Making a Scene:
Young Women's Feminist Social Nonmovement in Cairo[1]

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Abstract

This paper argues that some women in Cairo, Egypt are part of a feminist 'social nonmovement' that predates the 2011 revolution, where they 'make scenes', i.e. commit acts of everyday feminist resistance, by defying patriarchal control over their bodies and behavior in public space independently from one another, spurred by patriarchal oppression for most, and participation in the revolution for some. Through interviews with twelve Cairene women in 2017, I investigate how and why they defy the social norms governing women's use of public spaces and investigate the role of the 2011 revolution in their different forms of feminist defiance. I analyze three acts of public feminist resistance: women removing the hijab, defying street harassment, and moving out of their parents' and husbands' homes. My findings contribute to the literature on recent Egyptian women's feminist resistance specifically, and everyday resistance studies in general. Only a quarter of my participants identify the revolution as the main reason for their feminist epiphany and resistance.

Introduction

On January 25, 2011, Egyptians took to the streets to protest the 30-year autocratic rule of Hosni Mubarak (Hass 2017). During the eighteen-day sit-in at Tahrir Square in Cairo, citizens could not turn their eyes away from the large presence of women. It was difficult for many Egyptians to comprehend that women were leaving their homes and taking an active role in national politics. This was shocking because historically in many Muslim majority

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societies the public sphere has always been perceived as the domain of power, politics and religion, and as the 'universe of men' (Mernissi 2003,138).

In March 2011, the military forcibly removed protestors from Tahrir Square who stayed after the toppling of Mubarak in February. Both men and women were tortured and later jailed, however women had to go through a series of virginity tests (Human Rights Watch 2017). Through this and other similar measures, including death threats, sexual assault, and proposed dress codes, the Egyptian state and society aimed to exclude and control the increasing number of women protesting in public (El Said, Meari, and Pratt 2015).

When a General representing the army was interviewed on CNN about this incident, he voiced the opinion of the majority of Egyptian society regarding women's morality and the public sphere: '[T]he arrested women were not like your daughter or mine[...they] camped out in tents with male protestors' (Abouelnaga 2015,44). According to the General, respectable women are confined to the private realm and comply with normative femininity,[2] but loose women 'demonstrate boldness and courage and break the segregation norms' (Amireh 2017; El Said, Meari, and Pratt 2015,16). To the state, loose women were a national threat in need of containment as they transgressed traditional gender norms.

These virginity tests, sexual assaults and death threats aimed at controlling and terrorizing women aptly reflect the socially and politically constructed division between the public and private spheres, and the extent to which this division informs how traditional Egyptian society and the state view and treat women. Once a woman transgresses patriarchal boundaries and steps into the (male) public sphere, her body and honor are subject to public scrutiny; they are questioned and checked in efforts to delegitimize women's presence in public spaces. Egyptian women do not have a right to use male spaces (exemplified in the street or traditional cafes, *qahwas*) and if they are 'unveiled the situation is aggravated' (Mernissi 2003,144). Consequently, a woman's mere presence in a male dominated public place, nontraditional behavior, or immodest clothing is enough to raise suspicion.

2 Normative femininity means traditional feminine behavior and presentation a woman exhibits, complying with society's patriarchal notions of womanhood. In line with politics of respectability, normative femininity dictates that Egyptian women must be modest, quiet, mostly homebound, obedient daughters and wives, among others.

But the women in Tahrir Square entered the political terrain, a symbol of the public sphere, believing in their right to exist in this space and refusing to be merely gendered symbols of honor. While the revolution of 2011 inspired some women to assert their right to be in public, for many others the decision to defy patriarchal social and religious traditions concerning public appearance was before then spurred by various personal reasons and experiences. Regardless of the catalyst, I argue that when a woman in Cairo asserts her right to be in public space by acting or appearing in a way that society deems a violation of acceptable gender norms and feminine propriety, she is committing an act of feminist resistance.

Cairene women, through individual, everyday acts of feminism, are challenging the patriarchal and conservative social norms of how to appear in the public sphere in growing numbers. Some women have removed their hijab, called out sexual harassers in the street, and moved out of their parents' home. I find these women's stories worth exploring, considering the parental, societal, and religious obstacles they face when carving new spaces for themselves in public. Through interviews with twelve Cairene women, I investigate how and why they defy the social norms governing women's use of public spaces through 'making scenes' (Creasap 2012). These scenes can be read collectively as public, feminist acts that together create what Asef Bayat (2013) calls a social nonmovement. In a social nonmovement, individuals carry out everyday forms of resistance that are repetitive and dispersed across time and space, causing an unintentional but widespread impact. Building on Bayat's concept, I argue and emphasize that my participants are part of a *feminist* social nonmovement, where women commit acts of public feminist resistance by resisting patriarchal control over their bodies and behavior in public space independently from one another (Bayat 2013). Furthermore, I investigate the role of the revolution of 2011 in the different forms of women's public feminist defiance.

This paper joins literature that sheds light on women's everyday resistance in the public sphere in the Global South and feminist literature that challenge the public/private, masculine/private dichotomy in the Middle East and North Africa (Alnass and Pratt 2015; Fabos 2017; Galana 2016; Jabiri 2016; Moussaid 2009). Furthermore, I situate my above argument and vision for the future of the feminist social nonmovement within the emerging field of everyday resistance. In line with Anna Johansson and Stellan Vinthagen (2020), this study aims at changing the discourse on resistance and what qualifies as 'real resistance' (19). It contributes to this

field by shedding light on everyday, feminist acts of resistance that are non-political' or have '"private" goals, emotions or personal needs' (Johansson and Vinthagen 2020, 29). Finally, through this study, we gain a better understanding of the feminist cultural shift underway in Cairo and its potential to dismantle patriarchal manifestations in the public sphere, and patriarchal institutions at large.

Background: Women in the MENA and Egypt's Patriarchal Public Sphere

Men and women in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) often inhabit 'two different worlds': the private and the public (Ghannam 2002,90). Women, who are expected to be powerless and subordinate, are confined to the private sphere, and men monopolize the public sphere as they are expected to be powerful and dominant (Ghannam 2002). Sexual segregation, as Mernissi (2003) calls it, is an integral part of this social and spatial division. To prevent sexual interaction between men and women, societies developed veiling and seclusion by relying on certain interpretations of Qur'anic verses, allowing men and women to collaborate only for procreation when they marry (Mernissi 2003). To prevent illicit relationships, restrictive codes of behavior ensure women's sexual purity and virginity (Moghadam 2003). A woman's sexual purity, or honor, is her primary duty towards herself and her family, because her honor is by extension her family's (Moghadam 2003). Men are responsible for protecting the family honor by controlling female members, to the extent that they sometimes kill them due to 'real or perceived sexual misconduct' in a crime dubbed 'honor killing' (Moghadam 2003,122-123). In this kinship system, men have rights over their female kin that women do not have over themselves or their male kin. These patriarchal rights reduce women to objects that must be preserved until handed from father to future husband, and views them as incomplete and in need of legal and social dependence on a male figure (Frye 1990; Radicalesbians 1970; Rich 1980; Rubin 1975).

