previous verses, the word 'any' in 'You don't have any right to be,' responds to the word 'everything' mentioned by another writer in a different context: 'Everything I was, everything I wanted, was wrong, wrong, wrong, wrong.' It is as though the poet the aggressor all the excuses or justifications he might construct, while simultaneously echoing and rearticulating the sentiments expressed by her companion in pain. She tells the aggressor "what have done and continues to do is "wrong, wrong, wrong," but in her own distinct voice.

Another notable feature of the book is that the editors didn't intervene with commentary or explanations but rather made an effort to arrange the narratives in a way that created an internal coherence. This allows readers to dive directly into the narratives as if in a therapeutic storytelling session.

The final section of the book includes a practical guide designed to raise awareness of the red flags that may indicate a partner's tendency to be violent in a relationship. It also offers strategies for addressing violent situations in ways that prioritize the psychological and physical safety of the victim.

Despite the significance of the topics addressed in the book and the unexplored realms it delves into, its reception in Arab and Islamic societies may face challenges due to its depiction of same-sex and transgender individuals' relationships. The book's efforts to chart a way forward out of the maze of intertwined relationships where the victim's rights might be lost, could thus be further complicated

by additional variables, including geographical, cultural, and religious dimensions.

Nevertheless, the experiences presented in the book can serve as a starting point for critical discussions about activists' communities across our diverse societies. These narratives raise pressing and complex questions that resonate deeply with our lived realities and daily lives: Does the victim feel safe filing a complaint with the police or the courts? Does the situation change if the victim is a feminist, political, etc.? Would a man be able to speak out about experiencing abuse in a marital or romantic relationship? Do the family or close social circles provide adequate support and genuinely listen to the victim? Or is there a pervasive tendency to remain silent about the truth, especially in societies where divorce or separation is stigmatized for social, religious, or even economic reasons? Are activists' communities willing to acknowledge and address violations that may occur within their own spaces?

Overall, this book is important, insightful, timely, and provocative, offering a critical and controversial exploration of its subject matter. While it provides a compelling reading experience in terms of both form and content, it is psychologically intense because of painful details it conveys. The book's significance lies in its ability to create channels of communication that challenge the stigma and shame experienced by activists and therapists who have endured abusive relationships. One of its most profound lessons is the reminder that no one is infallible or immune to becoming either an abuser or a victim- even those who publicly denounce abusers or work to support survivors. As stated in the book's introduction, its primary aspiration is to create home support circles (i.e. internal) ensuring that victims are not forced to flee, abandon their homes, or relocate to escape the cycle of abuse. Ultimately, the revolution starts at home.

Authors & Contributors

Amal Abdelhadi

Feminist and human rights activist and researcher on gender equality, reproductive and sexual health and rights, and Gender based violence. Founding member of the New Woman Foundation since its inception. Member of Tiba editorial board. Supervised the production of the first English issue of Tiba.

Hala Kamal

(PhD) Professor of English and Gender Studies at the Faculty of Arts, Cairo University. She is a feminist scholar, co-founder of the Women and Memory Forum, and board member of the New Woman Foundation. She is also a member of the Bread and Freedom Party (currently under registration).

Marianne Sedhom

Feminist activist and lawyer. She has worked as a researcher with leading human rights organizations on issues related to the rule of law, political and civil rights, punitive policies, and conditions in places of detention.

Elham Eidarous

Egyptian leftist and feminist activist. She works as a translator. She studied political science at Cairo University and international human rights law at the American University in Cairo.

Yousry Moustafa

Egyptian researcher and expert in civil society capacity development.

Nihal Nour

Editor and translator with fifteen years of experience. She is particularly passionate about editing and translating academic works. She holds a master's degree in Cultural Studies from Cairo University and is proudly and fiercely feminist.

Maha Al Said

Professor of American Studies and former Chair of the Department of English Language and Literature at Cairo University. With over 22 years of teaching experience in Egyptian universities, she specializes in gender studies. She has published extensively on Arab American literature, gender studies, creative writing, popular culture, and the impact of new technologies on literature.

Mona Ibrahim

Professor at the Department of English, Faculty of Arts, Cairo University. She has published research in diverse fields, including American studies, comparative literature, feminist writing, translation studies, postcolonial studies, and African literature. She served as editor-in-chief of *Tiba* magazine (2002–2018), overseeing issues on topics such as women and legislation, women and resistance, women and education, and women in science. She is a founding member of the feminist storytelling group *Ana El-Hekaya* (I Am the Story).

Dalia Youssef

PhD in Comparative Literature. Teacher at the English Department, Faculty of Arts, Cairo University, and a researcher.

Yara Saleh

Editor, and researcher in Middle Eastern Studies