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Publisher: Routledge

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UK



International Feminist Journal of Politics

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rfjp20>

Turning the Gendered Politics of the Security State Inside Out?

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Available online: 12 Aug 2011

To cite this article: Paul Amar (2011): Turning the Gendered Politics of the Security State Inside Out?, *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 13:3, 299-328

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14616742.2011.587364>

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Turning the Gendered Politics of the Security State Inside Out?

CHARGING THE POLICE WITH SEXUAL HARASSMENT IN EGYPT

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Abstract

This article analyzes sexual harassment politics in the global south as a crucial laboratory for testing and reformulating the mix of emancipatory and repressive governance practices that constitute contemporary gender-sensitive 'human security' regimes. In Egypt, between 2003 and 2010, internationalist feminist campaigns advocated anti-harassment projects that demonized working-class youth masculinities as well as 'disreputable' public femininities in an attempt to intensify the policing of the city and discipline public sociability. Through a politics of respectability and 'strange bed-fellow' processes of NGO-ization, this state-allied, pro-enforcement project demobilized class-based movements for democratic change. By contrast, inventive Egyptian organizations adapted UN gender doctrines and legal mechanisms to their own purposes, mobilizing mass campaigns that critiqued frameworks of police protection and social respectability. They cultivated forms of assertive female agency that came to occupy center-stage during the recent Egyptian Revolution of January and February of 2011. By contrasting these forms of global/local feminist organizing, this article reveals the queering power of new metaphors of masculinity, class struggle and global female insecurity. The conclusion generates a critical theory of security-state practice and illuminates alternative global-south feminisms that contest rather than facilitate securitized and militarized appropriations of internationalist gender and security interventions.

Keywords

gender, security, masculinity, Egypt, feminism, harassment, human rights, international law, police brutality, international relations, Middle East

The security forces appeared from behind and front. We started running, and security police in civilian clothes ('*baltagiya*') started grabbing randomly many young men and women. I saw them grab and beat a young innocent man, pushed him to the ground and kept kicking. I protested against the beating up, and kept screaming at them to stop acting like animals. 4 or 5 huge men grabbed me from my hair and said 'well join him you bitch' and slapped me on the face and cornered me next to the young man and kept hitting me on my head, arm shoulder, back, stepping on my head with their shoes until I bled from my mouth and could not speak any more on the ground. . . . They threw us all in the microbus. And while pushing me inside they were trying to pull off my clothes and sexually harassed me, one grabbed my breasts, another held my waist, and another grabbed my bottom. They grabbed the mobile from me, then threw me to the asphalt road. Despite the pain, I will go on protesting.

– Mona Prince, Egyptian writer and university professor, during protests during the 'Day of Rage' on 25 January 2011 (Prince 2011).

Egyptians! Four people set themselves on fire because they hated the security agencies and did not fear the fire. Four people set themselves on fire in order for you to awaken. We are on fire so that you will take action . . . I have no intention of destroying myself, but if you police will set me on fire, go ahead! Because I am not leaving Tahrir Square.

– Asmaa Mahfouz, young woman leader of the 6 April national labor movement, leading a protest in Tahrir Square on 18 January 2011, video of which 'went viral' in Egypt and helped spark mass uprising on 25 January (Mahfouz 2011b).

The uprisings and mass protests that occupied Tahrir Square in central Cairo between 25 January and 15 February 2011 were haunted by the figure of 'sexual harassment' or, to put it more accurately, the sexualized assault and terrorization of women activists. Gender-sensitive coverage of the revolution by Egyptian, as well as Western, media outlets focused on two forms of representation. One was that Tahrir Square represented a utopian space that forged a new gendered social contract (El-Saadawi 2011) and hosted a new 'model for how democracy should be' (Naib 2011). There, Egypt's rich and poor, men and women, people and state, struggled to establish and perform a new concord based on mutual respect and human dignity, with assertive women youth activists as primary articulators of this concord. On the eve of what would become a revolution, Asmaa Mahfouz (cited in the epigraph above) summoned Egyptians to Tahrir Square. She did not claim the international subject of 'woman victim' in order to decry human rights violations and to plead for police and legal protections. Instead she described herself metaphorically as an 'Egyptian on fire'. Explicitly not a suicide bomber, Mahfouz recounted how her fire – her rage and righteousness and political passion – was dismissed as hysteria, madness and shame by the State Security officers and thugs who attacked her initial, small protests. She presented herself as a fearless, unprotected woman in public channeling the 'manhood' (*rugula*) of Egypt through political action, in order to make legible the violence

of the state and challenge the security state's manipulation of notions of gendered honor. 'Show your honor and manhood and come down to Tahrir on 25 January. If not, then you are a traitor to the nation, like the police and the President are traitors' (Mahfouz 2011a).