The apparent 'preoccupation with virginity,' the heavy burden of family honor that women carry, the division of society into public and private spheres, and the lengths to which men go to police the lives and the behavior of the women in their family force some women to 'bargain with patriarchy' (Kandiyoti 1988; Moghadam 2003,122). By dressing modestly outside the home, such as wearing the Islamic veil or hijab, women signal

their belonging to the concealed private sphere, and use it to bargain with patriarchy, or the male dominated public sphere, specifically to partake in the economic market. In Egypt, many women who wear the hijab do so out of conviction, not as a bargaining tactic. Nevertheless, many Egyptian women do employ occasional bargaining tactics in public. For example, when a woman wants to leave her home at night, it is best if a man chaperones her so she can 'trespass into the men's universe' (Mernissi 2003,143). Otherwise, she should expect men to harass her. Unfortunately, societal traditions consider women's presence in the public sphere both offensive and provocative, which automatically exposes them to harassment (Mernissi 2003).

Everyday Resistance and Cairo's Feminist Social Nonmovement

Despite the hostile public sphere and patriarchal hierarchy of Egyptian society, many women are refusing to bargain with or abide by the rules of patriarchy. However, recent research on Egyptian women's feminist activism *narrowly* focuses on the revolution of 2011 as catalyzing their defiance and resistance to sexism and normative gender roles (El Said, Meari, and Pratt 2015; Hafez 2019; Hatem 2011; Mourad 2013; Ramadan 2012; Sholkamy 2013; Tadros 2016). While the revolution is a source of social change, including 'a heightened sense of gender awareness' on the part of women, scholars considering it the main catalyst for propelling women's resistance overshadows other factors that awakened Egyptian women's feminist defiance, and that some women's defiance started before the revolution (Moghadam 2003, 23). In fact, accounts of Egyptian women challenging patriarchal social norms of how to appear in public, which predate the revolution or are not related to it, populate news articles (Darwish 2012; Debeuf and Abdelmeguid 2015; Gamal 2015; Nkrumah 2016; Primo 2015).

Furthermore, much of the social movement literature assumes that women who engage in feminist resistance belong to feminist activist groups (Al-Ali 2000; Moghadam 2005; Sandberg and Aqertit 2014). Even researchers who work on 'marginalized forms of resistances, such as hidden and everyday resistance, as in James C. Scott's work, still tend to privilege certain "political" forms of resistance' (Johansson and Vinthagen 2020, 29). Not all women can assume the risks of participating in feminist political activism in patriarchal societies and under authoritarian regimes, but they can participate in resistance outside formal social movements. While everyday acts of resistance do not necessarily originate from a declared

feminist agenda, they could have 'important, if unintended, consequences' in society (El-Kholy 2002,15). Such *ordinary* public feminist acts slowly chip away at the patriarchal system in place, inspiring other women to do the same, resulting in an unorganized feminist 'popular mobilization,' or a feminist social nonmovement (Zaatari 2014,55).

Some women who live in Cairo are now part of a feminist social nonmovement. Here, I build on Asef Bayat's (2013) 'social nonmovement' and add 'feminist' to clarify its nature. A social nonmovement refers to 'collective actions of noncollective actors' (Bayat 2013,20). In a social nonmovement, individuals carry out similar everyday[3] forms of resistance separately from one another; these forms of resistance, in the case of the Cairene women, take place in public and are feminist. As part of this feminist social nonmovement, women's public feminist practices can be exemplified by having short hair, smoking, and retaliating against male harassers, among others, all of which are actions that the patriarchal Egyptian society deems inappropriate and unfeminine. The simultaneity and accumulation of these forms of resistance normalize these women's behaviors. The more women 'assert their presence in the public space, the more patriarchal bastions they undermine' (Bayat 2013,21). The power of these women's practices lies in their '*ordinariness* [original emphasis],' in their occurrence one day after the other at the hands of different women on separate occasions in different places (Bayat 2013, 88). Despite their ordinariness, these noncoordinated 'everyday forms of resistance' demonstrate the potential of women to challenge and change patriarchal societal notions (El-Kholy 2002,12).

Indeed, resistance is potentially productive and can be part and parcel of everyday life (Baaz et al. 2016). Its productivity lies in its ability 'to constructively transform societies and change history' (Baaz et al. 2016, 138). To James C. Scott (1985), the potentiality of everyday resistance lies in it being 'informal, hidden, and non-confrontational' (140). Like Scott (1985), the resistance I study falls outside organized, formal political activity; it happens every day by ordinary people. In contrast to Scott (1985), however, one of its main characteristics and where I argue most of its transformational potential lies is its confrontational and conspicuous nature, or in other words, its scene making.

3 'Everyday' means 'way of life,' not something that happens 'every' day (Johansson and Vinthagen 2020,28).

As part of a feminist social nonmovement, women's public acts of defiance contribute to creating or 'making a scene' (Creasap 2012). Kimberly Creasap (2012) explains that making a scene occurs when people challenge norms governing who 'belongs' in public spaces; 'the presence of a scene at some point entails a struggle over territory' (184). I utilize the concept of making a scene to signify two simultaneous meanings; the first is Creasap's definition, and the second is its idiomatic meaning which is to cause a public disturbance. As such, the everyday resistance I study here is different from Vinthagen's (2015) elaboration of it where he explains that unlike protest, everyday resistance does not necessarily call for attention—my research is concerned with everyday feminist resistance that either calls for attention, or attracts attention without the intent to do so, due its audacious nature in the context of the Egyptian public sphere

In this study, women struggle against men's territorial hold over Cairo's public space. As resistance is always a response to power, this power can be manifested in different forms including, but not limited to, laws, state institutions and, what concerns this paper, patriarchal divisions of private and public space, and traditional gender norms and normative femininity (Baaz et al. 2016). Cairene women make a scene by appearing in public space in a manner that does not conform to traditional gender presentations or even by simply being in a male dominated setting. Furthermore, the street, for example, is the scene where a woman chooses to leave her house wearing what some perceive as immodest clothes. In every instance of scene making, Cairene women are putting their foot down and asserting that they too have a share of public space. This is a contemporary and concrete example of how resistance results in the simultaneous restructuring of power and reconstruction of spaces and material realities that allow the creation and expansion of possibilities to resisters (Baaz et al. 2016; Vinthagen 2015).

