International Conference

Women – Power – Change? Transformation Processes in North Africa and Middle East

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Emergence into Democracy: A Chance for a Gender Equal Society
Jagoda Rosul-Gajic and Daria Szyjkowska

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Emergence into Democracy: A Chance for a Gender Equal Society
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For many people, the Arab Spring came as a surprise. An entire region seemed to come out of hibernation. Experts claim though that the turmoil in the Arab world was just a question of time in these days of globalization and the internet revolution. Experts agree that the Arab Spring has changed the entire region. People expected that their living circumstances would become better after the revolution, but instead of an improvement a worsening is currently looming. And it is still open whether the revolutions will lead to democratic systems or to civil war and failed states.

The fact that the Arab women have been considerably contributing to the advancement of democracy for decades is oftentimes missed. They take a stand for human rights, the intercultural dialog between the Arab and the Western World as well as for the political and cultural participation of women. And women indeed achieved a certain agency in the public life by expressing themselves just as loud as the men during the protests.

In daily life, women are banned from many basic rights although they became a symbol of the transformation in the region. And yet it is important that the women are heard also during these reform processes as a lasting and democratic transformation process and a just society are not imaginable without equal rights for women and men. Promoting women, networking and achieving common objectives are important and necessary factors. The withholding of basic rights from women in daily life leads to a structural discrimination of women which is an essential reason for the social and economic issues in the region. The improvement of the social and economic situation of women is a key factor for economic and social development.

In the cultural sector too, the new media were and are helping an increasing number of women to appear as writers or bloggers, but it is still not easy for women to get a chance to speak in the respective Arab countries. In Europe, these women are hardly known at all.
For women, the fight against a dictatorship also means a fight against gender related discrimination and suppression. Democracy requires that women and men participate in the political decision making processes and thus also in the distribution of influence and control. It is vital that women are also heard in these reforming processes.

A provisional appraisal of the democratic development in the region shows that new forces propagate a conservative model and that the political elite once more consist only of men. It is not yet in sight how the future will turn out for the women in the Arab countries.

Since the new start, the Arab World shows a new image also for the actors in Germany. A debate about the role of the Islam, resp. the so-called Islamism in relation to the democratic values and human rights arose. The question arises whether women’s rights are an exception as the cooperation between politics, civil society, religion and also the international aid workers is necessary in order to sustainably enforce women’s rights in the Arab world. Cultural exchange as well as the promotion of the economy in order to establish a stabilization of the region which also includes women is an option as one of the long-term strategies.

Will women in the Arab world continue to play just a small role in public life also in the future? What are the perspectives for a true democracy in the entire region? How can revolutionary changes improve the women’s situation? What options to help in building a stable and gender equal society do Germany and Europe have? These and similar questions were dealt with and discussed during the conference.

**Reading and discussion with Arab Writers**

A reading and a talk with the Egyptian writers Salwa Bakr and Mai Khaled, as well as the Palestinian writer Faten Mukarker were the prelude to the conference. The writers described their lives before and after the revolution in Egypt. For a long time, Arab literature was exclusively set by men. Today there are a lot of female writers who address social taboos in their texts and who write about politics, democracy,
religion or everyday life. It was the aim of the reading to open the door to the Arab culture and literature for a larger audience and on the other hand, to shine a light on the role of the Arab intellectuals in the reform processes.

**Salwar Bakr** is one of the best known Egyptian writers. She writes about the situation of women, values and life. Although she is also internationally known and her works were translated into numerous languages, Ms Bakr says that she writes for Arab women and men and not for the women in the West. *"I’m writing for women who are rarely seen by others. Male literature has a different way to tell about women. Male literature mentions women whom one can benefit from like for instance a mother or a lover”,* says Bakr. The political situation in Egypt has always formed her life as an artist. She emphasizes that the revolution made people equal and she wants it to last until the objectives have been achieved.

Also her life has fundamentally changed: *"I’m part of a generation that is politically active and paid a high price for the current political situation”,* she points out.

**Mai Khaled** is a writer, a translator of literature and a radio and TV journalist. She presented a series of English TV shows. She read from her book “Zauber des Tuerkis” which was published in German. Mai Khaled spends a lot of time in Europe and sees a lot more common features than contrasts between the Arab and the Western World. She states that the protest movement has changed a lot in Egypt. The respect between the younger and the older generations has increased as a large number of young people have prepared and most of all accelerated the revolution with the help of the new media. Nevertheless the Egyptian women are still suffering from a policy which does not stand up for the women’s rights, says Khaled.

**Faten Mukarker** read from her book „Leben zwischen den Grenzen“ in which she describes her life as a Christian Palestinian. In her book she tells about the limitations for women, set by religion and politics. Ms Mukarker is a constant visitor of Germany where she gives lectures and reports about her compatriots’ situation. She invites interested people to her home where she cooks a traditional Arab meal, reads from her book, offers them a city tour and enlightens them about living
conditions and history. As a writer, she takes a stand for the intercultural dialog between the Arab and the Western world.

**Women – Power – Change?**

This conference was supposed to offer the option of an exchange between experts from Arab countries and Germany. It dealt with the chances which result from the integration of gender relations in the transformation processes but also and particularly with existing practical obstacles and epistemological objections. Apart from that, new approaches for the political education in the field of equal rights and the promotion of democracy were opened up.

**The Conference allowed for:**

- An international exchange of experts who work in the field of Gender and the advancement of democracy in the Near and Middle East
- An inter-cultural dialog between the Arab and the Western world
- A sensitization of multipliers in Germany who put themselves out for a sustainable development of the Arab countries
- New knowledge about the role of gender relations in the transformation processes of the Near and Middle East
- The working out of diverse perspectives of science and practice for the practical advancement of gender democracy
- The presentation of activists’ input
- The support of junior scientists who work in the field of inter-cultural work, gender and the promotion of democracy in the Near and Middle East
- The opening of new approaches for the political education within the subject areas equal rights for women and men and democracy in the Arab world
- The soliciting of male actors for Gender Mainstreaming
- The lectures of the German and international readers as well as the subsequent discussion about the individual subject areas
Open Forum
Friday night an open forum took place where the participants actively joined in. Basma Abd El Aziz, Egyptian Department of Health, Dr. Atef Botros, Mayadin al-Tahrir and Salwa Bakr, Egyptian writer, dealt with the subject “transformation processes in the Arab world: Germany’s and the European Union’s Role”. The discussion was facilitated by Jutta Prediger from Bavarian Broadcasting.

Summary and Résumé
The conference “Women – Power – Change? Transformation Processes in the Near and Middle East” intended to contrast but also to link as many perspectives from science and practice as possible by presenting a number of speakers. The conference enabled the dialog between experts from different Arab countries and the experts from Germany. By offering a number of discussions and three different workshops, interested audience members could at the same time become active participants in the conference.

All in all, the event “Women – Power – Change? Transformation Processes in the Near and Middle East” was a multifaceted and inspiring conference. The competent participants took the chance to critically review the experts’ positions and concepts and to establish networks.

Concerning the subject matter we’d like to emphasize that the speakers from various Arab countries created a special ambience. The conference succeeded in showing the actual situation in the Near and Middle East which attracted wide interest among the attendants.

We want to thank to the Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen e.V., the Auswärtiges Amt and the Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung. In addition, we want to give our special thanks to our cooperation partners, the Kulturreferat der Landeshauptstadt München, the Petra-Kelly-Stiftung and the BayernForum der Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung – it was great working with you!
Women – Power – Change
Monika Renner

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen,
Dear Hosts,
And of course particularly our dear and esteemed guests from North Africa and Middle East,

First of all I want to present the Munich city hall’s compliments to the conference conducted by the Frauenakademie München! I highly appreciate the initiative for this conference as our media indeed keep us informed about the current events in the countries where our guests are from, however, this can never replace the authentic report and an exchange on a personal level.

Our western picture of the countries in the Middle and the Far East is presumably still to somewhat extent affected by the way the Orient was pictured during the 18th and 19th century: seen through the male and occidental eyes of a traveller, a world which seemed to be very mystic and partially mysterious. Therefore, we often have difficulties to interpret particularly the recent social movements in those countries – keyword Arab Spring – related to the striving for power of religiously oriented segments of society in the respective countries, especially from a socio-political point of view.

It is particularly difficult to evaluate the social position of women, their rights and the implementation of these rights from here. A discussion which is not new – also not for the West – and which we too have, until today and time and again. In the following I would like to present some of my thoughts about the keywords of this event:

Women – Power – Change

1st keyword WOMEN

Isn’t it a remarkable fact that women are quite naturally among the leaders of spontaneous social movements wherever they occur but are literally removed from
the occurrences from a certain point on and thus do not appear at all in the writing of history?

In Europe, for instance, during one of the most moulding social revolutions of the modern era, the French Revolution, it was the market women of Paris who marched to Versailles in 1789 and demanded bread from the King. One of the most renowned quotations on the part of the court is said to be made by a woman, Queen Marie Antoinette. She is believed to have said “if they do not have bread, let them eat cake”.

This citation which is not really testified by any reliable historic source is still well known and intended to transport the cliché of the extravagant and self-centred poppet at the royal court. Here, an object of hate was deliberately created – a splitting strategy which the patriarchal writing of history pursues until today and a trap in which we women keep right walking into time and again. And then, when in the course of the revolution, the term “égalité” became synonymic with “fraternité” – i.e. brotherliness, Olimpe de Gouge, a feminist of those days who called for equal rights for women was executed on the scaffold!

**Which leads me to the 2nd key word: POWER**

An up to date example: Anne-Marie Slaughter, head of Hillary Clinton’s planning staff and the first woman in this powerful position, quit her job as she no longer wanted to live that life which did not leave her any time for her family. Do you know even ONE man who would have given up such a powerful position because of his family life? And shouldn’t it rather work the other way round? What about adjusting the working conditions to the family life and integrate the hereby achieved life experience of both sexes into powerful politics?

**And the last key word: Change**

Women in the East and the West are living under conditions which have been shaped by different cultures. Thus, some demands for the equal involvement in society have to be formulated in different ways. There are, however, unalterable universal basic demands which we all can phrase together: mutual respect, empathy free of
prejudice, unrestricted access to education and freedom without conditions. There is no other way for the world to become human, peaceful and viable.

WOMEN have to re-define POWER so CHANGE can become a quality worth living.

Today is a good day to debate, to form alliances and to start new projects. With this in mind, I want to wish you a very successful conference!
Greetings
Jagoda Rosul-Gajic

Dear Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

My name is Jagoda Rosul-Gajic and I want to extend a warm welcome to you on behalf of the Frauenakademie München. It's a great pleasure for me to be here today. We are all very happy that we managed to invite a number of international guests and experts, some of them from far away, to this conference.

What is the aim of this conference and how did we define it? On October 14, 2011 already, a conference about the topic “Democratic Movements in the Arab World - a Chance for a Gender Equal Society?” took place, in cooperation with the Department of Arts and Culture of the Bavarian state capital Munich, the Petra-Kelly-Foundation and the Friedrich-Ebert-Foundation. As this conference received a remarkable resonance we decided to conduct another international meeting on this topic and with the same partners.

Experts agree that the Arab Spring has changed the entire region. People expect better living conditions after the revolution but at first a worsening seems to take place. It is not yet clear whether the revolutions will result in democratic systems or if civil war and decline will follow.

This conference deals with equality and the development of democracy in the Near and Middle East from different points of view. The fact that the Arab women have been contributing to the promotion of democracy for decades remains oftentimes ignored. They stand up for human rights, the intercultural dialog between the Arab and the Western world and for the political and cultural participation of women.

And indeed – for a short time the women achieved a certain agency within the public sphere by articulating themselves just as vehement as the men during the protests.
But still – despite the fact that women have become a symbol of the transformation in the region, they face a reality in which they are denied a number of basic rights. It is still the men, more or less exclusively, who represent also the new political elite. And yet it is important that the women are heard also during these reform processes as a sustainable and democratic transformation process as well as a fair society is not imaginable without gender equality in the public sphere. It is unforeseeable how the future in the Arab countries will turn out for their women.

Which perspectives does democracy have in the entire region? How can Germany and the European Union contribute to stable and gender equal societies in the Middle East? This is the context of the various lectures we are going to attend today and tomorrow. The first lecture will be a scientific one entitled “the Arab World in Turmoil - Backgrounds and Political Connections” and after that we will hear a lecture about the Spotlight: Palestine.

After that we will have lunch break – one sentence about that: the lunch will be served at 12.00 straight, here in the lobby. There will be one vegetarian dish and a dish with turkey meat. You can enjoy your meal either on the roof terrace or in the restaurant.

Ms Jutta Prediger from the Bavarian Radio Broadcasting will lead you through this afternoon’s session. Many many thanks for this great commitment.

After the lunch break we will see two contributions about Egypt. After that three different workshops will offer you the possibility for an exchange with experts and other attendants. An open forum will follow at 5 p.m., entitled “Transformation Processes in the Arab World: Germany’s and the European Union’s Role”.

On Saturday we will hear a contribution about “The Situation of the Women in Iran” as well as one with the topic “The Work of German Foundations On Site”. The conference will end at 12.30 p.m. after the farewell.
This conference takes place in cooperation with the Kulturreferat der Landeshauptstadt München, the Petra-Kelly-Stiftung and the BayernForum der Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung.