In a second set of representations wholly incompatible with those above, Tahrir served as the mosh pit for a hypermasculine mob where Orientalist tropes of the 'Arab street' were bottled-up and concentrated, a space constantly bursting with predatory sexuality and not disciplined enough to articulate either coherent leadership or policy. These latter, phobic representations were tempered for a time after plain-clothes police and Mubarak-allied thugs viciously attacked CNN journalist Anderson Cooper (Hajjar 2011). In the wake of this attack, journalists articulated a tentative new discourse in which brutality in Egypt, including sexualized brutality, was seen as an instrument of state terror deployed tactically by the police state, rather than as a cultural attribute shared by all male Arabs. But just a few days later, when a similar attack was made against South African CBS correspondent Lara Logan, most of what had been learned during the analysis of the attack on Mr Cooper was suddenly forgotten (Lindsey 2011; Kurtz 2011). Instead, Ms Logan's blondeness and femininity were incessantly underlined, and the discourse of the 'frenzied' Arab mob and its uncontrollable sexuality returned with a vengeance (South/South 2011: 5). Fox News condemned the entire Egyptian people as not yet ready for modernity or democracy, with Glenn Beck insisting that the incident proved his theory that the uprisings were backed by an 'Islamofascist' conspiracy (Easley 2011). Media reports did not consider that the harassers could have been plain clothes paramilitaries or sub-contracted thugs sent by State Security to attack internationals as they had been doing for weeks or that the attacks could have been stirred up by the incessant government propaganda insisting that 'imperialist journalists' should be challenged and humiliated. Instead, the media ignored the issue of the security state and its practices. The predatory culture of Muslim men became the talking point. No reporters followed up on the fact that Logan had been rescued by a group of Egyptian young women political activists and twenty male military officers. Were these subjects not also representative of Egypt, 'Muslim culture' and the revolution?

The study below will not focus exclusively on the recent Tahrir protests or on the hypervisibility of the Lara Logan incident and the similar controversies surrounding the International Women's Day march on 8 March 2011 that followed (although I will revisit this briefly in the conclusion). Instead, I will set these controversies into the deeper social-historical context of women's movements around urban public sociability, sexualized state terror and the policing of what is called 'sexual harassment' (*at-taharrush al-jinsi*) in Egypt's public and political spaces. In this light, the progressive achievements of the recent Egyptian Revolution can be seen as driven in significant part by the ingenuity of Egyptian feminist activists who have mobilized new kinds of assertive women's subjectivities. By critiquing the sexual agenda of police-state repression

while also deconstructing the class and geopolitical interests behind international *and local* discourses that portray working-class Arab men and Islamic cultures as inherently predatory. These agendas have been forged at the contentious intersection of regional and subaltern, as well as UN system, forms of feminist mobilization.

In the year 2000, the UN Security Council (UNSCR) passed resolution 1325 on 'Women, Peace, and Security', designed to assure the inclusion of women in military – humanitarian deployments and to legalize international armed interventions in response to rape, femicide and sexual violence in situations of armed conflict, as well as in the context of peacekeeping operations (Shepherd 2008). In May 2003, UNSCR 1325 was cited in the preamble to UNSCR 1483, authorizing the US invasion of Iraq. This weaponized the gender/security resolution as 'a tool to justify military occupation on behalf of "liberating" women' (Cohn et al. 2004: 138). And, by 2009, UNSCR 1325 was being cited in Egypt as a precedent for deploying police and state-of-emergency powers in order to protect women, in the local context, from street harassment. In 2005, the United Nations Development Program's 'Arab Human Development Report' (which, in the past twenty years, has become the much-debated *porteparole* of liberal – secular – cosmopolitan voices in the Middle East) focused its entire volume on 'The Rise of Women in the Arab World' (Regional Bureau for Arab States, UNDP 2006). The report identified the problems of sexual harassment of women and the discriminatory attitudes of Arab men as priority 'human security' concerns, marking the continuing metamorphosis from the ambit of war, genocide and state terror towards the spheres of morality, personal attitudes and quotidian class/gender violence. In July 2010, at the Regional Workshop for Arab Parliaments,¹ women parliamentarians discussing the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) spent much of their time fine-tuning legislative language around sexual harassment and sex trafficking. Despite the fact that they were meeting in Beirut – a city troubled by bursts of renewed sectarian violence and protests led by immigrant women domestic laborers and rebuilding in the wake of Israeli bombing raids – the parliamentarians discussing violence against women ignored the looming questions of war, refugees and labor migration as women's issues and instead highlighted the cultural problems of Arab men committing sexual harassment in city streets, which they termed a 'human security' priority. As analyzed by Sally Engle Merry (2003: 943), CEDAW is:

a cultural system whose coin is admission into the international community of human-rights compliant states. At the heart of this legal process of monitoring this international human rights convention is the cultural work of altering the meanings of gender and of state responsibility for gender equality [through which] national and international NGOs . . . shame noncompliant governments [whose] sovereignty was increasingly defined as contingent on its human rights performance.