In Egypt, engaging in public acts of everyday feminism and/or participating in unorganized feminist social movements seem to be the only option for women as the government has been cracking down on organized feminism. Before and after the revolution women human rights defenders experienced gender-based violence during protests at the hand of plain-clothes police/government men to 'silence and exclude [them] from public spaces and the political events shaping Egypt's future' (Torungolu 2016). Five months after the toppling of President Mubarak in 2011, an investigation into the registration of local and foreign funding of women's and human rights nongovernmental organization (NGOs) initiated the closures of many

international and local NGOs, such as the feminist organization Nazra for Feminist Studies (Aljazeera 2017; Amnesty International 2016; Nazra for Feminist Studies 2018; Nobel Women's Initiative 2016).

Everyday public feminist practices can be powerful and influential, because unlike conventional social movements with well-known leaders, they cannot be dispersed by governments that are unable to track individual acts of resistance (Bayat 2013). Women in Muslim majority societies under authoritarian regimes do not necessarily need an organized social movement or mass mobilization to negotiate, resist, defy or overcome gender discrimination (Bayat 2013). Unlike Scott (1985), the (women's) resistance I study, does not make 'explicit claims' and while it may result in undermining patriarchal power relations, it does not intend to 'undermine [them] through its consequences' (Baaz et. al 2016,140). In defining everyday resistance, I follow Michel de Certeau (1984) and Baaz et al. (2016) in focusing on a particular kind of act, not an intent or a consequence. This research is concerned with everyday feminist resistance where women can employ the 'power of presence': 'the assertion of collective will in spite of all odds, refusing to exit, circumventing constraints, and discovering new spaces of freedom to make oneself heard, seen, felt and realized' (Bayat 2013,88). By asserting their presence in the public sphere, Cairene women become 'public players' by subverting gender roles and norms (Bayat 2013,98).

Even though Egyptian feminist figures and organizations are currently experiencing an unprecedented backlash, no previous government has ever allowed NGOs to operate independently (Magdy 2017). During the rule of President Gamal Abdel Nasser (1956–1970), parliament passed legislation to put all NGOs under state control during a period often referred to as 'state feminism' (Magdy 2017). During Mubarak's rule (1981–2011), the number of new women's rights NGOs increased substantially; however, they were mainly development focused and closely related to state officials (Magdy 2017). Unfortunately, what was originally a feminist movement in the Arab world, has mostly become a women's rights movement that relies on international agreements and funding instead of 'popular mobilization' (Zaatari 2014,55). There is a difference between 'the calls for reform by the women's movements' and a population that mobilizes under 'the feminist call for change' (Zaatari 2014,58). A feminist popular mobilization, or a feminist movement, unlike a women's rights movement seeks to dismantle all patriarchal institutions in place by abolishing the patriarchal/paternal system that places men at the top of its hierarchy and by creating policies that

promote equality in social and legal frameworks (Zaatari 2014). Regrettably, the current political climate in Egypt will not allow for the complete realization of such a movement. However, some Cairene women enact 'off the radar' ways that gradually dismantle patriarchy through engaging in a feminist social nonmovement by carrying out everyday acts of feminist resistance in the public sphere. As such, this study illustrates the nexus of social nonmovements and feminist calls for change: an unorganized feminist movement that challenges patriarchy and allows women equal rights and access to the public sphere.

Unearthing some women's epiphanies, challenges and victories, who are part of the feminist social nonmovement, are essential to a real understanding of the lives of women in Cairo and the potential of Egypt's feminist future. By showcasing Cairene women's agency and resistance, I contest the essentialized image of oppressed and helpless Muslim, Arab, and 'Third World' women (Bulbeck 1998; Kaplan 1994; Lugones 2010; Mohanty 1988). Furthermore, this paper aims at changing the narrative around the everyday lives of Arab and Muslim women and countering, and challenging their consistent portrayal of mostly, if not only, bargaining with patriarchy.

Data and Methods

I conducted research for this paper as a master's student at the University of Cincinnati, Ohio, U.S.A. I was planning to do in-person interviews in Cairo, Egypt in the summer of 2017. After I arrived in Cairo in June, the IRB proposal that I had started in February was not approved. This decision was not negotiable; according to the IRB, it was not safe for me to conduct these interviews in Egypt. The IRB was wrong. Before starting my MA in 2016 and during my summer visit in 2017, I had conversations with women in private and public about topics relevant to this paper. We spoke freely, without fear for our safety or judgement by nearby listeners. In fact, one young man offered to take part in my study when he overheard me telling a friend about the topic. Since I did not want to change my topic, I opted to interview Cairene women who were temporarily living in or visiting the U.S., as the IRB suggested. As an Egyptian national, I am part of a network of Egyptians who reside abroad, and through this network, I invited Egyptian women in the U.S. to take part in my research. I circulated my interview invitation among my contacts, in English and Arabic, clearly stating the research is about women who challenge the socially and religiously acceptable

ways of being in the public space in Cairo. I recruited participants who were in the U.S. for three years or less, a duration that allowed me to find enough participants and ensured they had not forgotten their experiences in Cairo. I interviewed women who were in the U.S. from two weeks to two years. Using snowball sampling, I identified twelve women between the ages of 25–38 who are all educated and none are wealthy. Eleven of them identified as members of the middle class; they were either on scholarships supported by private institutions to complete a two-year master's degree or attending trainings paid by their jobs. Only one person identified as a member of the upper middle class and was on a trip paid for by her parents. By August 2019, all the participants were back in Cairo, which means all the experiences discussed in this study occurred before their U.S. stay. Four women (Mariam, Marta, Nancy, and Monica) are Christian, six (Wafaa, Dina, Shereen, Heba, Noha, and Reem) are Muslim, and two (Salwa and Safaa) were born into Muslim families and no longer identify as Muslim. I use religiously and culturally appropriate pseudonyms for all participants. All participants are cisgender, heterosexual women. Some participants answered all my questions in English, some used a mix of English and Arabic, and others relied more on Arabic.

I searched for women who exhibited any form of defiance to cultural and religious norms in Cairo's public sphere. I had personally taken off the hijab in 2010 and started to verbally fight with men harassing me on the street. I had met Cairene women who had also taken off their hijab, some who started to be bolder in fighting street harassment, and others who moved out of their parents' home and lived on their own. In addition to these three main categories, two other categories emerged during my interviews, though I did not include them in this study: women biking and smoking (in public). Finally, living in Cairo until 2016, I witnessed how the revolution catalyzed many young Egyptians to defy religious and cultural beliefs and practices.

I conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews via Skype as this interview approach allows researchers to understand the lived experiences of the participant (Hesse-Biber 2014). I based the interview guide on my positionality as a native of Cairo and my knowledge of the undergoing sociocultural changes (Altorki and El-Solh 1988). In these interviews, there was space for a normal flow of conversation and spontaneity, which was essential to unearthing details about participants' experiences, feelings, and changes (Aurini, Heath, and Howell 2016). I built rapport with each participant, embracing a 'participatory model' as I have lived through similar

experiences (Hesse-Biber 2014,199).