At this point I would like to thank everybody for the great collaboration. Apart from that I would like to thank the Auswärtiges Amt, the Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen e.V. and the Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung for their generous financial support. And finally I would like to thank all speakers who supported us during the preparation of this conference. A huge thank you goes to my colleague Daria Szyjkowska.

I hope that our conference will contribute to the further promotion of this important subject and I wish everybody an insightful event.

Many thanks!
Regional Order, Transnational Norms and Legitimate Action

The Middle East in a Perpetual Region-building Process

Mitra Moussa Nabo

Since 2001 we are witnessing an upheaval of its regional order in the Middle East. This upheaval is in fact a regional reordering process and an integral part of the dynamics of regional politics since the Middle Eastern International Society has been established. Starting with the events in Iraq and later in Lebanon, Yemen, and Sudan and most recently the popular uprising in different countries of the region, this reordering process shows different symptoms of a strongly contested process of building a regional order.

As Michael Barnett has shown, Arab regimes are in perpetual internal competition for establishing or preserving a dominant notion of how regional actors should deal with distinct issues of common intraregional significance – for example Arab-Israeli relations, relations to the “West” and relations between the Arab regimes themselves. Being a leading figure within such a regional order enhances the respective regime’s legitimacy on both the regional and the domestic level.

Both order and legitimacy are therefore rooted in the social structure of an entity. This is composed of different norms and values, which in turn constitute the identity of the entity and define the rules of conduct. The contents of norms are by no means fixed or static; they are rather responsive to events and therefore changeable. It is a mutually constitutive process: norms define the meaning of events and events reproduce or restructure the meaning of norms. The norm of Arabism is a clear example of a changing content. Arabism in the past decades has undergone a transformation so that the objectives of Arabism – e.g. Arab unity – are quite different in content when comparing its interpretation in the 1960s and today.

In the Middle East mainly two conflicting identities – pan-Arabism on the one hand and a sovereign state nationalism on the other – have always played a constitutive
role in interests and shaping politics. Since Arabism is a transnational regional identity – no matter whether state ideology or collective identity – domestic issues or interests relating to Arabism quite often have an inherent regional character. In contrast to that, the norm of sovereign state nationalism endorses a national state identity which excludes other regional actors. These two conflicting norms and identities can be found in all Middle Eastern countries and constitute an area of conflict. As part of this conflict setting, regime politics unfold, sometimes in a paradoxical manner.

Alongside Arabism and Sovereignty some other norms are central to intraregional political interaction, too. For example, pan-Islam, good governance and transitional justice play a decisive role in gaining regional legitimacy, too. These norms become crucial in determining the meaning of events in the region, in particular since the overthrow of the Saddam regime and more recently the ongoing popular uprisings.

By relating their own political action to norms of pan-Islam, good governance or transitional justice, Middle Eastern regimes try to acquire legitimacy in order to intervene in other countries and possibly mediating conflicts there. In doing so, transnational media plays a decisive role in transporting certain contents in order to communicate a certain perspective of ongoing or passed events. National or transnational print and visual media in the Arab region are therefore often mouthpieces of different political state and non-state actors. Playing the media card means that actors – against the background of their own identity – take part in designing the political discourse, within which they highlight – intentionally or not – distinct norms or rules of conducts.

Nevertheless, controlling a media outlet does not automatically enable an actor to establish a dominant frame for legitimate action. As the July war in Lebanon in 2006 has shown, the decisive point is to relate media reporting to a specific set of norms that is widely accepted and deeply rooted in a society. At the beginning of the conflict, the Saudi regime condemned the Hizbullah Operation as an irresponsible adventure. In contrast to that, the Saudi population and the wider Arab “street” welcomed and honored Hezbullah’s operation, in particular since it became clear that
Hizbullah will prevail as a quasi-winner. The Syrian regime as an ally supported Hizbullah’s operation and earned a great popularity domestically and regionally.

More recently, at the beginning of the insurgency in Libya, the Egyptian Islamic theologian Yusuf Al-Qaradawi, enunciated in a live broadcast of Al Jazeera a legal opinion (fatwa) that legitimated the killing of Libya’s ex-ruler Gaddafi. Pan-Islam and good governance as norms could be seen as a legitimization background for accepting and welcoming such an action. Qaradawi and Al Jazeera - and Qatar behind the scene - appear as legitimate and accepted regional actors that deliver a comprehensible and logical interpretation of the meaning of events. Implicitly, they define the rules of conducts and take part in shaping a new regional order.

For sure, the aforementioned sketch is a somehow shortened depiction of a complex perpetual discursive process in which several actors and structures (regional, global, Arabs, non-Arabs, etc.) are part of. This narrative, however, sets out contours for a comprehensive notion of how regional dynamics in the Middle East should be understood.

One question among others is how good governance and transitional justice have become meaningful norms in the Middle East. Is it related to the diffusion of Western norms of governance since the end of the bipolarity and how are these norms interacting with established intraregional norms, such as pan-Arabism and Pan-Islam and how do they become integrated in the regional belief system of how legitimacy is constructed?
Spotlight: Palestine

Faten Mukarker

Palestinians are allowed to vote for their local town council representatives for the first time since 2006. Many women run as candidates in these elections, because a civil society in Palestine is urgently needed, and women now insist that they must receive rights in that society, rights which are considered normal for European women.

The situation in Palestine is not very encouraging at present. We continue to be confronted with a lot of problems that seem to be impossible to solve: external problems like the conflict with Israel and its settlers; internal problems intensified by the external conflict like unemployment, poverty and a lack of perspectives for the young generation, and internal problems like the conflict between Fatah and Hamas.

The large international problems will obviously not be solved in the near future. That’s a fact, and it’s a fact that fills me with sorrow and grief. However, although acknowledging that fact I’m convinced we can and should use our time now to work actively for our society. We need to work on and develop the civil society in Palestine in order to see and feel that our situation can be improved. This is at least as imperative as solving the wider political conflict.

Politically, many things have been tried, many negotiations have taken place, many agreements were signed, but we haven’t really got anywhere close to a truly independent and democratic society. Today it is us – the women who are part of this society and want changes – who ought to have a say as well. The roles we have had in this society for too long need to change! Traditions form roles of how we should behave, and such traditions can and sometimes need to change. It looks like we are partly still living in some old times when women did not have any rights - rights that have been considered normal for European women for many decades already.
We will not sit aside and simply accept men obtaining and keeping power - waiting calmly and complacently for them to share that power with us. I do hope these times are over. From now on, nothing ought to be decided without us! It is about high time we put what we want on the table and leave no doubt about the crucial issues anymore. Palestinian women must obtain positions of leadership, we must be active in our society, so that questions which concern women, will be placed on the table for discussion.

It is of utmost importance for us, that women may decide for and by themselves how their lives will be, and that is impossible as long as we think in a patriarchal model of society. Women must be able to decide for themselves about their own education, for a career if they wish. It should be their decision to marry, as well as when and whom they marry; all these are pressures put on them by their family. We are not considered individuals, but are part of an extended family, and each step must be carefully thought out because in Arab society the family honour rests solely on the women. Simply put, what is considered “experience” for men is considered “dishonour” for women. As long as religion and state are inextricably linked, these pressures remain for women. And that is one of the things we wish to change.

Tradition determines roles of behaviour and, according to tradition, women do not have any rights. Women should marry early, have children and spend their lives as housewives, caring for their family and later for the families of their sons as well.

Yet, now our turn has come. We will not accept this status any longer. It may be a long road ahead. It will not be easy, as Arab society seems to be strong and closed, but we, the women – all of us in towns and also in the villages, where things are much more difficult for us – must take and shape our place in that society.

For several decades, I have worked to bring the problems of women to the forefront, both in Palestine and in Europe. I have been inviting foreign guests into our home where they have met my family including my mother, who was a traditional mother by all standards. They have met my husband and my children. We have tried to explain and show them the qualities of life in Palestine, and to tell them about the
problems as well. I have given lectures to visiting groups, have served our delicious Palestinian cuisine to them, and I have explained what it means to live in our society. I have also told them that, in my opinion, the external conflict is not between Israelis and Palestinians or between Jews and Arabs; it’s between people who are willing to pay a price for a lasting peace and others who refuse to do that. Thus, we have presented our country in its best light, and we have shown its potential.

However, we have not forgotten our problems, and there are many. Much is needed in Palestine: jobs, training centres, trade schools, schools, kindergartens, parks, playgrounds and more. We are a young society, 60% are children under the age of 16. They urgently need perspectives. And all of us especially need a better infrastructure. We can wait no longer and surely nothing will be given to us freely; we will have to take it. I am sure it will be a fight against all odds but if we do not start now we will be sitting in the kitchen just waiting and waiting – what for?

We are still missing the opportunities that are now emerging in other Arab countries where women are about to stand up and fight for their rights. We too need to start and join them, first mentally and then taking action ourselves. And we need to take with us the women from the villages, as for them it is even harder to make use of their rights.

I hope that, this time, women will be able to make a difference in the local elections. As so many candidates are women, I hope we will be able to have a say in the decisions made in our town and village councils to build a better future.
Egyptian women... rebels

Dr. Basma Abd El Aziz

Historical Overview

Although it seemed that women enjoyed some gender equality in the old Egyptian civilization - Egypt has been ruled by several queens at different stages, like Hatshepsut, Nofretete, Cleopatra and others - and women were not only queens but also gods like e.g. Isis and Maet, the goddess of justice.

Ordinary women had the same rights as men regarding different aspects of life: heritage, education and marriage. Max Muller said: “the role women played there has never existed among peoples all over the earth except in the valley of the Nile River”.

In modern Egypt – around the time of Mohamed Aly in 1805, a school has been developed to train and graduate nurses specialized in obstetrics. Historians considered it as a starting point for women to go out and work. I, however, believe that this might be true when speaking of women in urban areas as women in rural ones always used to work in agriculture their entire lives.

By the beginning of the 19th century, the “Intellectual Association of Women” has been founded and women played an important role in the revolution of 1919, leading demonstrations, delivering speeches in the streets and squares, and they were shot by the British army forces that were occupying Egypt. Despite their great participation in the 1919’s revolution, they haven’t obtained their political rights in the constitution of 1923. The same year, 1923, witnessed the founding of the “Egyptian Women’s Union” and the famous activist Huda Shaa Rawy became the Egyptian representative in the international women conference in Rome.

In 1928, Egyptian women could visit the universities for the first time. Here it should be mentioned that princess Fatma (daughter of Khidawy Ismail; Egypt’s ruler) had donated a piece of land to build the first university in Egypt.
In 1942 Fatma Rashed established the first “female” political party under the name “National Women’s Party”. Its priority was to give the Egyptian women the right to assume high official positions in the state equal to men.

In 1947 the “Egyptian Women’s Union” demanded a modification of the electoral law to allow women to vote just as men were allowed to and to get all their political rights including membership in the parliament and national councils.

In 1949 Dorreya Shafiq established another political party “bent el Nile”.

In 1951 there was a huge demonstration during the meeting of the National Women’s Conference (February, 19) and raised the slogan “Parliament is for Both Women and Men”.

In 1956 the Egyptian constitution finally recognized the political rights of the Egyptian women. Based on this recognition, 2 women became members of the parliament of 1957 (Rawya Ateyya, Fayda Kamel).

In 1962 Hekmat Abou Zeid was the first woman to be a member of the government (Minister of Social Affairs).

**Statistics from Mubarak’s Era**

- 30 – 40% of the Egyptian families are supported and funded by women
- 60% of the informal labour force that is unprotected by the state is composed of women
- Women produce about 42% of the wealth in the countryside and 32% in urban areas
- 41% of all registered voters are women
- Women, however, also represent about 60 – 70% of the illiterates
Years before the Revolution Egypt witnessed the Following Events

- Establishment of the Women’s National Council in the year 2000
- Adoption of the divorce law that gave women the right file for divorce
- Adoption of a law that incriminates female genital mutilation
- Abolishing the decision that prevented women from traveling outside the country without the consent of their husband
- Punishment of sexual harassment (a young man was sentenced for 3 years in 2008)

However, the miserable situation of women in the Egyptian legislation continued to exist, especially in labour, criminal law, penal code, family laws and personal status. The feminization of diseases is still there, giving the priority of treatment to boys over girls and keeping girls from visiting the primary schools is still most common.

The Last 18 Days Before the Fall of Mubarak

At the beginning of the revolution, the Egyptian women participated in all aspects, together with the men - they were fighting in the front lines, defending their freedom, working as doctors and nurses in the medical teams, composing security groups to ensure the Tahrir square’s safety, providing food and water and joining all the battles that took place. All through these days, women were there, never absent, having the same dreams, they were sitting and eating beside the men, sleeping too on the square, facing no harassment from anybody - a romantic and ideal 18 days. They were also exposed to the same extent to all kinds of violence and cruel treatment by the falling political system (no gender difference was seen).

After the Fall of Mubarak

The previous marvellous scene of the 18 days faded out gradually. Women faced once again -and still are facing- the exclusion from social and political life:

- The National Reconciliation Conference accepted notes about “preventing female TV” - reporters from appearing in non-Islamic clothes”, a request introduced by Yousssef El Badry, one of the famous Islamic figures.
- The public opinion-making continued: Islamic parties considered the Women’s National Council as a weapon of the falling system to destroy the Egyptian family and declared that all its achievements in the field of legislation should be abolished.