But what does this securitization of feminist humanitarianism and its politics of shame look like on the ground, in the quotidian fabric of class conflict, gender power and authoritarian politics in the security states of today's Middle East? Findings from research, conducted during four stays in Cairo between 2003 and 2010, indicate that, in the area of providing security for and preventing violence against women, UN policy consensus and the practice of its government and NGO allies has gravitated away from war and macroeconomic development toward daily life and morality. And within this sphere of daily life, policy is shifting away from a *private space and cultural backwardness model* that had focused on policing domestic violence, protecting individual dignity in the workplace and reforming aberrant 'cultural practices', such as genital mutilation, honor crimes, misogynist personal status laws, etc. Instead, we have witnessed a move in internationalist feminism toward a *public space and social deviance model* (or 'urban vice' model) concerned with enforcing access to public space, reforming public masculinities and moralizing and desexualizing urban quality of life. Of course, these two models of intervention – culturalist and urbanist – are not mutually exclusive and have overlapping historical and social origins. For example in the high-colonial period of 1880–1930, transnational temperance and 'anti-white slave' campaigns piggybacked on colonial and missionary governance projects that fused feminist internationalism, Protestant moralism and working-class phobic policing efforts (Jacobs 2005). This is not to say that the contemporary reascendance of 'urban vice' forms within international feminist anti-violence politics simply reflects colonial continuity. Instead, the articulation of this politics indicates that coloniality informs broader changes in the nature of security-state governance today. Here, I will present findings on how this 'public space and social deviance model' has been taken up by the security state in Egypt and particularly how the figure of sexual harassment became a nodal controversy for addressing (and deflecting) issues of labor mobility, police brutality, class conflict, youth alienation and social disintegration in an increasingly polarized polity. It is novel and broadly significant that these urban efforts which merged *juridical* forms of protection (enforcement of rights) and *cultural* forms of protection (disciplining of respectability) were legitimized by, and tied into, new international law efforts to regulate warfare and to deploy emergency UN security and humanitarian interventions around the figure of the woman, as scripted and deployed by class relations and security-state governance in Egypt.

CONCEPTUAL SHIFTS

Until today, the hegemonic framework for analyzing the rise of human rights internationalism has been through studies of agents of dissemination and routes of diffusion from north to south. These studies have provided insights into the emergence of the modern form of human rights internationalism in

Europe after World War II, the mobilization of coalitions that articulated those norms into codified international doctrines, treaties and resolutions around the United Nations and the social movements, cultural discourses and communicative networks that channeled these norms toward the post-colonial, non-democratic world (Sikkink 1993; Finnemore and Sikkink 1998; Lutz and Sikkink 2000; Steiner et al. 2008). Studies of diffusion have focused on the achievement of certain 'tipping points' where gender/security norms are accepted by a critical mass of relevant government actors allowing for a 'norm cascade' to rain down and facilitate processes of institutionalization and internalization. Felicity Hill (2005: 59) argues that UNSCR 1325 generated its 'tipping point' through NGO-organized public campaigns, report writing and individual meetings with Security Council members and UN fora. However, what if the norm cascade occurs when these discourses are appropriated, resignified and built into subjects of power at various scales, rather than when public campaigns at the top rain enlightenment down on backward institutions in global south or at the local level?

The dissemination model or 'globalization-as-Enlightenment' model, in general, has come under criticism from two sides in the past two decades. One cluster of critical scholarship focuses on the Western colonial character and imperialist imperatives that may be attached to the dissemination of liberal political rights. Human rights are seen as divorced from (or opposed to) global struggles for economic and social rights, and unconscious of (or reproducing) the racial, colonial, religious and cultural prejudices embedded within Western legalities and identities (Cobbah 1987; Mohanty 1988; Mutua 2001; Massad 2002).