I asked the participants six categories of questions (with an extra one for Muslims). First, I asked them about their experiences and views on women in public space in Egypt and Cairo to ascertain what they deemed as transgressive and appropriate and if they have behaved 'inappropriately' themselves. Second, I asked about their current religious beliefs and any reevaluation if appropriate. These two question sets did not result in their stand-alone sections in the paper but were interwoven in other relevant parts. Third, I asked (previously) Muslim participants about their experiences with the hijab. Fourth, I inquired about their living situation in Cairo. Fifth, I asked about their experiences being out late alone and with others in public. This also did not result in its stand-alone section. Sixth, I inquired about their experiences with sexual harassment in public spaces. Finally, I inquired about their participation in the revolution and its direct or indirect effect on their lives. I paid for a speaker of English and Egyptian Arabic to transcribe the interviews which I also reviewed. I coded the transcripts following the interview guide, and then analyzed the data according to topic.

Making a Public Statement: Removing the Hijab

Removing the hijab is the only act of public feminist defiance that pertains solely to Muslim women. Many Muslim women who wear the hijab follow the common interpretation of a dress code related to Quranic verse. This interpretation dictates that all girls who have started menstruating should cover all but their faces, hands, and feet (in private or public) from men who are eligible to be their husbands (even if a woman is married), as they have now entered womanhood. The hijab's purpose is to keep women modest, to protect their sexuality, hide women from men's gazes, and to avoid harassment in public (Hauslohner 2009). Not all Muslim women, however, wear the hijab, and not all who do wear it out of religious conviction.

Most women I interviewed who used to wear the hijab, even if they did not strictly observe Islam, felt they must abide by what society deems religiously and culturally appropriate (since the hijab is a visible marker of their faith). Six of the eight Muslim participants I interviewed no longer wore the hijab. Wafaa was still wearing it at the time of the interview, and Reem had never worn it. I interpret the women's decision to stop wearing the hijab as acts of, and commitment to, feminist resistance in public space that is part of Cairo's feminist social nonmovement. In most cases, for

those who no longer wear hijab, removing it was their first step toward self-discovery and defying patriarchy in the public sphere. Some participants faced opposition from their families, because many Muslims consider it a sin when a woman takes off her hijab. A hijab, in many cases, not only reflects a woman's religious conviction, but also her family's. Therefore, parents fear how their daughters' removal of the hijab will reflect on their daughters' reputation (and, by extension, theirs) when she appears in public without it (although the forms and intensity of familial disapproval vary).

Three participants, Dina, Shereen, and Heba, faced little opposition from their families when they decided to remove the hijab. As teenagers, Dina and Shereen decided to wear the hijab since many girls in their circles wore it. Shereen donned the hijab at 17 and took it off at 28, and Dina put it on at 14 and took it off at 21. Heba is the only one whose father forced her to wear the hijab. She started wearing it at seven years old. She wore it for 31 years, never imagining that she would take it off. After the revolution, she felt her 'body needed to breathe,' as if the conservative dress code had been constraining her.

Heba is a mother and a divorcee living in a family apartment building. According to her, many Egyptian Muslims believe the hijab is an integral part of a woman's identity and presentation, so taking it off makes her susceptible to interrogations by family and neighbors about her 'controversial' decision. She describes this as a confrontation she is eager to get over with, because only then can she 'cool down' knowing that it is behind her. She expects her neighbors to ask about her 'mental and psychological health'; and she expects she will tell them that it is none of their business. In this environment, removing her hijab is not simply a personal affair but a public one as well. With such an act of public feminist resistance, Heba is challenging both the society sanctioned dress code and the patriarchal surveillance society exerts over women's bodies and personal choices.

In contrast, the families of Salwa, Safaa, and Noha openly opposed the women's decisions to take off the hijab. Safaa and Noha's parents forced them to wear the hijab at a young age. Both began doubting religious teachings and obligations as they grew older. They reread hijab-related verses from the Qur'an and were no longer convinced by the common interpretation. Noha, for example, wore the hijab for seven years and took it off when she was away from her family during her last year at university, because the fact that her parents forced her to wear it had become 'unbearable.' By the time Noha

was about to graduate, her social circle had expanded, and she had outgrown some of her family's values. Through this feminist act, she decided for herself how to publicly present her body and identity. Her brothers and parents later found out and disapproved of her decision. While Noha's mother eventually made peace with her decision, she initially told her that she must wait until she married or traveled. There are still people who judge her when they find out she stopped wearing the hijab.

Unlike Noha, Salwa struggled internally, and with her family, with her decision to stop wearing the hijab. Even though she had been an atheist for a year, she continued wearing the hijab because she was unable to face her family with her desire to take it off. In 2013, after having worn the hijab for 18 years, Salwa went to a hair salon and walked out of the salon without her hijab:

> I felt I was naked in the street, which made me cry. For me, it was hard to understand what it was to be unveiled. I felt that everybody in the street was looking at me… I walked a few blocks. I was so nervous that I felt I couldn't continue walking. Then I entered a clothes shop. I entered the fitting room. I wore my hijab again…and went back home. I just couldn't do it.

Salwa wanted to remove her hijab because she felt like a hypocrite as she was no longer a Muslim but appeared to be one. However, since the hijab had been a 'part of [her] identity' for so long, being without it in public proved extremely difficult; it seems the hijab and her conservative dress code had functioned as her 'second skin,' making her feel 'naked' without it. On the following day, she decided to go out without it and to inform her mother of her decision.

Her father did not oppose her decision, taking it as a political statement against the Muslim Brotherhood's disappointing politics (Primo 2015). Salwa's mother, though, was 'hysteric[al].' Believing that a woman's hijab preserves her honor and protects her from harassment, every day, for six months, she would wait for Salwa to return from work to camp outside her bedroom and dramatically scream, drop to the floor, and slap her own face. For those six months, Salwa insisted on her decision and challenged the 'patriarchal bastions' at home and in public (Bayat 2013, 21). By the end, she could no longer handle her mother's 'abuse' and decided to wear the hijab again, until 2013, when she married and could take off the hijab away from her mother's input. By doing so, she committed to her feminist resistance

while persisting through extreme patriarchal pushback and challenging patriarchal norms in the public sphere.

Like Salwa, Safaa had to leave her home to be able to take off her hijab. When Safaa was in college, she told her family she was considering taking it off. They told her, 'That's the devil's work,' and advised her to pray more and get back on the right spiritual path. Safaa's husband was equally unsupportive. He told her he could not 'walk in the street next to a woman with an uncovered head.' Nevertheless, Safaa could not get the thought out of her head:

> I wasn't happy or convinced...why would my God force me to cover my body, so why was I given a body in the first place? Also, I was raised believing that I wasn't very attractive so why am I covered?