- After the revolution no women at all could be seen in the position of a governor, mayor or secretary general.

- The governor of El Giza said – in one of the famous Egyptian newspapers that women are not qualified for such positions. On the other hand, a considerable number of well qualified women reached good positions and complained about the regime’s ignoring their rights concerning promotions.

- The Minister of Local Development stated that the critical nature of the stage in which Egypt is right now, doesn’t allow the presence of women in high positions.

- During the re-composition of the government, women were never represented in a fair, just and equal way. The members of the government were almost all men except for one woman who belongs frankly to the old system.

- Even those nominations made by the rebels on Tahrir square (which is considered as the symbol of freedom and justice), have never included the name of a woman to be a minister.

- The media discourse and the language used by the famous newspapers, carried a sarcastic spirit when it came to gender issues, words describing the feminist NGOs were referring"يميرحلا تامظنملا" to which means: “the religiously forbidden organizations”.

- Only 2% of the parliament’s members are women, compared to 30% in Algeria, and 56% in Ruanda in the year 2008.

Our female members seemed lost during the meetings of the parliament and completely disoriented as to issues of women’s rights even to such an extent that one of them said that every woman is responsible for all the sexual harassment she receives; a woman has no right to file for divorce and genital mutilation is mandatory for females.
About the Tahrir square itself it should be taken into consideration that some important events, like e.g. the first women’s demonstration that was staged on the international women’s day on March 2011, were exposed to harsh harassment, insults and physical violence. The attackers were ordinary people (no criminals). On July 8th in the same year, a call from one of the social revolutionary movements has suggested to allow only men to spend the night on the square, however, it was not applied. Lately, in June 2012, sexual harassers attacked a demonstration that was held against “sexual harassment”!

At this time I should refer to the strong possibility that group harassment was at first initiated by the state, specifically the Ministry of the Interior, who brought groups of criminals to attack women protesting against the modifications of the constitution in 2005. Groups of young men started to model this behaviour and imitated the state and now this attitude is settled as ordinary.

The political system is still using oppression on a gender basis. The authorities are still taking all possible steps in order to break the women’s will. We can find sexual harassment, virginity tests, dragging women through the streets by the hair and threats of rape.

Attempts made by the political Islam to delete women’s achievements never stopped:

- Calls to review all the international conventions related to the protection of women’s rights claiming it is not in accordance with the Sharia.

- A new project BILL is introduced that abolishes the women’s right to file Sfor divorce and which allows the forced delivery of a wife to her husband (which was cancelled on 1967).

- Another project aims to reduce the age for marriage to 13 years based on the early physical maturation of female children in countries with a hot climate.

- And if there is a project to cancel the incrimination of female circumcision which is now being examined.
The Founding Committee of the Constitution

- Only 7% of its members are women
- 3 among them belong officially to the political Islam (Horreya and Adala party)
- The nominations made by the Women’s National Council and the list submitted by the Coalition of Feminist Organizations were entirely ignored

Women in the Discourse of the Non-Islamic Political Currents is catastrophic:

- Many of the human rights activists joined political parties
- Their views came to be less radical in defending their rights and they became more flexible, making deals and compromises
- Some of those activists (women & men) declared that this is not the appropriate time to fight for women’s rights, and the reasons they gave were for instance to avoid the social problems that would result thereof, claiming that the society is still too immature to accept real gender equality
- Thus the withdrawal of the liberals from the battle for women’s rights appeared to be a step taken just in order to stay popular in a through and through patriarchal society
- The structures of most of the liberal parties too show inequality (the majority of higher positions are reserved for men)

Positive Aspects of this Attack on Women:

- Fears and shame: many of the testimonies appearing on Facebook, tell personal stories about circumcision and its painful consequences
- A young woman published her photo in complete nudity to protest against the restricted view that summarizes women as sexual objects
- Women wearing a Nekab participated in the 8th of March and raised slogans saying ‘we want 50% of the Founding Committee of Constitution for women’
- A young woman - Samira Ibrahim - sued SCAF (Supreme Council of the Armed Forces) for the virginity test she was exposed to by force
- Another young woman chased a man who has sexually harassed here and succeeded in delivering him to the police station, regardless the negative attitudes of the bystanders who seemed to be sympathizing with him

- Women constituted a considerable voting mass, and were seen in huge numbers during the days of the election. Plus there were 1000 women among 13,000 supervisors of the presidential elections

- During these days, a lot of women who are neither politicians nor activists or feminists could be seen talking about their rights and trying to organize themselves to fight for these rights

**Finally**

The question here is whether we can expect a real progress in the issue of gender equality and women’s rights at this stage and under a ruling system that has a religious project, or whether it might become an era of even more oppression, coercion and persecution for women?

We might see that at times when Egypt had a national project for development, as for instance Mohamad Ali’s and Nasser’s projects, gender equality took place automatically and spontaneously, women’s rights became integrated to be part of the public rights for all citizens. On the other hand, the absence of such a project has usually been accompanied with the persecution of vulnerable social groups, with women in the core.

This might not be a good time for compromises, women are in need for a radical act, it is the revolution either to fight and to achieve our freedom or to go back and lose all previous achievements.
Egyptian women gained the right to vote and run for office in the 1956 constitution, when women won two seats in the parliament. Women won 9 seats in the 1964 elections; 2 in 1969; 8 in 1971; and 6 in 1979. After the adoption of Law 188/1978, establishing a quota system for women, women won 35 seats; 30 of which were quota seats, and 5 were appointed. Women won 36 seats in the 1984 parliament; 18 seats in the 1987 parliament; 10 seats in the 1990 parliament; and 10 seats in the 1995 parliament. In 2000, women won 15 seats in parliament, 4 of them by appointment; while in 2005, women won 10 seats in elections and gained another 4 seats by appointment. In June 2009, the People’s Assembly law was amended to add 64 seats for women using a quota system, after which female members of the dissolved National Democratic Party (NDP) won 46 seats in the first round of the 2010 elections (100 per cent of seats in the first round) and 54 out of 64 seats in the run-offs.

A flawed quota system was applied in the 2010 elections whereby new seats were added to the parliament instead of setting aside already existing seats for women, a move that raised questions about the state’s seriousness about reducing male dominance in Egyptian politics. Under the quota, women competed for seats on a governorate-wide level, with the exception of four governorates, making it difficult for women without substantial financial resources and who did not belong to the NDP to run efficient campaigns in a governorate.

In addition, vote rigging, as documented by numerous advocacy groups, ultimately led to the overwhelming victory of female NDP members. Due to the procedural and organizational obstacles they faced, the system did not contribute to honing the political skills of female candidates. The victory of NDP women sent a clear message to Egyptian society: only women of this party have a right to participate in politics.
As a result of the fraudulent elections, the entire quota system was rejected, as it simply served to increase the number of NDP parliamentarians.

Based on this knowledge of the electoral system, Nazra for Feminist Studies recognized the importance of cultivating women candidates who are capable of engaging in politics, compete, reach the public, and represent their communities. The intent is not to abandon women’s issues; rather, the history of women in elections in Egypt has shown that only experience and political practice can give rise to genuine representatives and politicians able to reach out to the electorate.

The Academy’s team worked with 16 female candidates for the People’s Assembly elections, both in individual constituencies and on lists, independents and party members. The candidates involved were spread out across eight governorates: Cairo, Giza, Daqahliya, Assyout, Beheira, Minya, Kafr al-Sheikh, and Aswan.

**About Mentoring on the Ground**
It is a strategy to work with candidates and their teams closely, where it’s not suffice to train them but also to Mentor them on their grounds during campaigning to analyses their strengths, weaknesses, risks and opportunities. Starting by analysing her constituency to see her needs during election campaign. This is done for each candidate individually in order to support her on the legal, political, and psychological level. And also providing the same support for their election campaign team.

**Criteria for Joining the Academy**
The Academy drafted the following criteria for selecting women to the Academy:

- Did not previously run for office with the NDP
- Not older than 45 years old
- Has experience in social, advocacy, or labour work
- Less empowered within her community

The Academy did not support candidates aligned with religious forces, as none applied to join the program. This decision was not made to exclude any genuine
social force, but was rather motivated by a desire to support female candidates that are genuinely less empowered. Most female candidates aligned with religious forces are politically capable due to their experience with politics within their groups or because they have the financial means to run a strong campaign, in contrast with women candidates that are aligned with civil forces, who require support and political, legal, and psychological empowerment.

The refusal to support women who had run for office with the NDP was motivated by the fact that women who had run for office on the NDP slate received the support of the former regime, most of them not experiencing the political hardship of women who decided to seek office outside the framework of the NDP. The decision also grew out a view of women’s political action as inseparable from political action in general and the belief that women’s rights will be achieved in a democratic framework that supports human rights. This was not the case in the practice of the former repressive and undemocratic regime, which attempted to use women’s issues and women’s political participation as a tool to further political goals. Such attempts government tool had a negative impact on women’s issues and created a form of state feminism, separating women’s concerns and issues from the larger socio-political reality. The latter effects only served to further ghettoized women’s issues. The selection criteria also guaranteed that the Academy did not engage with parties or forces that adopt forms of popular mobilization the Academy rejects, such as the power of money or religious mobilization or polarization.

Nazra for Feminist Studies, represented by the Academy’s team, decided to join female candidates on their political journey and offered legal and psychological aid, helping each candidate understand her electoral district, and analysing strong weak and points, opportunities and threats (SWOT analysis). More specifically, the Academy worked with the female candidates by mentoring on the ground, participating in their campaigns, and working with them in their districts, parties, and lists. The Academy also convened theoretical and practical training sessions for candidates, their campaign staff, and their proxies in polling stations. During its work, the Academy team maintained an equal, neutral stance from all political forces, supporting candidates in accordance with the team’s ability and availability.
regardless of their partisan affiliations, the only conditions applied with the candidates being the aforementioned criteria and conditions for the selection of candidates.

**Legal Issues and the Electoral System of the 2011-2012 Parliament**


The SCAF’s constitutional declaration, issued to govern the People’s Assembly and Shura Council elections, introduced a system of proportional lists for two-thirds of the seats and individual constituencies for the remaining one-third of seats, elected by direct, secret ballot. The system permitted party candidates to compete in individual constituencies, and the law required that at least one woman be included on each party list, without specifying her position on the list. The law also allowed women to run for individual constituencies on equal footing with men, whether as independents or party candidates. The new system did not adopt the quota applied in the 2010 legislative elections, which set aside 64 of 508 seats in the People’s Assembly for women, pursuant to Law 149/2009, while preserving the 50 per cent quota for workers and farmers.

It may initially seem that electing two-thirds of parliamentary seats using a party-based list system might improve women’s chances for representation when compared to the individual candidate system. However, the electoral system only required the inclusion of at least one woman on each list, but did not specify her position on the list, as demanded by some political and advocacy organizations before the law was issued.
The adoption of a combined list-individual system in the new elections law created additional campaign difficulties for candidates, especially given the relatively large electoral districts. In addition, an examination of the final list of candidates revealed that many parties included women on their lists as a merely formal move to meet the legal requirement, placing them towards the bottom of the list and thus reducing their chances of winning a seat, even though some female candidates were more capable and proficient than the male candidates placed at the top of the list. In very few cases, female candidates were placed on the number two spot on the list; for example, Sana Said, a candidate from Assyout, who was placed second on the list of the Egyptian Social Democratic Party due to her experience in politics and her popularity in her district. The new law created placed several hindrances to female candidates, who had to wage a battle within their parties to prove themselves and win a top spot on the list, after which they waged another battle to reach voters and convince them of their ability to represent them in parliament. Some Islamist parties, which considered women’s entry to the parliament corrupting and saw their inclusion on lists as a necessary evil, refused to put a photo of their female candidates on their posters, replacing it with a photo of the candidate’s husband or with a rose. Many civil parties did not differ from Islamist parties in their treatment of female candidates, the result being that women were not given sufficient space on the lists of civil parties, whether leftist or liberal. Their perspective differs. The result, however, was that.

**Political Climate**

The run-up to the People’s Assembly elections witnessed several crises, starting with the events at the Balloon Theater, followed by those at the Marinab Church and Maspero, and, immediately before elections, the crisis of Mohammed Mahmoud Street, which began on November 19 with demonstrations in Tahrir Square and its environs after the “Friday of One Demand,” joined by many political forces. After that large Friday assembly, a group of martyrs’ families and young people staged a sit-in. The attempt by police forces, supported by the army to disperse the sit-in, sparked clashes that lasted until November 25, only 48 hours before the first round of voting was scheduled to begin. Although the events of Mohammed Mahmoud Street were not the most violent since the start of the revolution, the events created confusion
and stoked strong divisions between political forces participating in the elections. In general, these differences put political forces in one of three camps:

1. The first camp demanded the postponement of elections until the end of clashes on Mohammed Mahmoud Street and the restoration of security, fearing that the violence would deter voters and depress voter turnout,

2. The second camp demanded the cancellation of elections before the turnover of power to a civilian transitional government, and accused any force participating in the elections of political opportunism and attempting to attain power without regard to those killed in the clashes,

3. The third camp demanded that elections proceed on schedule, seeing them as the only legitimate means to affect a power transfer. The SCAF supported this camp and called on citizens to vote while promising to provide security for voters at the polls.

This political crisis put candidates on both party lists and in individual constituencies in a quandary: they could either ignore the events and continue with their campaigns; or respond to calls for an election boycott, leaving the political arena to competitors and allowing them to win an easy majority in a parliament that is tasked with drafting a new constitution. This was an important consideration since Islamist parties, most importantly the Freedom and Justice Party and the Salafi Nour Party, decided against boycotting the elections.

The political conflict had a negative impact on the performance of all candidates, men and women alike, particularly those belonging to new, civil parties, many of whom decided to suspend their campaigns as a means of pressuring the SCAF and other parties to end the violence on Mohammed Mahmoud Street. Although this affected candidates regardless of gender, the continuation of the violence especially affected female candidates’ ability to suspend and continue their campaigns, particularly in urban areas, where most candidates were based. This was exacerbated by the fact that some parties took a substantial amount of time to decide whether to join or boycott elections.
Given the security fears and the potentially large electorate, the SCAF decided to hold the vote over two days in each round. It also set aside special polling stations for women, which facilitated women’s ability to stand in lines for long periods without fears of being subjected to violence or harassment. It also enabled them to take their children with them to polling stations. These latter policies played a positive role in encouraging voter turnout, especially among women, around 52 per cent of eligible voters turning out, and an especially high turnout from women. Nevertheless, candidates, both male and female, faced several difficulties, the impact of which was greater on women candidates.

**Electoral Context**

Difficulties facing candidates were not necessarily political, but rather were linked to the electoral context. These included procedural and organizational obstacles, as well as prevailing political practices.

**Procedural Difficulties**

*Short campaign period*

The confused political circumstances produced a number of procedural obstacles. Most significantly, the release of party lists was delayed until November 1, 2011, just 27 days, or less than one month, before the vote, although the deadline for the application for candidacy was October 24. Campaigning began on November 2 and was set to last for 24 days before the beginning of the campaign moratorium, which bans all campaigning starting 48 hours before the polls open in each round. In addition, campaigning began on virtually the same day that lists were announced, which confused parties and candidates, leading female candidates to wonder if their applications had been accepted by the High Electoral Committee (HEC), which further reduced the time allotted for campaigning. Moreover, some female candidates had their electoral symbols changed after initial approval, which required them to either replace their campaign posters and flyers or find other ways to alert the public of this modification.
Organizational Difficulties

Managing Female Candidates’ Campaigns

With the exception of candidates who had previous experience running for national or local office, the Academy for Women’s Political Participation found that most female candidates did not maintain a permanent, paid campaign staff. Parties provided only the most limited campaign support via the larger party campaign, which, naturally, worked for the party as a whole and was more focused on the candidates placed at the top of the party lists. Most female candidates relied on first-degree relatives and volunteers among their neighbours and colleagues, who did not necessarily have political experience. In practice, this meant that campaign activities were often cancelled, either to protect candidates from possible harm given the prevailing political circumstances, to avoid burdening the unpaid campaign staff, or due to the lack of political experience necessary to understand candidates’ constituencies and how to intervene to effectively support candidates.

At the same time, however, having a candidate’s relative on the campaign team, especially her husband, had an extremely positive impact, shoring up the candidate’s credibility among voters. This portrayed the candidate as first and foremost a successful homemaker who entered the political arena with the consent and encouragement of her husband, thus boosting her legitimacy, especially in rural areas. This created a dilemma for unmarried candidates, whom the Academy advised to compensate for the absence of a husband by recruiting another first-degree relative to their campaigns, such as a father, brother, or mother. The same difficulties in maintaining campaign staff applied to candidates’ ability to provide and train their deputies to observe polling stations on voting day.

Size of Electoral Constituencies

The relatively large size of electoral constituencies was a problem faced by both female and male candidates, but was a more complex issue for candidates running as individuals than those on party lists. Larger districts required extra effort from female candidates, as many male candidates did not comply with campaign spending caps, and the aforementioned political and security issues compelled many female
candidates to campaign primarily by knocking on doors, and holding popular meetings.

**Problems Related to Prevailing Political Practices**

*Money and Electoral Bribes*

The prevailing practices of using money and electoral bribes, as well as the distribution of food for political purposes, were observed. These practices cannot be attributed to certain parties to the exclusion of others.

*Religious Mobilization*

Although violence was less prevalent in these elections compared to previous parliamentary polls, the conflict over the state’s identity (religious vs. civil) was reflected in the elections and the means candidates used to mobilize the public, creating an unprecedented degree of religious polarization (Islamist vs. civil and Islamist vs. Christian). It should be noted that most of the candidates participating in the Academy were veiled. Of the 16 candidates, 2 were Christian, and of the 14 Muslim candidates, only one was unveiled.

This was one of the most significant electoral issues, and was reflected in the discourse of female candidates, whether within Islamist or civil forces. The focus of the Islamist discourse and their female candidates on the role of women in the public sphere worked to limit the role of women within certain confines and limit their political participation. Such a focus is posed a dilemma for female candidates in the civil camp for two reasons. First of all, it created a political discourse at odds with the discourse of female candidates in the Islamist blocs, as the former focused on the importance of empowering women and opening up equal fields of opportunity to them. In other words, women’s issues became one of the priorities of their political discourse. Secondly, it turned candidates’ political discourse into a political-social discourse that attempted to raise women’s issues as part of prevailing social problems while the candidates simultaneously presented themselves as candidates that seek to represent their constituencies and that do not speak solely about women’s issues. Although the religious polarization had a negative impact on all female candidates aligned with civil forces, whether Christians or observant Muslims,
the effect was more pronounced for Christian candidates, and especially female candidates who are at the top of their party lists. In one case, a candidate participating in the Academy chose to abandon her spot on the list to a Muslim male candidate and move to the bottom of the list to avoid increasing the polarization, especially since there was another Christian male candidate on the same list.

**People’s Assembly Elections 2011-2012: Indicators and Outcomes**

Of all the female candidates, none who ran as an individual candidate managed to win a seat. Of the women running on lists, only eight won seats. Among the participants in the Academy’s program, Sana Said, a candidate with the Egyptian Social Democratic Party in the second district of Assiout, won a seat. This indicates that despite the difficulties facing women, the Egyptian electorate may vote for a female candidate if she can prove herself to be an adept politician involved in public life.

A look at the party lists and the placement of female candidates reveals that no one political bloc was more woman-friendly than others. Thus, we attempted to divide electoral blocs and coalitions in these elections, given the aforementioned religious polarization, into four divisions: list coalitions composed largely of Islamist parties, list coalitions composed largely of civil parties, lists composed of the remnants of the NDP, and lists composed largely of ideologically indeterminate parties. This preliminary analysis (the final analysis will be reviewed in the final report) reveals that none of the four divisions were distinguished by the proportion of women on their lists. On average, all these blocs featured the same number of women on their lists, though the placement of the candidates differed. The following graphs illustrate the proportion of women on the lists of the four principal political blocs.

**Recommendations**

Clearly, the elections took place in the midst of extremely complex, fluid circumstances, in terms of the legal and political electoral context, and they were fraught with various procedural and organizational difficulties. Female candidates and voters faced the same obstacles as their male counterparts, although the impact was disproportionately felt by women, in addition to other problems faced solely by
women. The Women’s Political Participation Academy makes the following recommendations based on its experience:

1. Parties and civil society institutions concerned about the political empowerment of women must begin cultivating qualified political female cadres immediately after the Shura Council elections, instead of waiting for the next elections to commence the search for qualified female candidates. Despite the short period of the Academy’s work, our experience has shown that working with women based on the assumption that they are capable of engaging in politics, competing, reaching the public, and representing their communities bears fruit. Sana Said ran for office in 2005, 2008, and 2010, and decided not to limit herself inside the party to women’s issues; as a result, she carries weight in her district and within the party. The Academy closely followed this experience through mentoring on the ground. The outcome of elections proved that political experience and practice are what creates genuine community representatives and politicians capable of reaching voters.

2. Although the elections law required at least one woman to be placed on each list, it did not specify their placement on the list. The results of the elections reveal that not one woman placed lower than number four on the list won a seat, given the difficulties of any list taking more than 50 per cent of the vote except in exceptional cases. In turn, it is recommended that the parties’ law require women to be placed in the first, second, or third position on party lists.

3. The High Electoral Commission (HEC) must confront candidates, women or men, who do not comply with campaign spending limits, which can be done through a set of administrative decrees. Although it is difficult to monitor spending by party and individual candidates, especially since candidates with large parties may receive donations in the form of substantial discounts from advertising and production companies, the HEC can set unified, specific criteria for visual campaign materials, for example, by defining and unifying the size of campaign posters.

4. Parties must support the campaigns of their female candidates, providing the necessary material and technical support to campaign staff to provide female
candidates with a professional campaign team capable of fully supporting her in the run-up to the vote. It is preferable for one member of the staff to be a man, as men’s support of female candidates breaks many social barriers and presents female candidates as politicians, not exclusively as representatives for women’s issues.

5. The relatively large electoral districts, particularly in individual constituencies, showed that the individual candidate system, especially with the current district apportionment, is not friendly to women or minorities. Indeed, no woman won a seat in the individual constituencies. It is therefore recommended that districts be redrawn to make them smaller.
Femini Ijtihad
Sara Bergamaschi

Femin Ijtihad stands for “critical thinking” of gender notions and laws. It was founded in early 2008 by Natasha Latiff after a study with lawyers and judges in Afghanistan on the law regarding rape and its discriminatory effects on victims. During this study, lawyers and judges explored gender-equitable interpretations of the Islamic law to posit a draft of a rape law that was both gender-equitable and within the Islamic framework. It was this exercise in “critical thinking” that lead to the idea of an initiative to critically analyse and re-posit notions of gender and law. Today, four years down the road, we research and share relevant and simplified academic scholarship and case law on Muslim women’s rights with activists, lawyers and women’s organizations working at the grassroots. Although our work has mostly benefited Afghan activists, our strategic vision will be to contribute to the work for women's rights also in other Muslim-dominated countries. Our research is cross-jurisdictional and contextualizes best practices in one country to another.

Over the years, academic ideas and theories have flourished and contributed to the understanding of women’s rights in law and society. These ideas are invaluable to the work of political and grassroots activists, lawyers and judges, especially in places where such information is essential yet extremely inaccessible. Our mission is to share knowledge and legal arguments on gender equity with activists and lawyers working at the grassroots level.

What we have done – previous projects
50 Working Groups on Women’s Rights and Agency 2008 – 2010
Femin Ijtihad has conducted over 50 working group discussions with student activists, journalists, lawyers and researchers from various social sciences’ backgrounds. These working groups have taken place in-house, within universities and online - involving participants from Germany, Italy, Singapore, Malaysia, Australia, London, the United States and Afghanistan – and students from top-tier
programs at Harvard, Cambridge, the NYU, The New School, Fordham, the National University of Singapore, the School of Oriental and African Studies, Oxford, the Warwick University and others.

The working groups sought to train participants on more nuanced and multidimensional ways of analysing theories and ideas through utilizing multiple disciplines as lenses into re-understanding the Muslim women’s agency and rights. It encouraged participants to think about how theory can inform practice and vice versa to enrich current philosophies and programs relating to gender equality in Muslim societies.

The Participants’ analyses of women’s rights were transcribed into dialogues. Lessons learned have been incorporated into the F.I.s work with legal aid and research organizations in Afghanistan.

*Promoting Women’s Inheritance Rights through Interactive Programming Project*
*Duration: February 2012- July 2012*

Femin Ijtihad worked closely (on a pro bono basis) with the Women and Children Legal Research Foundation (WCLRF) to develop an innovative and participatory training methodology and manual for community mobilizers on women’s economic rights in Kabul and Jalalabad. The law of inheritance and method of division is a complex subject. Until now economic empowerment programs for women have only gone as far as encouraging women’s inheritance rights through legal citations, without showing how inheritance is to be distributed and in what situations the shares alter.

The project was innovative for a) its use of illustrations as a teaching method on inheritance-divisions, b) introducing and connecting the law to the laymen, c) promoting women’s inheritance rights with minimal emphasis on the term “women’s rights” (a contentious subject in conservative areas), d) promoting an understanding of the multiplier effect of women’s economic empowerment to the community and nation, e) utilizing language and methods to empower men as partners. The project was an important stepping stone for two reasons: a) inheritance is the most
significant factor behind women’s economic empowerment and in the eradication of gender-based poverty, b) though women’s rights of inheritance are protected by law and the Islam, confusion on division principles and cultural barriers have greatly limited women’s access and control over inheritance.

12 community conversations have been held thus far. 180 community members, leaders, educators and religious elders in Kabul and Jalalabad have participated in these conversations. There were some difficulties starting the conversation amongst the men, but all facilitators reported that all objections were gradually removed as the conversations progressed; we had anticipated potential objections and had built in responses to address concerns.

Strategic and Shariah-based Litigation for Women’s Rights

Project duration: May - July 2012

The Legal Team at Femin Ijtihad worked closely with Medica Afghanistan, a non-for-profit women's’ rights legal organization that provides legal aid and representation for women. The aim of the project was to train lawyers on how to strategically select, analyze and present Islamic legal arguments as supplements or interpretive tools to apply provisions of the Afghan law in a gender-equitable manner. The Head of the Legal Program at Medica Afghanistan had requested to “prepare us for when and if the Taliban return to the judiciary”. The training focused on women’s rights cases involving child custody, rape, adultery, running away and separation due to harm.