Safaa explains part of her confusion with the hijab. Her older sister, mother and others always point out that her skinny figure renders her unattractive, saving her from harassment. Why, then, does she have to keep covering her body since her uncovered body is not attractive? She no longer understood the logic in covering a woman's body. After three months of telling her parents and husband, Safaa decided to act. The only way she could take off the hijab was if she left her home; so she moved out while she was still married and later got a divorce. After removing the hijab, Safaa says she can 'see [her] face more clearly now. Before, [she]felt that [she] was invisible in pictures.' She could not defy patriarchal traditions by only taking off the hijab but had to move out as well. Safaa's doubting the hijab led her to doubt all her Islamic beliefs, culminating in her no longer identifying as a Muslim.

By removing their hijabs, these women visibly declared their disapproval of a common religious and social practice, they socially rebelled through their body by discarding a traditional physical modifier of Muslim women, all while being fully aware of the possible negative and harmful consequences at home and in public (Pitts-Taylor 2003). Every time these women leave their houses without their hijab, they assert their presence in public by exhibiting 'embodied' everyday feminist resistance and challenging religious and social norms governing public space (Bobel and Kwan 2019; Weitz 2001). By sticking to their decisions they committed to feminist change; and through their daily 'power of presence,' they sustain and expand Cairo's feminist social nonmovement (Bayat 2013,88).

Cairene Women Stand up for Themselves: Defying Harassment

Most women I interviewed identify sexual harassment as a significant barrier to their use of most public spaces in Cairo, except for some upper-class settings. In fact, 99.3 percent of Egyptian women have experienced some form of sexual harassment in their lifetimes (Tadros 2016,). As the women were growing up, their mothers told them never to respond to street harassment. Their mothers warned if they did respond, their response would constitute an invitation to the harasser and would reflect badly on them. Families and society ask girls and women to remain in the shadows, no matter the circumstances. Consequently, when women stand up for themselves (with no help from a male companion) and retaliate against harassment, it is a form of feminist resistance and a denouncement of gendered traditions that confine women to a submissive and often abused state when in public.

Common forms of harassment women experience range from staring to verbal harassment to groping. Most participants agreed harassers do not discriminate: they harass all kinds of women. What exposes women to this harassment? Making a scene. This scene making can take the form of not wearing the hijab, laughing out loud, wearing flashy clothes, or even being tall. In addition, women assert that society blames men's harassment on their sexual repression (McBain 2015). However, the actual reason that men harass women is because they do not see women as their equals. Mariam captures the status quo perfectly:

> In the street, no woman is safe, verbal harassment, physical assault. It's like we're public property. Anyone has the right to attack any time, and you don't have the right to defend yourself… She's expected to be the weaker person, and she's expected to deal with it. If she defends herself in the street, then she's loose, she doesn't have a man they can talk to or defend her. So, if I defend myself when I get harassed, I don't just disgrace myself but also my family.

Mariam explains that women in public are 'up for grabs'; men do not question their right to infringe on women's privacy and do not expect the women to fight back. Indeed, most Egyptian men 'inhabit and move through public space through restricting the mobility of women' (Ahmed 2004, 70). Even more, society and harassers look down on women who make scenes

in public, such as those who yell/speak loudly and swear. Because women do not usually find support from passersby when they call out harassers, it is uncommon for women to publicly stand up for themselves. Women's feelings of vulnerability on the street, and fear of harassment, disgrace or scandal have long shaped how their bodies minimally inhabit, and how their bodies minimally inhabit—and how they inconspicuously appear in—public space (Ahmed2004). Nevertheless, most participants indicated that they and many women they know no longer put up with men's transgressions in the street and stand up for themselves in any way they can, especially after a new law criminalized sexual harassment.

In 2014, for the first time in Egypt's history, the government identified and criminalized sexual harassment (The Economist 2015). Before the revolution, the term 'sexual harassment' did not exist in Egyptian Arabic, or at least people were not aware of it. The word *mo'aksa*, which loosely translates as 'bothering' or 'flirting,' was the only word people used for harassment in general and verbal harassment in specific. During the revolution, people and reporters started using the term *taharosh gensy*, sexual harassment, because, for the first time in recent memory, thousands of women and men gathered together in close quarters. Unfortunately, this close physical proximity for extended hours led to many cases of harassment. As a result, thousands of women and many Egyptian feminist organizations rallied together, causing the Egyptian government to criminalize the act (Massena 2015). As Marta and Wafaa have shared with me, this law encouraged some women to defend themselves, speak up about their experience, and demand justice (Haase 2013; UN Women 2013).

Women stand up for themselves against harassment in different ways. Nancy, Shereen, Marta, and Noha verbally responded to different forms of harassment without using profanity. When responding to harassment, these women use phrases such as 'respect yourself,' 'why don't you mind your business?' or, 'how dare you?' Phrases that do not contain profanity are the least offensive and confrontational form of fighting against harassment, because Egyptian society looks down on women who use swear words. Nevertheless, the mere fact that these women vocalize their disapproval of harassers' transgression and entitlement is a form of feminist resistance and scene making. It feels 'triumphant,' as Nancy describes it.

In contrast to those four, Heba, Salwa, Wafaa, and Monica have verbally responded to harassment using profanity, which often causes an even bigger scene. Wafaa, who describes herself as skinny, started talking back to

harassers when she became more self-confident. When she experiences verbal harassment, she does not 'let it go.' For Heba and Salwa, participating in the revolution gave them the confidence to stand up for themselves. In the past, Salwa always tried to be 'invisible' in the street in order to 'move freely' and avoid harassment. When walking in the street, she wore loose clothes and 'frown[ed] like a soldier' so as not to attract attention. However, Salwa has gone from wanting to be invisible to responding to harassment with a litany of curse words. Similarly, Monica always tries to use insults she knows will deeply offend the harasser.

Like Salwa, Heba had initially always kept her peace in the street. Even after the revolution, her attitude and response to harassment did not initially change, 'but when harassment became really abusive, [she] found it meaningless to remain silent.' One time, a man told Heba that she has 'nice breasts,' in response, she told him that '[his] mother's are better.' Even though this is not profanity, Egyptian society considers this very insulting. Heba felt 'victorious' not only because she was not used to insulting harassers, but because men almost always expect women to be scared to retaliate, to be 'polite,' and not to know foul language.