For the topics aforementioned, the project activities entailed a) surveying and gathering all the “interpretive possibilities” postulated by scholars to arrive at gender-equitable outcomes for female litigants, b) studying gender-equitable judicial reasoning and decisions in Pakistan, c) strategically interweaving those interpretations with Afghan law and directing lawyers how to use Afghan and Islamic law and jurisprudence as a coherent whole, d) conducting a 3-day training in Kabul for 24 lawyers and social workers from Medica Afghanistan and Women for Afghan Women on litigating these cases.
24 lawyers and social workers from two prominent women’s rights legal aid organizations were trained on strategic and Shariah-based litigation for women’s rights cases. The training included an exercise on how to respond to judicial deliberations; “what if the judge says this..., how do I respond?” and the importance of pro-actively directing a case in court by asking the right questions and cornering/stream-lining the issues at hand. We will be conducting a follow-up after 2 months to assess the results of the training and whether or not it made a difference to whether judges receive and respond favourably to gender-equitable Islamic arguments.

Research Project "Women’s Political Participation in Libya: Post-Revolutionary Perspectives”

We began investigating the status of women’s rights in Libya this spring. The urgency of the situation was obvious – widespread human rights abuses were carried out against women during the Gaddafi regime. In light of the Transitional Council’s (hereafter: Council) statement regarding the implementation of a modern interpretation of the Sharia law, our investigation was timely. In light of the concerns posed by Libyan activists during the uprising against the regime, we carried out an investigation on the condition of women before and after Gaddafi.

We were concerned over the model of Sharia positioned by the Council and how this would impact upon Libyan women's public visibility. The Council's statements were examined within the broader context of Sharia’s application, the history of Islamic governance, along with an understanding of Islamic law and scholarship on gender and legal reform.

The Islamic intellectual tradition recognizes the potential of Sharia to adapt to different contexts and jurisprudential mechanisms like Ijtihad permits creative legal reasoning for measured application. The history of Islamic governance illustrates this practice.

Sharia’s potential to adapt and its nature as a truly cohesive legal system makes it an attractive option for an interim government responsible to create a functioning and
stable government in a country that has been marked by social and political upheaval.

The Head of the Transitional council, Mustafa Abdul Jalil, has emerged as the public face of the interim government. He is also most probably aware of these facets of Sharia as he had studied law at the University of Libya before he started his career as a jurist. He was eventually appointed Minister of Justice under Gaddafi by his son Saif Gaddafi as part of the latter’s alleged legislative reform agenda. Saif is now under investigation by the International Criminal Court for human rights abuses.

Interestingly, although Jalil often acted against the regime, there are allegations of abuse of power which we discovered in our interview with Libyan women activists, who associate him with Gaddafi. Debates on pluralism - including the subject of women’s rights - have been a secondary concern to Jalil and his colleagues in the Council.

Sharia may be appealing for the Council because it is perceived as “free” from Gaddafi influence. It is alleged that his “support” for women's rights is just a façade over a rather male-dominant system. Sharia is also perceived by the Council as an alternative to Western-type governance, which is extraordinarily important given Libya's heritage as a post-colonial state.

It is presently unclear which viewpoint, either reformist or conservative, will dominate the Council’s application of Sharia. The reformists advocate a renewed examination of the scriptures in conjunction with sometimes explicit approval of values derived from Western post-Enlightenment thoughts. Also it remains to be seen what the consequences are for women from the Council’s decision to apply Sharia law.

**Current debates on Women’s Rights**

The argument made so far is that: If the Islamic law, as we said, permits innovation and therefore ideological evolution - and it has traditionally done so then it is unlikely that the Islam predisposed predominantly Muslim societies to repressive politics
including the repression of women. At this point it is also necessary to look at other factors in order to try to understand Libya's historical gender inequalities:

- Libya is a tribal society and its political character is largely defined by familial networks
- The demographics created by these family relations present themselves as an alternative explanation for Libya’s historical lack of gender equality (Obermeyer et al)
- Demographic data collected during the Gaddafi era demonstrate that as a group, the Libyan women have fertility rates significantly higher than those of their counterparts from other countries

This could indicate that historically, Libyan women have been expected to fulfil their roles as mothers and wives within the family. These roles are relegated to the private sphere and limits the women's visibility and agency in the public sphere.

To sum up, this contradicts the assertion that the Islam predisposes a society towards authoritarianism and by extension, the repression of women. Also, this contradicts the view that Muslim women are forced into passivity because of their religious beliefs. Arguments that essentialize women's identity with the Islam oversimplify the reality and do not take into account the intersection of different identities and roles that define the women's place in society. In our interviews with Libyan women activists, we discovered that many Libyan women view the Islam:

- as a progressive force for gender-equity
- as a force against unchecked authority of men against women
- as a way to replace chaos with order

**Current status contradictions**

The Council has in fact made some gestures towards gender equality. Although their members will remain predominantly men, they have appointed one prominent female member and two female Ministers: Salwa Fawzi El-Deghali, Dr. Fatima Hamroush, and Mabrouka Jibril.
El-Deghali is in charge of the Transitional Council for Legal Affairs, an extremely important position.

Dr. Hamroush serves as Minister of Health and Jibril serves as Minister of Social Affairs. They all have received some notice for their reformist activity but very little is known about Jibril. Some considered the appointment of these three Ministers as a token gesture rather than a sincere effort to include more women in the political process.

**Activist perspectives**

During our research, we interviewed Libyan women activists to obtain their perspectives on the issue. We interviewed Zahra Langhi, founder of the Libyan Women’s Platform for Peace (LWPP) and Ghaida al-Tawati of the Libyan Journalists’ Union. They both identify themselves as moderate Muslims who do not see their Islamic religious beliefs in conflict with gender equality. Langhi and al-Tawati’s positions of leadership within the activist movement make them fundamental sources of information about the current status of campaigns to achieve gender equality. Zahra’ Langhi, Founder of the Libyan Women’s Platform for Peace (LWPP) which acts as a political pressure group on behalf of certain issues like e.g. gender quotas and campaigns to allow Libyan women to pass on citizenship to their children.

The Platform has achieved major successes regarding gender quotas. They consulted with legal experts in Libya for advice on legislative drafting. Eventually the Council passed their proposal.

One of the interviewees opined that patriarchal attitudes about gender roles were widespread: "It’s not as if the Islamists were against women and the secularists were pro women; both parties are patriarchal and do not care at all when it comes to women’s issues.” She was particularly concerned with Jalil’s public support of polygamy.

Langhi rejects accusations that her political activities violate the Sharia: "But we are not against Sharia. Basically, Sharia and the sacred laws have to be reinterpreted in
the reformatory way and not in the regressive way as they (the NTC) are proposing right now.” She also said that their work for gender equality met resistance from other activists and reformists, who criticize the movement’s campaigns as unnecessary distractions from achieving political unity.

Ghaida al-Tawati was associated with the Libyan Journalists Union under Gaddafi and she continues to work as an independent activist. She is the daughter of an ex-prisoner; she has maintained an active presence in the anti-Gaddafi blogosphere since 2005 and was the only female participant of the 2009 Human Rights Watch Conference in Tripoli. She was eventually imprisoned for a period of three months during Gaddafi’s rule and now combines her activism with her beliefs as a moderate Muslim. She supports the creation of a muftiat, or council of jurists, to monitor the application of Sharia and the declaration of fatwas.

She also does not believe that the political situation has dramatically improved since the fall of Gaddafi. In reference to recent protests over proposed electoral laws: "Nothing changed. Actually the opposite of what we expected happened. Many people were beaten, arrested and kidnapped by armed people. Even when we protested, my colleagues and I were cursed and humiliated". She said that tribal traditions on gender segregation complicate women’s political participation: "Here we face a big problem. Women don’t share the public’s interests and worries since they are not in direct contact with the public.” This lack of contact with the public illustrates the effects of tribal traditions of gender segregation and exclusion, which contribute to an attitude toward women that al-Tawati describes as ‘fear’: "We should wait until men’s fears of the right to vote for women are gone, and until they can realize that women are worthy and are able to represent him in the next parliament.”

Both Langhi and Atwati wish to see women enter the public sphere. They are running a campaign to allow women to pass on Libyan citizenship to their children. Currently this right is limited to men. They also demand the ability to fully participate in the life of mosques since they believe that equality in public sphere is nothing if not matched by equality in the private sphere.
To sum up, the outcome of the Libyan political landscape will depend on two things:

- Internal ideological and political divisions between conservatives, reformists and secularist in the Council.
- The need to unify a fragmented population: currently, for example, there is a bid for autonomy in the Eastern region of Libya and Islamist factions have asserted their dominance.

Conclusions
The appointment of female ministers indicates some improvement but Jalil’s conservative attitudes and association with Gaddafi still concerns many activists. Repressive attitudes remain widespread, even among Libyan reformists. This indicates that tribal traditions and social demographics, rather than Islam, are likely to contribute to gender inequalities in Libya.

The application of the Sharia can occur within a pluralistic Islamic tradition that recognises women’s equal rights; activists can use concepts like Ijtihad, creative legal reasoning, and the history of the hybridisation of Islamic and secular concepts of governance to argue better for these rights.

What we want to do next
Strategic Sharia-based Litigation on Women’s Rights in Afghanistan
Location: Kabul, Afghanistan
Objectives:

- Strengthen the legal skills and arguments of Afghan lawyers and legal activists in women’s rights cases pre-trial and during trial in court.
- Improve outcomes of women’s rights cases in favour of female litigants.

Implementation:

- Conduct a Needs Assessment on what kinds of cases are most urgent, the nature of those cases, and difficulties lawyers face with prosecutors and
judges. How: by interviews and conducting focus group discussions with lawyers in Kabul.

- Survey and gather scholarly analyses and opinions on women’s rights in Islamic law and jurisprudence on a set of pre-determined issues. How: F.I. has an e-library of scholarly materials on the subject. 1 or 2 lawyers will review these materials and put together relevant and persuasive opinions. We will cross-check these materials with the needs assessment; does this information answer to the needs identified?

- Analyse and gather case law and judicial decisions from High and Supreme Courts of South Asia that have adjudicated in favour of women. How: As above.

- Develop a manual and curriculum that will serve as a reference guide for lawyers on how to use each primary and secondary jurisprudential opinion, as well as when to use it and examples of how to direct the court/prosecutor by setting standards that they have to reach ("burden of proof") if they were to decide against a female claimant. How: Each lawyer involved will write-up a particular section of the reference guide.

- Translate materials to Dari. How: We will contract out the translation to a professional translator; from English to Dari.

- Training (insert no.) of lawyers and legal activists on strategic Sharia-based litigation for women’s rights, in Kabul through a 4-day program. How: 1-2 F.I. lawyers will hold the 4-day workshop in Kabul.

- Provide a one-on-one mentorship program - assistance and advice on developing and presenting Sharia-based arguments for existing cases through written submissions and oral presentations. How: F.I. has a Legal Team who will volunteer their time to work with an Afghan lawyer on a case.

- Monitoring and Evaluation.
**Expected Outcomes**

Short-term result: Afghanistan is entering a crucial period, in a time of transition where it is expected that extremist judges will return to the judiciary to consolidate the role of the Sharia in the country. The program will strengthen the lawyers’ ability to engage with conservative judges on points of religious law/discourse and authoritatively direct them to consider gender-equitable interpretations of law.

*Long-term result*

We intend that consistent and persuasive interpretations of law will improve the outcomes of women’s rights cases in favour of female litigants. It will also improve the strength of Sharia-based lobbying for women’s rights cases pre-trial.
Spotlight: Syria
Noor Alchikh Oughlli

With the Arab Spring women in the Arab world in general and in Syria specifically, found themselves taking part in kind of a double revolution. One against the corrupted tyrannical regimes that have been ruling the region for more than four decades and another revolution against the elements and factors that restricted their role in societies under different names and characters: religion, culture, tradition, etc.

These components were at the same time protected and enforced by the regimes in the region which lead to a double oppression of women: the same political oppression that was applied to all citizens of the country plus additionally a social, religious, cultural oppression for being female. What are the factors that have been contributing to the women’s vulnerability in Syria? Was it religion? Tyranny? Tradition?

During the one and half year of the revolution in Syria, hundreds of women have been killed, jailed, or forced to flee the country. At the same time, many women have aroused and inspired so many other men and women in Syria, breaking all stereotypes for the oppressed, silent, weak Syrian women. Actresses, bloggers, artists, doctors, volunteers, activists, they all proved and showed strength and a high degree of awareness and braveness, it looked like they’ve been longing for freedom and dignity more than anyone else and it is now or never for them to take the chance!

They participate in the revolution knowing that without human rights in Syria there will be no women’s rights and without freedom for all humans there will be no freedom for women. The road will be long for now they are fighting against so many decades during which their role and existence were severely restricted. They know that it will take a long time to change mentalities, laws and practices, but now they know also that they have taken the first step and there will be no going back.
Improving the women’s status in Syria doesn’t necessarily mean to give up religion or identity, but reforms and interpretations can be done within the religion itself, and I don’t specify one religion here as Syria is a land of more than 18 religious sects which makes the situation even more complex and requires a state that respects the diversity and religious freedom but at the same time protects all citizens, women and men and treats them equally and protects them by law - something that wasn’t accomplished during the actual regime in Syria. The personal status code or the family law are not the same for all Syrian citizens and they don’t treat women and men equally. Honour crimes for example, are still tolerated by the Syrian law which hands out only mild punishments. Many of these laws and especially honour crimes do not origin from religion. People, however, think they do and for that reason they also tolerate these crimes.