Unlike the other women, Mariam used physical violence in response to physical sexual harassment, making an audacious scene. In the summer of 2016, Mariam finished her gym work out at 6 p.m. and was walking home when a car drove by quickly; Mariam stepped back in shock. A man yelled at the driver, 'Why would you want to hit that hottie?' This man's comment angered Mariam. When she insulted him, he explained that this was a compliment and asked how dare she insult him. When he grabbed her arm, people started pulling him away. This time, Mariam did not resort to screaming and swearing: 'I do boxing so I beat him up! I take boxing classes not just to defend myself but to hit people in the street if they harass me.' Mariam narrates what happened next:

> The police saw him grabbing me... I told them I wanted to file a report. They took him, and I went to the station alone. When I arrived, because it was in Ramadan, I stayed from 6:15 till 8:00 waiting till they broke their fast, and during this time, the officers were trying to convince me not to file that case, so as not to harm him. Though, they should simply be executing the actual law. I now have my lawyer's union card, so I showed it to them and told them, 'I'm a lawyer and I will file a case.'

> At this moment, the harasser turned into a coward; he kept begging me not to file the case. Then he started denying what happened...saying he was a respectable guy and was not used to catcalling girls...He was just protecting me from the car that was about to hit me.

By the time the night shift officers arrived, the marks on Mariam's arm had disappeared. Since there was no proof of physical assault, she could only file a case of verbal harassment. Officers let the man go after four hours of being locked up. Nevertheless, Mariam says she felt triumphant in the end. Mariam's way of fighting harassment is the least common. Not only did she learn boxing, she also hit a man in public, consequently making a scene and smashing gendered expectations of how women should behave in the public sphere. Her form of combating harassment is the most confrontational and retaliatory, clearly illustrating the lengths to which women will go in order to protect the spaces they have carved for themselves in public.

Regardless of the form women's retaliation takes, women's continuous contestation of harassment gradually alters the behavior discipline and patriarchal relations of power 'inscribed' into 'the spatiality of social life' (Johansson and Vinthagen 2020,122; Soja 1989). These contestations make known to the public that women are able and willing to defend themselves and that they refuse constraints on their being in public. As such, these contestations are a way the women are affirming their right to be in public space, and a step towards making it safer for themselves and others. Fighting harassment is indeed a social interaction that results in the remaking and unmaking of Cairo's symbolic and material public space (Johansson and Vinthagen 2020,122). These women stood up for themselves and made scenes despite not being in the company of a male guardian; they refused to abide by society's politics of respectability and feminine gender roles by using curse words or fighting back physically. This illustrates one form of daily public feminist resistance in which some Cairene women engage.

Scandalous in the Public Eye: Leaving Home, Living Alone

Women who move out and live alone make the biggest scene of all, making them essential contributors to Cairo's feminist social nonmovement. Egyptian social traditions dictate that single men and women live with their families until they get married, but in modern day Egypt this applies more

to women than men. Preserving her virginity, which is synonymous to a woman's honor, is a daughter's main and most important duty toward herself and her family, because their honor relies on hers (Moghadam 2003). Society assumes that a woman being under the supervision of her family is the best way to preserve their honor. Marriage is the only religiously (whether in Christianity or Islam) and socially accepted license to have sex and to have a separate life from one's parents. Some women move alone to Cairo for study or work since it is the capital and has the country's best education and employment opportunities. Regardless of origin, many participants believe society generally considers women who live alone to be 'loose' or 'whores.'

All women I interviewed had wanted to live alone in Cairo for years, but most were unable to do so. For example, Nancy, Shereen, Mariam, Marta and Monica's parents do not prevent them from traveling alone abroad and within Egypt, but object to them living alone in Cairo. The first time Nancy told her mother she wanted to move out, her mother reminded her that this is not acceptable in Egyptian culture, but did not mind that Nancy left the country, where she would be away from people's eyes and judgment. All that mattered to her mother was saving face:

> My darling, you are in Egypt. If you want to do that, immigrate. Leave the country, go study somewhere and have your life. Nobody will tell you what to do or not to do. But as long as you are in Egypt, you are not gonna leave your parents' house. You can't do that. You can't just simply move out.

Nancy's mother's response and opinion on the matter is representative of that of many Egyptian mothers. These women's parents do not mind their daughter's independence in the sense that they can have their own jobs, travel alone, and pursue further education locally and abroad. However, being physically independent and living alone as an unmarried woman would be scandalous; the shame of an unmarried woman living alone in Egypt is unbearable to many parents.

Unlike most participants, two women moved out despite their family's disapproval. In 2015, Safaa was married, but she moved out because her husband was not supportive of her decision to remove the hijab. When her mother found out, she considered it a 'catastrophe.' Safaa's mother tried to change her mind; when she lost hope, she told Safaa that if she wants to 'live like this,' then she should 'leave the country.' In 2016, another participant,

Wafaa moved to Cairo from Fayoum, 60 miles southwest of Cairo, against her mother's wishes, when she received a scholarship to study cinema. Two years away from retiring and being the sole breadwinner in the family, she only accepted her daughter's leaving when Wafaa received a job offer that could provide her with financial security.

According to Safaa, women must use a secret phrase with some real estate brokers if they are looking to live alone. When a woman asks for a 'freedoms apartment,' the broker knows she is looking to live alone where the neighbors and doorman mind their business, usually for a premium. Safaa says, 'It's like I would pay for the broker or the doorman to mind their own business… it's like renting a place with a dishwasher and another without.' Doormen and brokers exploit her desire to be independent because they know she will not easily find an apartment where she can live alone. Consequently, she must bribe these patriarchal social guardians to turn a blind eye.

Finding a broker who knows landlords who do not mind renting to single women is only one part of this difficult process. Neighbors, doormen and landlords do not necessarily leave the women alone after they have moved in. For example, after a male friend of Wafaa's carried a new microwave to her apartment, the doorman saw him and insisted he carry it instead. Apparently, no strange men were allowed in the building. In another building where Wafaa lived, her landlord told her that the doorman will not allow her in the building after 1:00 a.m. because 'people would talk'; Wafaa stayed in the apartment for two nights and moved again. Society clearly judges and attempts to control unmarried women who live alone. Although these women live in a physically private space, they do not live alone in the building, on the street, or in the neighborhood, so they are always subject to the public eye.

Safaa learned that finding and living in a freedoms apartment does not guarantee a private and free life. Once, the doorman knocked on her door to inform her the neighbors had called the police because they saw men walking into her apartment. Nevertheless, Safaa would not give up her independence for anything. Living in a space of her own, Safaa says, enables her to reflect on her thoughts and behavior, allowing her room to be a 'doer of things not an object to whom things are done.'

By living away from their families, without a (male) guardian, Wafaa and Safaa carry out a monumental act of public feminist resistance as they

challenge Egyptian rules of sexual respectability and social propriety. These women proclaim that they do not need anyone to be responsible for them. Rather, they are responsible for themselves; they have control over their decisions, time, body, and whereabouts. They risk their reputation and honor; they risk being ostracized by their neighbors and harassed (verbally and sexually) by the police or landlords. For them, to live alone is to provoke society; neighbors, shopkeepers and doormen constantly question their virginity, wonder why their parents have no control over them, and why they are still not married. These women, fully aware of the situation, refuse to give up their newfound space where they feel they can finally evolve and experiment with life.