Will the Revolution in Syria, if it succeeds, and when I speak about a revolution I speak about the intellectual and peaceful movement which it was in the beginning and not the armed conflict that is going on now, will this revolution be strong enough to sustain the violence and the tyranny? Will it be able to prevent Syria from slipping more towards civil war? What role do women play? After all they are still on the peaceful side, didn’t get involved in the armed conflict, were oftentimes victims but also this gave them more responsibility to run communities and families. Syrian women know now that they have the strength, they know the responsibilities that come with it and the challenges they have - will this now be the first step towards their liberation? One thing we know to be true in Syria: there is no going back!
Women’s situation in Iran

Shadi Sadr

Fortunately, the topic that the organizers had suggested me was wage enough to allow me to determine which aspect of women’s situation in Iran should be better to discuss in this conference. Considering the fact that the primarily motivation of this conference was Arab Springs, I decided to bring the experience of Iranian women and women’s movement in Iran in the context of the revolution and the uprising. I do believe, this experience has still something to be looked at by women’s movement in Arab countries.

Therefore, first I would like to talk a few about the situation of Iranian women after the 1979 revolution. Then, I will talk about the Post 2009 Election movement and the role of women in the movement. In both part, I will try to elaborate a few words to show how and why in none of these historical momentum, women in Iran could not gain anything but lost many things. The 1979 revolution in Iran, for the first time dragged massive groups of women to the streets to protest against the Shah government while prior to that due to diversity in social class, ideology, religion or even education had never been united together. They were not mobilized due to gender awareness and believed that by the time the Shah leaves the country and democracy is established, while they didn't have any precise definition for it, all gender issues and class diversities will be resolved.

Those women, who were demonstrating in the streets and shouting “Independence, Freedom, Islamic Republic” had never imagined that “Islamic Republic” even under the influence of the religious revolutionaries’ plans, even if they considered themselves as secular, would have never imagined or consider such a meaning and what would their status be within such a regime. Shortly after the revolution, the newly emerging Islamic regime, quickly defined itself by women. Less than one month after the victory of revolution, the office of Ayatollah Khomeini, the Leader of Revolution, announced that the previous Family Code, which was being practiced, are nullified considering their contradictory nature to Islamic regulations. The most
important consequence of this order was that women almost lost their right to divorce and the only way possible to obtain divorce was through a very difficult and long process. Couple of days later, Ayatollah Khomeini personally announced that women are not allowed to enter governmental offices without Islamic hejab. What was meant by Islamic hejab was covering the whole body except the face and the hands up to the wrist and the feet up to the ankle.

Protest against compulsory Hejab, which was mobilized by secular women of different groups, due to their political attachment to different groups and ideological diversity could not create a coalition for women’s rights to be able to prevent the decisions and measures of the new government against women, including compulsory Hejab, nullification of family support act and the right to be Judge for women, and demonstrate a proper reaction.

Due to the fact that in the Shah era, by implementation of the policy of modernization of the processes of allocating rights was from the top and followed by elites, it had not been able to play its role in the empowerment of ordinary and most importantly religious women. Consequently, the protests were not welcomed by the majority of women. The weakness of the women's independent movement and diverse disagreements prevailing within political groups on the importance of women's issues compared to imperialism and oppression were other factors in fading women's protest which made it ineffective. The massive repression of opposition political groups in 1981, including secular women's groups, silenced their voice for at least one decade. The start of war within Iran and Iraq, where national security and independence remained the main concern for 8 years, was also effective and played a crucial role in ignoring all other issues and silencing women's protests against discriminatory rules and regulations. However, Iranian women's combat in challenging patriarchal rules and values never stopped.

The bond and the collaboration between male domination and fundamentalism in Iran has created conditions for women that can be called “control of the mind and the body.” In this system, in addition to the long list of civil and punitive laws that subordinate women—including the duty of submission in relation to sex in marriage,
polygamy for the man, the requirement of the father’s permission in marriage, the requirement of the husband’s permission to apply for a passport and travel abroad, the absence of unconditional right to divorce for the wife, the testimony of a woman counting for half that of a man, criminalisation of extra marital relationships, the legality of the killing of the wife by the husband if found having sex with another man, the criminalisation of being seen in public without the veil—we have daily new policies aimed at driving the women increasingly to the back rooms of the house. I can refer to the new policies to limit women’s entry to the universities, half time employment of married women which reduces the demand for women in the job market, changes in school books for girls and the inclusion of house keeping, child care and care for husbands in the girls’ curriculum, dividing the sexes at the universities and other public spaces, and eventually, submitting the running of school girls to the clergy to make the content of their education even more religious than before.

But as I mentioned earlier, what is important to point out is that despite the common view of Iranian women in the West as passive and resigned, the women have resisted these laws and policies, not only individually, but in collective forms, and have had achievements as well. The Iranian women’s movement has, especially over the last ten years, actively pushed women’s demands into the public arena and forced concessions in the form of certain reforms in laws and policies. The activists of this movement have, despite all oppressions and pressures, including imprisonment, being deprived from leaving the country, loss of jobs, expulsion from the university, closure of the offices, and so on, managed to actively fight against policies and laws designed to institutionalise the subordination of women and efforts to send them back to the house.

Having one of the most active women’s movement is the region which had supposedly learnt from the experience of the post 1979 revolution, one could expect that women’s movement would have a strong presence in the post 2009 presidential election protests. But this did not happen and I am going to give you a deeper analysis of why while the ordinary women risked their lives in the streets, women’s
movement was not able to translate their demands and to a politically meaningful manner.

Thirty years after the 1979 revolution the world could witness yet another feature of the unpredictability of Iranian society. The millions, who had used the opportunity granted by the government for election campaigns and laid claim on the streets, continued to stay on the streets after the unbelievable election results were announced. Protests against the declared outcome of the election remained, but new demands were added to it as the demonstrations went on despite intense suppression, and as earlier demands remained unanswered by the government.

Events following the June 2009 presidential election could be examined from many points of view. Yet, by any account, it is certain that the remarkable role played by women after the elections would be one of those angles. A review of the pictures published of the street protests after the election would remind us of the courageous women who shoulder to shoulder with men, and sometimes even ahead of them, would shout slogans, protest and, by the same token, would be suppressed.

From the very beginning, the presence of women in protests was very significant. Particularly, this is because in contrast to the tradition of the political struggle and congregations of the 1979 revolution, women were neither prepared to assemble in separate processions nor willing to modify their dress code to give it a more pious appearance. At the same time, in many street clashes, contrary to the existing clichés, women would not stay in back rows or run away, but would rather stand firmly to defend themselves. Security forces, too, in contrast to past years, would not regard the “femaleness” of these protesters as a cause to treat them less harshly. Consequently, a considerable number of women were killed, injured, and detained, of whom the best known was Neda Agha Soltan, a young woman shot dead on 20 June, who emerged as the emblem of the movement.

The robust presence of women in street protests after the elections had many characteristics that in their totality would challenge all gender stereotypes. Young women in outfits that were defined “improper” by the Islamic republic would
stipulate their demands along with men and not separate from them. In fact, the first message of the forceful participation of women in street protests was the breakdown of the laws related to compulsory hijab and to segregation of sexes in public space. At the same time, while in the beginning women were just “present” in the protests, they rapidly found their special roles once repression culminated. In small groups, women would attempt to prevent youths from being arrested, or would try to release them once they were captured. There were many scenes in the final street demonstrations in which young women were leading defensive actions and, more specifically, protest cries. That was despite the fact that women did not have a tangible presence in the political leadership of the movement. During this period, a large number of women were arrested, who were from all walks of life - from social activists, to members of political parties, to journalists, to housewives. Some of these women recounted their experiences of torment and sexual torture after their release from prison. The death of some others, like Taraneh Mousavi, in which case there were indications of rape followed by murder, caused the issue of sexual assault and torture of political prisoners to be raised widely. In particular, that was the case because some female political prisoners were forced to confess to having sexual relationships with male political activists, and more specifically reformists. In other words, they were used as prey to lure male politicians.

The robust role of women in post-election protests, on the one hand, and the rich experience of the women’s protest movement, on the other hand, led to the expectation that the movement would enter the demonstrations in a very organized fashion. That was particularly so because a large portion of activists in this movement had created a coalition called the Convergence of Women’s Movements for staging their demands in the election, and had announced that they were planning to utilize the relative openness of the elections period to present women’s demands. A concern raised from that very beginning was that those who were using the election period to present women’s demands, were not utilizing the post-election period, especially the vast potentials of the women protesters in the streets.

One of the reason was the fear of being arrested during or after street protests was one reason that prevented leaders and the better-known figures in the women’s
movement from attending the protests except as “individuals” amongst the circle of their families and friends. Most women activists had pending cases in the revolutionary courts, and recollections of imprisonment along with their comrades. Additionally, the events of post-2009 election had taken almost all socio-political activists, including those of the women’s movement, by surprise. Those who were accustomed to leading social actions, were feeling that they were lagging behind the people. As a result, there were no advance organizational preparations to take advantage of the sphere of public protest or to direct it. There was also no consensus over the form of participation in the post-election public protests, or even the need for any specific type of activity, amongst the activists. The flow of events was so rapid that the movement’s activists who attended daily street protests and skirmishes had no time to ponder, converge and regroup. They would participate in many protests, but as individuals or small groups, detached from their identity as women movement’s activists. My personal observations indicate that at any gathering or protest, if women activists encountered each other, they would simply say greetings and move on. Except for security officers that knew them, these women activists were just ordinary faces in the crowd though they would see many familiar faces. No specific slogan, banner or other indicators would distinguish them from the larger crowd. At the same time, the street environment was gender blind. That is, even though women of all ages participated in street protests, those very same women had no interest in raising gender-specific slogans.

There is a large volume of discussions in feminist sociology that supports the theory that pro-democracy forces do not necessarily have progressive views regarding gender discriminations. Contrarily, numerous historical experiences of the processes of democratization in many nations demonstrate that pro-democracy forces could be profoundly patriarchal. In Iran, too, there are at least two specific historical experiences. One is the Constitutional Revolution of 1905-1906, in which women, who until then had minor parts in the social life, played a critical role. However, because women’s rights had no position in the ideas of the revolution, women were treated as minors; they were incapacitated in the country’s first constitution and were denied the right to vote. In the 1979 revolution, too, the majority of the groups involved had a male-dominated notion of women’s issues, which made it easier for
Islamists to institutionalize discriminations against women. It was because of these historical experiences and their resemblance to the overall atmosphere of the Green Movement that some women movement activists warned of a recurrence.

Relying on the narratives of women’s movement activists and some visible facts, one can recognize that a main reason for the passivity of the women’s movement was the reality that the streets of Tehran could not tolerate gender-based demands or any objection against patriarchal slogans. Gender blindness was not only prevalent in the thoughts and opinions of political leaders, but also amongst women movement’s activists. Many believed that in the midst of the struggle for democracy and freedom, it was no time to bring up women’s issues.

The fact was that during Mahmoud Ahmadinejad’s first term as president, in spite of all the state repression and shrinkage of public space, Iran’s women movement not only survived but experienced one of the most productive periods of its history over the past century. However, it was paralyzed when the movement encountered the flood of protesters in the streets and the repression of civil rights activists, including those belonging to the women’s movement. Almost all the women movement’s activists were present on the streets and amongst the protesters, not as “women movement’s activists,” but rather as “individuals” without their group identity. That was still not the full picture. In the fervent days and months of street protests, a significant number of women movement activists not only put aside their struggle against gender discrimination, but also fought for democracy and freedom under the new conditions, and believed that postponing their objectives as women would make the realization of democracy and freedom more probable. Various groups and organizations in the women’s movement which, prior to the election, were very engaged in different forms of electoral/semi-electoral campaigns and other previous pursuits, announced no plans for participating in street protests as organized groups. In fact, yet again, the experience of the post revolution was repeated, albeit with a lot of contextual differences.

In reality, it appears that we are facing two completely different and disjointed images of a twin female in post-election Iran. On the one side, there is a women’s
movement that until the election was highly proactive, leading the movements and responses related to women’s issues. It seemed the movement was representing the silent majority of women in presenting their case against gender-based discrimination. This activity lasted until a day before the election. Just one day after the election, however, there were waves of ordinary women, who were never engaged in any women’s movement, in the streets, actively participating in, and at times leading, street demonstrations. That was when the women’s movement turned entirely silent. These women had no representatives and, except in cases where they demanded recounting the votes and called for the presidency of Mir-Hossein Mousavi, did not delegate their representation to any person or group. Indeed, after the election, we encounter large numbers of women who cannot be assembled under any single umbrella group identity because of their “individualities.”