The Revolution: The Feminist Resistance Catalyst?

Participating in the 2011 revolution, especially in sit-ins and protests, was the first time many women felt that their presence in public was welcome and appreciated. Many women started to believe that they could scream and shout in public, and that they have a right to be in the public sphere. Not all the women I interviewed, however, have gone through this experience. In previous sections, I presented and analyzed the different ways Cairene women defied patriarchy in the public sphere. In line with Johansson and Vinthagen (2020) who argue that 'everyday resistance goes on before, between or at the side of the dramatic resistance events' (28), in this section I explain that the revolution was not the main reason behind this defiance, although it was the catalyst for some women's public feminist resistance and participation in Cairo's preexisting feminist social nonmovement.

The public feminist resistance of Dina, Monica, and Wafaa proves that Cairo's social nonmovement existed before the revolution. Three different events, each unconnected to the revolution, triggered their public feminist defiance. Dina took off her hijab in 2009, and even though she participated in demonstrations, she does not think the revolution has changed her in any way. Though she still identifies as Muslim, Dina no longer believed the hijab was a religious obligation. Monica started standing up to harassment because it had become unbearable. Wafaa read a novel, *The Beggar* by the Egyptian Nobel Laureate Naguib Mahfouz (1965), in the summer of 2009 that made her reevaluate her constricted and conventional life:

> It's a very philosophical novel about a nihilist called Omar Hamzawy who is depressed and wants nothing from life…and has no energy to

> change it. Back then I identified with this state of isolation…Then I started to feel that there was something more to be done in life beyond this; something more than just graduating, getting married, having children, aging and dying. I couldn't imagine being like my mother, coming back from work at 3p.m., prepare lunch, watch TV and go to bed…At the end of the novel he resorted to mysticism...Yet he still did not find comfort, but the point is that he kept trying all the time. We are here to try. No one is consistently happy but trying makes life worth living. This influenced me greatly. I wanted to try life too.

Clearly, Wafaa wanted to experiment with life and tread 'the road not taken.' She did not want to lead the conventional life of many Egyptian women. This novel pushed her to study cinema and move to Cairo in 2016.

Some women, while not completely rejecting the revolution as catalyzing their feminist resistance, are uncertain how much to credit it. Marta, Nancy, Noha, Reem, and Shereen think the revolution, alongside other catalysts, may have indirectly instigated their bold behaviors. Nancy participated in demonstrations, but she draws no links between the revolution and her change in behavior from ignoring harassers to talking back at them. Without explicitly using the phrase 'the personal is political,' after the revolution, Nancy explains that she started feeling that sexual harassment is no longer 'a personal matter, but rather a communal thing' and that women must stand up for themselves. Similarly, Shereen did not participate in the revolution, but she thinks it 'might have something to do' with her decision to remove the hijab. She explains that the revolution resulted in a 'vibe' that emboldened many women, including herself. Similarly, Noha identified the revolution as a possible cause for the change she witnessed in her social circle and believes that is how the revolution indirectly influenced her. Many of her friends took off the hijab after the revolution, however, she is unsure if they were able to do so because 'the revolution broke down some social barriers' or because they 'saw others do it so that gave them strength.' When one of Noha's neighbors took off her hijab, it 'empowered' her to do the same. This illustrates the ripple effect of one woman's act of everyday feminist resistance, resulting in the spread of Cairo's feminist social nonmovement.

Similar to Noha, the revolution played a minor role in Reem's feminist defiance. She briefly participated in the revolution in 2011 and was 'fascinated by people demanding their freedom.' Reem's change, however,

was gradual and progressed over the years. She questioned gender roles as she observed how parents in her family treated their sons more favorably than their daughters. When she fell in love with a Christian man, she questioned gendered interpretations of the Qur'an that allow Muslim men to marry Christian and Jewish women but do not allow Muslim women to marry Christian and Jewish men. Furthermore, in 2011, at Reem's university, there was a call for members for a newly established feminist union. This was Reem's first encounter with feminist thought, especially women's sexual and bodily rights. All these factors resulted in Reem no longer abiding by what society or her single mother consider acceptable. She started dressing less conservatively, smoking, and staying out late. Finally, Marta is now more comfortable with staying out late and calling out harassers after she participated in political protests in 2013, widely considered a continuation of the revolution, and volunteered in an anti-harassment campaign at the time. The church she attends also had a role in changing her attitude through harassment awareness sessions.

The remaining four participants clearly identify the revolution as the main reason for their feminist epiphany and resistance. Safaa, Heba, Mariam, and Salwa participated extensively in the revolution, and described their lives before and after it as completely different. Before the revolution, they were shy, followed the curfew that their parents set for them, never talked back to harassers, and dressed conservatively. For them, the revolution was the site where they first felt present; it gave them a voice and confidence that they had never felt before. Salwa explains that in the beginning she never used to yell out slogans with crowds. She had never been one to raise her voice in public, but during the revolution, she was angry enough to 'scream [her] heart out.' This was her first time making a scene.

During the sit-ins and protests, these women interacted with Egyptians from all walks of life. They spent countless hours observing and talking with people who existed beyond their small social bubbles. As a result, these women, who belonged to traditional and protective households, socialized with 'the other,' as Heba put it, and gradually got rid of the stereotypes they had about people who are more liberal, less religious, and of different religions. Due to their extended hours outside their homes and discussions with protesters and activists, for the first time in their lives, they thought about feminist issues that affect their daily lives like women's freedom of mobility, taking off the hijab, sexual freedom, harassment, women's rights, and constricting gender roles. Heba explains, 'If it wasn't for the revolution, it

would be impossible for me to understand [that women should have freedom to do whatever they want with their bodies]. This is why I am so grateful for this revolution with all my life.' Heba owes her feminist consciousness to the revolution. It propelled her into resisting patriarchal practices and ways of thinking. She started respecting other women's personal choices and decided to practice daily public feminist acts of resistance to live the liberated life she envisioned for herself.

The personal decisions participants made as a result of the revolution made them feel more like themselves; they all expressed a notion of self-discovery. Mariam says that after the revolution, she 'became herself'; it pushed her to break away from the carbon copy lifestyle that many Egyptian women live and pursue; she no longer just wanted a husband and kids, but wanted to explore different ways of living. In the same vein, Salwa says the following about how the revolution changed her:

> The revolution enabled to move without having a problem with people seeing me…With my old personality, I would never ride a scooter, or wear short clothes, or show my hair. I wanted to look like everyone else, so I could freely walk. After the revolution I strongly wanted to look like myself. I wanted to be me, to be present as I am and 'fuck you people'; I don't give a shit about you.