In other words, the women’s movement could not assume the responsibility of representing the women protesting on the streets. This inability was not merely limited to mobilizing them; even more important was losing the opportunity to define and demonstrate who these women, who turned into a symbol of the Green Movement, actually were and what demands and motives brought them to the streets. Although no field research is conducted about the motives, demands, and ideals of the women who participated in street protests, there are at least two case studies which demonstrate that the “votes” women demanded to be recounted could have contained gender components. That is, the protest against the election results was a protest against the status quo, which comprised of many objective elements, including gender discriminations. Neda Agha Soltan and Parastoo (family name withheld for obvious reasons), were two ordinary young women active in the Green Movement, who did not have any political backgrounds. Yet one lost her life and the other was imprisoned for the cause of the movement. They were both against their conditions as women. Despite their different upbringings, in describing a better future, both cited leaving Iran as an alternative, particularly in order to be free in their dress choices. It seems that the women who have risked their lives in the streets for democracy and freedom by challenging the regulations of the veil, gender apartheid, and the cliché of the submissive and obedient woman have, in practice, shown the bond between the gender demands and the more general democratic
demands. But gender demands are so far not manifest in the slogans of the popular movement and the positions of its leaders.

But in my analysis, apart from all of these reasons, the most important reason which make women’s movement handicap in the post-election uprising was its traditionally focus on changing the laws rather than the other aspect of daily base of women’s lives such as economy, sexuality and VAW.

The legalist approach and its emphasis on the need to change particular family and penal laws, as the most important priority of the women’s movement, had two consequences. One was that the women’s movement had to take a distance from the issues of the everyday life and grant the government and its law-making institutions some minimal legitimacy. Both these approaches were ineffective after the election. The protesting women’s issues were no longer the right to divorce, equality of blood money, or elimination of the stoning law; rather, they demanded the right to vote, to assemble peacefully, and to participate in the realm of politics without the fear of being subjected to rape and sexual torment. In the meantime, they had experienced different forms of sexual torment during presidential campaigns and in the post-election protests that were never paid attention to by women movement’s leaders. In addition, a large portion of the movement’s members and sympathizers no longer granted the government any legitimacy and had branded it the “government of the coup d’état” because of what had occurred after the election. After the leader of the Islamic republic and many majles deputies supported the government and its repression of the protesters, this lack of legitimacy extended to all institutions of the state. Under such circumstances, it was impossible to mobilize people around the goal of changing the laws through the state’s civil institutions. One of the founders of the Campaign for One Million Signatures, stated in an interview: “There is a condition in the society that faces us with a [critical] question. That is, where does the difference between a vote and a signature lie? Why should one trust a legislator, who is supposed to listen to these demands? Thus, this public trust has been violated, and one who is collecting signatures has no answer for it.”
Accordingly, the central question was: how in a situation in which the government’s legitimacy, from the point of view of respecting people’s votes, was severely undermined, could the women’s movement mobilize people around its requests and demands from the very same rulers? This condition is described as “antagonistic” by an Iranian scholar, who believes “suspension” of the women’s movement in such a situation is quite natural:

One suggestion for creating such a connection was to actively participate in the popular movement while maintaining women movement’s identity, on the one hand, and redefine women movement’s identity in accordance with various forms and means of the popular movement, on the other hand. Accordingly, instead of pursuing the strategy of the “unified voice,” which discounts the demands and roles of the women participation in the popular movement, the women’s movement should develop the strategy of “unity within diversity,” which seems to be the path open to other social movements, including the labour, teachers, students, etc. In this context, the women’s movement should be revisiting its operations and plans so far, and constantly attempting to make links with the popular movement—be it in terms of moral support, actions, or methods. From another perspective, with participation in the popular movement, it could help to prevent it from becoming gender blinded and, without forming separate lines from men, express its gender-based demands. In spite of all this, the women’s movement could not practically bridge the gap between gender and democratic demands and unfortunately, we missed that historical momentum.

Today, three years after the Green Movement, due to a sever crackdown of the civil society including women’s movement, all of the activities in public sphere is banned and the continuity of women’s movement is under a big question. Nowadays for us, Iranian women, is time to not to act but to think and to wrap up what we did and what we did not, what we achieved and what we lost. But the most overwhelming question is what if we would have acted differently in 2009 when all of us were shouting in the streets? This is a question that I believe women in the Arab revolutions or post revolution context should think about that: Is it possible not to forget gender demands but to link them with the demands of the revolution?
Women – Power – Change? Transformation processes in North Africa and Middle East
Seija Sturies

Introduction

Basics of the Advancement of Women and Gender Work in the International Development Cooperation of the Friedrich – Ebert – Foundation

In more than 100 countries, the Friedrich-Ebert Foundation (FES) supports the constitution and the consolidation of civil-social and governmental structures concerning the advancement of democracy and social justice, strong and free unions as well as the advocacy of human rights and equal opportunities for women and men. This commitment is part of the social democracy’s historical heritage and an essential part of its identity.

FES evaluates gender equality as a constitutive element of democracy and thus as an important part of the advancement of democracy. The strategy of Gender Mainstreaming (GM) is supposed to ensure that all political concepts and projects will be implemented and analysed in the light of their effects on women and men.

Since the 1990ies, the foundation added the GM concept to their activities in the advancement of women. Whereas the strategy of women’s advancement tries to counter the discrimination of women directly by means of equalizing projects, GM is about exposing the social gender relations and looking closely at the unequal distribution of power, money, labour and time between the genders – with the objective to reduce this mismatch in the long run. When planning the FES’ offers of education, dialog and counselling, the foundation’s staff is coerced to take into consideration the fact that women and men usually have different time budgets and that additionally the women’s mobility in a number of countries is limited which can make it difficult or even hinder them to participate in these programs.
FES assumes that the effects of political measures are all the more diverse for women and men, the more their living conditions are different like for instance in countries and regions with strongly traditionally oriented gender roles.

Therefore, the differentiation of our participants according to their gender and the taking into consideration of the diverse effects of events and projects on women and men is therefore also a contribution to the sustainability and efficiency and an essential aspect of the foundation’s quality assurance.

Gender Mainstreaming concretely means for the foundation’s work that:

- Women and men should be integrated in the project activities in equal measures
- The participation of women is to be promoted
- Women should be qualified for leading positions and
- Politics should be checked up to which extent it stabilizes or rather changes the dissimilar gender relations

Several tools and details were developed in order to implement these principles in everyday work. For their gender sensitive work, the staff gets a gender toolbook which contains these tools and details.

Additionally, a gender analysis is to be made for each country in the context of the development of a long run country strategy. This analysis examines the current gender relations on the ground as well as the political, economic and social parameters on which they are based on. This country strategy and gender analysis is the basis for the development of the international office’s annual project planning. In addition, each of the foundation’s international offices supplies a contact person for the gender topic. This person is in close contact with the local women’s organizations but also other organizations which take a stand for gender equality and equal opportunities on site. Together with these partners of the foundation, the contact person develops concerted projects which are designed according to the respective local needs and implement them together with the partners.
The international offices’ gender representatives in turn receive supporting trainings in order to develop gender sensitivity and to be able to transport that critically into their daily work.

The international offices’ gender work but also the gender work of the corresponding work units in Germany is supported by a gender team. The gender team consists of the respective work unit’s gender representatives and conceptually develops further the international gender work of the entire department, analyzes and documents it.

**The FES’ Work In the Field of the Advancement of Women and Gender in Egypt**

As we already indicated FES does not work on their own on the ground but the office closely cooperates with the local partner organizations like for instance non-governmental organizations, research institutions, governmental institutions, e.g. the Egypt Department of the Environment and the Department of Labour. FES could not work in Egypt without their partner organizations. The respective projects are developed together with their partners according to the local needs. All partner organizations participate according to their particular capabilities in the conception, the preparation and the realization with their own staff and infrastructure. These partner organizations and their local contacts offer FES the necessary contacts to influential multipliers and politicians.

With respect to the advancement of women / Gender, FES Egypt has been long-since working closely with two particular partners, the women’s organization Women Development Forum and the faculty of communication science of the University of Cairo.

... *Before the Arab Spring*

In 1995, FES Egypt established the focal point “Advancement of Women and Gender”. The project’s coordinator responsible for this working area is also the first contact for gender and women issues as well as for the local partner organizations. A dedicated feminist movement participated in the forming of a pluralistic society in Egypt since the beginning of the 20th century. And also more recently – before the
political upheavals took place – the media and the press had the discussion about women-political issues on their daily agenda – despite the increasing influence of conservative-religious groups. This was mainly promoted by the activities of a differentiated and ever-growing scene of civil-social organizations but also the close to the state National Council of Women’s Organizations’ readiness for reform.

Basically, FES took up the most different questions about the promotion of women and gender together with the partner organizations, like for instance the UN-convention about the ending of all forms of discrimination against women (CEDAW) which Egypt ratified in 1981, though under proviso of Shariah, but also those about the reformation of the family law and the nationality law. FES supported the women in their demands for a stronger participation in public life via a number of different means.

Latest project examples from 2009: in 2009, a number of events were conducted in various Egyptian provinces. During these events women who were members of local councils were trained in their abilities to hold their ground in their respective position and to be able to integrate their voters’ interests in their work. Another project example was a series of trainings about gender issues for journalists, organized together with our partner, the Faculty of Mass Communication of the University of Cairo.

Gender justice and equal opportunities were also an important topic in the debate about the experience gathered after the reform of the Egyptian family law has been implemented a few years earlier. These experiences were published in a leaflet which addressed the practitioners in this field. Based on this leaflet, corresponding groups could as a part of their political lobby work make the case for another reform of the law of civil status as well as the review of the Family Courts’ practices.

The Egyptian law of civil status does not grant Muslim women the same rights as men under recourse to religious rights but discriminates them legally and socially. The Family Courts are highly frequented institutions, however, their performance is
not efficient and thus they make it even harder for the families, especially concerning the situation of women and children in familiar conflicts or separation.

In 2010, just as it was the case in 2009, FES’ work particularly focused on strengthening the Egyptian women in such a way that they were able to articulate their right to equal status and to make this a topic of the reform discussions. The general elections in 2010 were the context for FES in this matter. In 2010, 64 out of a total of 518 seats were allotted to women for the first time. And even if that was not the main topic in connection to the elections, the media made reports about the female candidates and their election campaigns. FES supported this by deliberately inviting mainly journalists to the candidates’ trainings events who were working on site. In doing so, FES could ensure that the topic of gender issues was included in the media’s reports about the election process.

About 80% of those women who participated in the candidates’ trainings organized by FES submitted their data to the electoral commission in order to be admitted to the elections as a candidate. Many of them were not admitted. 20% of those women who participated in the training workshops conducted by FES finally succeeded in being nominated as a candidate for the general elections and 10 women were actually elected in the end. As some of them said, the training events conducted by FES played a great role in this process. Another subject of 2010 was the new Social Insurance Act and FES’ partner organizations managed to arrange discussion forums in which quite a number of important players got together and submitted detailed proposals for modification explicitly according to women’s interests.

... in the Year of Political Upheaval (2011)
In 2011, the year of political upheaval, FES’ work was also intended to promote civil social players and here explicitly women to accept their options to participate in the political transformation process. The peaceful grassroots movement which overthrew President Mubarak at the beginning of 2011 was an impressing example for the fact that Egypt has a vital and dynamic civil society. This turning point was not achieved by opposition parties, unions or other organized political forces but by countless dedicated and brave citizens who were hardly organized at all. Basis for this focus of
the foundation’s project work in 2011 was the assumption that only the society’s pressure on the military council could achieve any success in the democratic transformation process, which proved right. Again it was for the most part through protests in the streets or public debates which made the military council fulfil demands of the protest movement.

During these protests, women marched against the regime in line with men and with the same rights and thus many players were hoping that the participation of the women in the protests would show a result on the political level, too. These hopes, however, did not come true: the last parliament elected before Mubarak’s overthrow had a female quota and 14% of the seats were won by women. The first freely elected parliament of the transition period showed a female quota of only 2,4% (12 seats), mainly because the female quota was abolished. As the campaign against non-governmental organizations resulted in an increased sensitivity before the general elections at the end of the year, FES was not in a position to organize systematically election preparing courses for candidates, especially female ones like they did before.

In addition, the supreme military council did not confer their decisions in a regulated or systematic way with other political forces but launched and still launches their acts via decree. This was also the reason why recommendations made by women’s organizations were not taken into consideration in the new laws.

FES, however, also supported women in dealing with relevant political questions by means of a number of trainings and discussion events. Here, not only the political and social elite in Cairo were addressed but also specifically women who took actively part in local social initiatives and non-governmental organizations in the provinces.

After the enthusiasm in the beginning and the hopes directly after the upheaval commenced, also feminist activists turned to be more realistic. They noticed that the issue of the social political position of women still is a controversial topic, the more in the light of the Islamist tendencies which regain strength. The lack of unity within
the feminist movement unfortunately also represented a challenge which prevented it from developing an own position in the debates about the constitution.

So just as before the “revolution”, the FES offered programs in cooperation with their partner organizations also in 2011 which supported the women in their socio-political demands for a stronger participation in public life. This was even more important as there was and is the danger that issues important for women are being sacrificed for other political interests particularly during the interim phase – even by those forces who basically are open for feminist demands and issues in politics.

All in all, FES had an eye on the promotion of women in 2011, however, the work field took a back seat considering the political events which came thick and fast and the scope of action which opened up for a political foundation.

... Relevant Project Examples (2012)

In the year after the upheavals in 2012 we can note that women are still being underrepresented in the political and the civil social life in Egypt; one reason for this fact is the still very widespread traditional attitude of the society that men were better qualified for leading positions. Plus the increasing influence of Islamist forces is still being considered as a threat for the participation of women in political and public life by Egypt partners and left as well as liberal forces.

FES, however, considers a broad and institutionalized participation of women in this stadium as an essential contribution to provide a broader and more enfolding basis for the transition process and thus to make way for the large female part of the population to form these days of transition as well as the country’s future.

FES accordingly offers representatives of associations and non-governmental organizations, politicians and scientists opportunities to get together in order to develop strategies for a better political participation and to deal with the presentation of specific interests of women during this transition phase, particularly considering reforms of the constitution, the electoral law, female quota, etc.
FES will conduct a regionally designed women’s conference in Cairo from October 1st – 3rd, 2012, for the working up of the events of the Arab Spring seen from the female perspective, together with their partners, the Women Development Forum and the faculty for communication studies and in cooperation with the regional Arab network for women’s rights, Ro’a.

This conference’s starting point is the assumption that the women’s situation has not improved – as many players were hoping – but could rather become worse. The conference’s participants from the diverse Egyptian provinces but also from Tunisia, Libya, Yemen, Syria, the Emirates, Sudan, Morocco, Algeria, Bahrain and Saudi Arabia will develop a common regional vision and strategies how to deal with the future chances and challenges. The role of the media, whose unprofessional and tendentious reporting had an adverse impact on the region’s women during the upheaval, will be looked at in particular.

**The Work of Additional German Political Foundations in Egypt**

*in the Field of the Advancement of Women and Gender*

Apart from the FES, there are some more German political foundations on site with their own offices – namely the Konrad-Adenauer-Foundation, the Friedrich-Naumann-Foundation for Liberty (FNF) and the Hanns-Seidel-Foundation (HSS). The Heinrich-Boell-Foundation and the Rosa-Luxemburg-Foundations are looking for options to open up offices in Egypt. The FNF, affiliated with the FDP, has no work line of its own when it comes to the advancement of women, but has a constant eye on women and gender aspects in their activities. Same applies for the HSS in whose project work women do play an important role, partially also as an explicit target group, however, they do not have a separate women’s project.

KAS, i.e. Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, affiliated with the CDU in contrary has done a lot of work in the field of the advancement of women in Egypt, the office’s activities were, however, temporarily stopped since the beginning of 2012 in the context of a criminal trial against them. KAS initiated a working focus “Advancement of Women” in 1996 which started with a multiannual cooperation with the on-site partner organization Alliance of Arab Women in order to promote the female candidates for
the regional parliaments during their campaigns but also with the support of elected female members of the regional parliaments, as well as the promotion of female candidates for the general elections. On top of that, KAS intensively supported the development of the Egyptian Centre for Women Rights from 1998 on and had a co-operation with this non-governmental organization until the end of last year. During this co-operation for instance courses and workshops in relation to the constitutional referendum in 2011 were conducted. In this context, too, KAS conducted courses for the promotion of female candidates during the campaigns for the Egyptian parliament and the regional parliaments. Between 2002 and 2007, KAS also cooperated with a subgroup of the National Women’s Council, the Women Business Centre, concerning programs for the promotion of economic development for Egyptian Women.

From 2005 until the end of 2011, KAS used to work with another small non-governmental organization, the Development Program for Women and Children, intensified in the provinces of Upper Egypt in the field of such diverse topics like family and inheritance issues, violence against women, economic subjects, the electoral law, women quota and others.

**Prospect**

*Examples of the Promotion of Women Conducted by FES from the Region of the Near / Middle East and Northern Africa*

In 2010 and 2011, the topics compatibility of family and work, labour market policy and social security were the central issues in the Near and Middle East and Northern Africa. FES used to have a close co-operation with the Gender coordination of the Department of Labour about the modernization of the labour and socio-political set of tools. Particularly in the traditionally Islamic influenced societies of the region the significant gender differences have to be taken into account in this context: women are still being discriminated in the fields of professional education, occupation, career and payment which limit the access to the social insurance benefits which depend on employment relationships. Thus the women’s specific problems in the employment market were the focus of this co-operation with the Moroccan Department of Labour.
In Sudan, first of all workshops were held out of the capital Khartoum in order to fathom the consequences of the new law of civil status. FES Sudan held several workshops together with the most different social groups to work out alternatives to the law of civil status in order to be able to interfere in the legislation process. The objective of this project was on one side to raise awareness of the gender gap in the law of civil status and consequently in the families and the society among legal players, women’s groups and the civil society in general. It was on the other hand intended to trigger a debate about the forced marriage of juveniles and the access to education for girls also out of the capital Khartoum. In addition, FES was looking for new partner organizations for this topic out of Khartoum.

**Summary**

The question what Germany and Europe can contribute to stable and gender equal societies in the Near and Middle East as well as Northern Africa, has to be considered from different point of views. For FES, the on-site involvement is a balancing act. The foundation wants to support specific groups and tendencies which are close concerning their ideology, does, however, meet certain limits especially with a local office. Before the upheavals and during the authoritarian regime of Mubarak, the foundation could operate only restrictedly in the important fields of the promotion of democracy and political education and thus shifted weight to the just as important, however, politically less charged topics economic and social system. The working area women’s rights and the political participation of women was always on the spot during the past years but it was a two-edged affair as FES was acting in a conflict of aims’ relation of tension. On one hand, FES wanted to go in for the advancement of women but on the other hand the foundation also stood for the promotion of a political pluralism. An illustrative example: those female candidates who became members of the parliament via the already mentioned female quota in 2010 and who were in this context trained by the FES, were all members of the former ruling party NDP.

Now, after the upheavals, the restrictions for FES’ on-site work in the field of the advancement of women are different. The foundations’ work as well as the work of other international players are considered as an alien and unwelcome interfering in
national affairs and meets considerable distrust by the political representatives and a major part of the people. In addition, particularly the work in the field of the advancement of women and equal rights for women and men is considered as being against the Egyptian traditions, mainly by Islamist players.

A close cooperation with local partner organizations which are ingrained in the respective society is imperative on this fine line which the foundation’s work walks in relation to the advancement of women, however, also in general.
Program

Thursday  19th of July 2012

10:00       Press Conference at the Women’s Academy

19:00 – 21:00 Reading and discussion with Arab Writers
Salwa Bakr, Cairo, Egypt
Mai Khaled, Cairo, Egypt
Faten Mukarker, Beit Jala/Bethlehem, Palestinian Authority (PA)

Interpreter: Firouz Bohnhoff

Friday  20th of July 2012

10:00 – 10:30 Welcome
Birgit Erbe, Women’s Academy Munich, Germany
Christina Eder, Department of Arts and Culture, City of Munich

Opening
Monika Renner, City Council, Munich, Germany

Introduction
Jagoda Rosul-Gajic, Women’s Academy Munich, Germany

10:30 – 12:00 Panel 1
Presentations and Discussions

Arab World in transition – background information
Mitra Moussa Nabo, Universität der Bundeswehr München, Germany

Spotlight: Israel/Palestine
Peaceful conflict resolution – opportunities and limits
Faten Mukarker, Activist and Author, Beit Jala/Bethlehem, (PA)

12:00 – 13:00 Lunch

13:00 – 14:30 Panel 2
Presentations and Discussions

Spotlight: Egypt
After the election of presidency – prospects for gender equality?
Dr. Basma Abd El Aziz, Ministry of Health and El Nadeem centre, Egypt

Improvement of Women’s Political Participation?
Yahia Zaied, Nazra for Feminist Studies, Egypt
14:30 – 16:30  **Workshops: Exchange and Networking**

**Evolving conceptions of pluralism in Islam and the future of women’s rights in post revolutionary Libya**
Sara Bergamaschi, , Femin Ijtihad, Afghanistan

**Women in Syria**
Noor Alchikh Oughlili, University Rovira i Virgili, Spain

**Voices of Tahrir** (film)
Negar Taymoorzadeh, Marburg, Germany

16:30 – 17:00  Coffee Break

17:00 – 19:00  **Panel 3**
**Panel discussion**

**Transformations processes in the Arab World:**
**The role of EU and Germany in North Africa**
with:
Salwa Bakr, Cairo, Egypt
Dr. Basma Abd El Aziz, Ministry of Health and El Nadeem centre, Egypt
Dr. Atef Botros, Philipps-Universität Marburg, Germany

Facilitator: Jutta Prediger, Bayerischer Rundfunk, Munich, Germany

**Saturday  21st of July 2012**

10:00 – 12:00  **Panel 4**
**Presentations and Discussions**

**The Situation of Women in Iran**
Shadi Sadr, Justice for Iran, London, UK

**German foundations’ field work**
Seija Sturies, Friedrich Ebert Foundation, Cairo, Egypt

12:00 – 12:30  **Conclusion**

12:30  End of the Conference
Speakers, Presenters and Hosts

Dr. Basma Abd El Aziz, psychiatrist, activist and writer from Cairo. She works for the Egyptian Department of Health and is an activist of El Nadeem Center, an association for the psychotherapeutic and social rehab of victims of violence. She publishes books, short stories and subject documentaries.

Salwa Bakr, Egyptian writer. She lives in Cairo where she is considered as one of the country’s leading writers and an advocate of the intercultural dialog between the Arab and the Western world. The women’s situation in Egypt is the focus of her literary works which include novels and tales.

Dr. Atef Botros, Arabist and scientific assistant at the University of Marburg’s centre of Near and Middle East Studies. His research areas are the democratic transformation in Egypt and the patterns of the resistance in arts and literature. Additionally to research and teaching he founded the transnational network of political education and free arts in Egypt called: "Mayadin al-Tahrir e.V."

Sara Bergamaschi, was born and raised in Modena, Italy. She works for the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ / German Association of International Cooperation). Ms Bergamaschi studied political sciences in Berlin and Paris, focusing the regions of the Near East and Northern Africa. She used to work for several international organizations like UNICEF and UNWFP. In October last year she joined Femin Ijtihad, a promising organization for women’s rights, based in Afghanistan. Representing Femin Ijtihad, she delivered a lecture about the Libyan research project.

Christina Eder, subject specialist for urban cultures, cross-cultural issues and gender studies in the Department of Arts and Culture of the state capital Munich.

Birgit Erbe, Certified political scientist, M.A. in Race and Ethnic Studies, CEO of the FAM Frauenakademie München e.V., primary areas: gender equality, gender
budgeting, women in science, European integration processes, gender and intercultural.

**Mai Khaled**, writer, literary translator, radio and TV journalist. She was host of a number of English-speaking TV shows. Mai Khaled represented the Arab Female Writers’ association in local and nationwide meetings and conferences.

**Anna Mazi**, certified social pedagogue, coming from Greece, elected member of the Advisory Board of Foreigners, Munich.

**Mitra Moussa Nabo**, was born in Aleppo/Syria. Mr. Nabo is scientific assistant at the chair of international politics and conflict research (with Prof. Dr. Stephan Stetter), University of the German Armed Forces, Munich. His research focuses on the problems of the international governance, resp. regional security research, particularly regional security complexes in the Near and Middle East.

**Faten Mukarker**, Palestine peace activist and writer. The Christian Palestinian was born in Bethlehem and grew up in Germany. She is living in Beit Jala near Bethlehem. In her book „Leben zwischen Grenzen“ (A Life Between Limits) she tells about the barriers for women – caused by religion and politics. Mrs. Mukarker often comes to Germany where she gives lectures and reports about her compatriots’ situation.

**Noor Alchikh Oughlli**, from Damaskus, Syria. She is a scientific assistant and PhD student at the UNESCO chair of intercultural dialogue in the Mediterranean region at the Rovira i Virgili University and is currently living in Tarragona, Spain. Ms Noor Alchikh Oughlli is currently working as a guest lecturer at the UN University in Bonn.

**Jutta Prediger**, presenter of the program „Notizbuch“ on radio station 2 of the Bayerischer Rundfunk, Munich.
Monika Renner, council member in Munich since 1990, German Social Democratic Party. Committed to e.g. the further development of strategies for the achievement of gender equality.

Jagoda Rosul-Gajic, M.A. political sciences, member of the FAM Frauenakademie München e.V. - team, focussing on peace and conflict studies, gender and feminist analysis of international relations.

Shadi Sadr, lawyer from Iran, activist for human rights and journalist. The well-known lawyer and feminist activist was arrested in Iran on July 17, 2009 when she participated in a protest rally. The exiled woman from Iran was awarded for the „International Women of Courage Award 2010". In 2009 she was received the Lech Walesa Award as well as the Netherland human rights award "Human Rights Defenders Tulip". In London she founded the organisation for human rights „Justice for Iran”.

Seija Sturies, project assistant in the international office of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) in Egypt. She supports e.g. the office’s activity field of promotion of women / gender. Before that she was a scientific assistant at the Deutsche Jugendinstitut (DJI, German Youth Institute) where she dealt with the effects of Salafist offers on young people in Germany. She studied Islamic studies, political sciences and Arabic studies (M.A.) at the Freie Universität Berlin and intensively dealt with reform-Islamic tendencies as well as the gender relations in the Islamic law of civil status.

Negar Taymoorzadeh, studied Gender Studies, Islamic studies and Romance studies in Hamburg, Buenos Aires, Istanbul and Cairo. Her research focuses on Gender and the democratic transformation in the Egyptian context. Ms Taymoorzadeh is an active member of the Mayadin al-Tahrir-Network.

Yahia Zaied,coordinates the Nara for Feminist Studies - project „Women into Politics“ in Cairo. He is an activist for human rights and focusing on gender issues, minority rights and the strengthening of marginalized groups.