The revolution spurred Salwa and the three other women on a journey of soul searching and self-discovery. After a series of personal epiphanies during and after the revolution, they decided they had to shed their old skin and live their lives as they wish, even if it meant going against all that is acceptable, traditional, and respectable, even if it meant making scenes. Even though it was a political uprising that inspired them, these women did not choose to go into politics afterwards, rather, they channeled their epiphany into everyday acts of feminist resistance in the public sphere, expanding Cairo's social nonmovement.

Conclusion

The women whom I interviewed for this study represent a wider feminist social transformation in Cairo and Egypt. Most of my interviewees know, have seen or heard of women who removed their veil, have moved out to live away from family, or stood up to harassment. Furthermore, there has been media coverage of how some Egyptian women of various social classes have been defying socially accepted ways of being in public. Some unmarried women

moved out of their parents' home because they were seeking independence, education, or new careers (Debeuf and Abdelmeguid 2015; Gamal 2015), others took off their hijab (Darwish 2012; Nkrumah 2016; Primo 2015), and some are riding bicycles for fun and transportation to save time and money (Agence France Presse 2015). These women have faced both backlash and support from their families, immediate social circles, and strangers in the public sphere. There is no evidence, however, of support or backlash on a *national* level. Despite a lack of attention on a national scale, such media attention proves the noticeable growth of a feminist social nonmovement in Egypt. There are no available statistics of how many women are part of this social nonmovement for various reasons, including the following two. This is the first study that acknowledges the wide occurrence of this everyday feminist resistance; the media coverage deals with the women as individual cases or groups and not as part of a wider feminist social (non)movement. Second, as this paper has shown, a nonmovement is uncoordinated and does not have a leader; therefore, the women participating may not even be aware of how widespread it actually is. This makes it all the much harder 'to track down' the participants of the nonmovement. In sum, through a sample of 12 participants, this study makes a claim that there has been a continuously growing feminist social nonmovement in Cairo that suggests a larger nonmovement occurring in other Egyptian settings, especially cities, among middle class, educated women. Due to the nature of nonmovements, and the qualitative methods of the paper, the number of women participants in this current feminist social transformation is unknown.

This research study joins the works of de Certeau and Scott to highlight the resistance by people in a subordinate position consisting of small actions compared to large-scale political resistance or organized social movements. These nonmovements are less visible in the literature on women's feminist resistance in Egypt and the MENA (Johansson and Vinthagen 2020). Nevertheless, the aim of this research has been to contribute to the under researched field of everyday resistance by revealing that on a micro, everyday scale this resistance is in fact *big* and *conspicuous*. Even more, this study has revealed how everyday resistance 'connects to collective actions or social movement activism, how it might scale up and spread, how it impacts social change' (Johansson and Vinthagen 2020, 181).

Along with Johansson and Vinthagen (2020) who argue that everyday resistance 'constitutes an initial, off stage, or later stage activity in relation to other more sustained, organized and conventional political forms of

resistance,' I argue that Cairo's feminist social nonmovement started before the 2011 revolution and still continues, and in fact, the revolution is not the main catalyst for Egyptian women's feminist resistance. Each participant challenged patriarchal norms and defied traditional gender roles before and after the revolution in public space. Women took off their hijab, fought sexual harassment verbally and physically, and moved out of their parents' (and husband's) homes to live alone. By carrying out such everyday acts of resistance, they defied patriarchal and gendered norms that often ban women from entering public space or dictate constricting conditions for their appearance in it. Each participant faced various obstacles at home as their parents (or husband) opposed their decisions or endured verbal, physical, and psychological violations in the street as they made scenes and enacted feminist resistance publicly.

More importantly, I have revealed how and why these women overcame these obstacles and persisted to publicly challenge Cairo's patriarchal society everyday. First, by defying patriarchy in public and, second, by refusing to yield to familial and cultural pressures, these women have created and maintained 'new spaces of freedom' for themselves to experience daily life as they wish and declare their right to exist in public (Bayat 2013,88). Furthermore, by creating new spaces of freedom independently, yet through similar forms of resistance, these women's actions constitute Cairo's feminist social nonmovement.

Considering the uncoordinated nature of this social nonmovement, an organized feminist effort is not the way to keep it alive. These women's everyday acts of resistance are effective because they are contagious. As long as Cairene women within the feminist social nonmovement continue to employ their 'power of presence' in public space, they will inspire more women to question their daily lives and their surroundings, which might result in their defiance of patriarchy and public feminist resistance (Bayat 2013,88).

However, will these individual acts of feminist resistance ever amount to large scale social change? While no one can answer this question with complete certainty, we must acknowledge that resistance is 'a process of unfinished struggle' (Vinthagen 2015, 8). Nevertheless, I argue that the women of the feminist social nonmovement are slowly going in the direction that Zeina Zaatari (2014) believes may lead to an Arab feminist renaissance. The Arab world as a whole needs a feminist change, not another wave of state actors that call for women's rights that seek adjustments within patriarchal/

paternal institutions (Zaatari 2014). In Cairo's case, its feminist social nonmovement is gradually dismantling the patriarchal institution pertaining to women's presence in public space.

I stand with Zaatari; real change does require the complete shattering of available institutions and frameworks. But what would that look like in the current political state of Egypt? Will feminists be able to lobby for and create policies that promote equality in social and legal frameworks as Zaatari calls for? This study reveals a potential societal and cultural 'arm' of Zaatari's envisioned feminist popular mobilization. Cairo's feminist social nonmovement is a cultural shift that embodies feminist change and resistance on the everyday, micro level that may be preceding a possible large-scale organized feminist movement. While this does not provide a practical answer to one of the pertinent questions in everyday resistance studies of 'how everyday resistance can "scale up" into resistance in many instances or into open, collective and organized resistance into a regional, national or transnational scale,' it offers a contemporary contextualized example of 'resistance culture' that can arguably lead to 'mass mobilizations' (Johansson and Vinthagen 2020,190).

Regarding the recent past, present and the near future, this study situates the feminist transformation in Cairo, and in Egypt, within a wider societal transformation taking place in the MENA region. The revolutions of 2011 inspired around 50 Saudi women to organize a decentralized campaign to demand the lifting of the ban on women driving (Galana 2016). In 2011, two Libyan women created Friday's Bike, a first-of-its-kind Facebook page in Libya for a weekly women's biking event (Alnass and Pratt 2015). In Jordan, women are challenging *wilaya* (guardianship); they are 'achieving independence at the levels of work, travel, and mobility' (Jabiri 2016, 128). In Sudan, women musicians transgress social and gender rules by performing their music in public (Fabos 2017). In Rabat, Morocco, women are increasingly frequenting cafes which are spaces men traditionally occupy (Moussaid 2009). More specifically, this study offers an inside look at the coalition of Bayat's (2013) social nonmovements and Zaatari's (2014) feminist call for change; a feminist social nonmovement in which Cairene women are challenging patriarchy and claiming their rights to the public sphere.

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