Another cluster of scholarship has focused on international human rights doctrines and resolutions as spheres of contention, sets of signifying practices and repertoires of tools that have no 'ideal form' or singular direction of dissemination, nor one meaning or legacy that would maintain them as exclusive property of the West (An-Na'im 1995, 1996; Orford 2003; Slyomovics 2005; Goodale 2006; Grewal and Kaplan 2006; Merry and Goodale 2007; Grewal 2008). These latter clusters of critical scholarship demonstrate that human rights and international law can be reworked and rearticulated by struggles and signifying practices in the global south that do not set aside or ignore colonial legacies, military imperatives or the liberal limitations of 'disseminated' human rights internationalism. Instead, they raise consciousness about these legacies or render them politically legible and recognizable. In doing so, they remake human rights politics by rearticulating it with alternative struggles explicitly linked to class, development, religious and cultural justice.

This study builds upon this latter set of approaches. As such, I do not trace the routes of missionaries and disseminators, nor do I spotlight the 'Westernness' of human rights internationalism in a way that reproduces simplistic notions of the unitary power of the West. Instead, I will identify processes of appropriation, resignification and contradiction in the dense space of social,

cultural and urban-spatial intersections in the global south, revealing the clashing ways that UN resolutions and international feminist human rights doctrines materialize in the context of class inequalities, institutional conflicts, cultural innovations and complex matrices of governance. I will draw upon an 'urban geopolitics' approach (Graham 2004) and upon the praxis of Egyptian feminists themselves (Seif Al-Dawla 2008; Ilahi 2010; Hassan 2011a) to develop a political sociology of state deployments of class, youth and masculinity around the enforced protection of women in order to map the securitization of 'war on terror' era feminist internationalisms. I do this by examining the lively subaltern political spheres in the megacity of Cairo, those that gave rise to the contradictory deployments of gendered protection and violation practices during the Egyptian revolution itself.

EXPLAINING CONCEPTS AND NEW TERMS

In this project, I draw upon theories of race and coloniality to develop notions of the 'logic of hypervisibility' and to relate this logic to the process that critical international relations theory calls 'securitization'. I explain that these formations give birth to 'parahuman subjects' which constitute the power of the 'human security state'. Conversations in critical race theory concerned with the logic of hypervisibility (Reddy 1998; Yancy 2008) focus on processes whereby racialized, sexualized subjects, or the marked bodies of subordinate classes, become intensely visible as objects of state, police and media gazes and as targets of fear and desire (what Frantz Fanon called phobogenic objectification processes or what Stuart Hall called moral panic encoding processes). Paradoxically, when subjects are hypervisibilized, they remain invisible as social beings: they are not recognizable as complex, legitimate, participatory subjects or citizens. One route for subjects to escape the logic of hypervisibility is to strive constantly for *respectability*. This route entails a historically class-phobic (demonizing the working class), gender essentialist moral practice consisting of self-disciplinary practices that are depoliticizing and aim for assimilation. In the late nineteenth century, the liberal-progressive politics of respectability was called 'temperance' and was linked to vice policing and the punitive moral reform of working women and boys. In the late twentieth century, respectability politics was associated with the promotion of values of civility and 'gender mainstreaming' in secular 'civil society'. This dovetailed with promotion of piety, gendered labor discipline and moral self-management by Islamic and Christian neoliberal movements. To state it simply, this strategy for moving from hypervisibility into respectability tends to naturalize social hierarchies and modes of governance.

However, other traditions of gender activism have developed more productive options for disarticulating the logic of hypervisibility. These tactics turn the gaze back on the state to reveal the interests, histories and power relations that generate certain race, sex and moral subjects and metaphors.

This supplants the logic of hypervisibility with a critical project of subversive recognition that can potentially rearticulate spheres of disciplinary power. This strategy, which I call 'critical desecuritization', does not count as a liberal theory of resistance since it does not pretend to predict how subaltern subjects will speak or act once their spectral or shadow characters as mythic figures of fear and desire begin to be dispelled. There is no progressive or liberal *telos* guaranteed, nor, on the other hand, is there any assumption that the response will be illiberal or religiously orthodox.

Since visibility metaphors cannot comprehend all the practices of the new formations of subjectification by human security regimes, let us turn to critical security studies terminology. The term 'securitization' emerged in the Copenhagen School for Peace Studies in the late 1990s (Buzan et al. 1998) in order to describe how political speech acts or media representations produce subjects of politics that are used to transfer everyday social, economic and cultural governance into the realm of emergency police enforcements and military occupations. These subjects I regroup into the category 'parahuman'. In relation to the study of colonial or postcolonial governance, the term parahuman has been utilized to refer to populations 'disabled' by racism and/or war. And genetic science and sci-fi discourse uses the term parahuman to refer to chimeras, mutant, or modified embryos; but my coining of this term is specific to the sphere of contemporary transnational security practices. I define this term as the semantic child of paramilitarization and humanitarianism; and, in turn, humanitarianism can be defined as securitized humanism. Humanism is deployed increasingly by semi-privatized, but state-serving, parastatal enforcement agencies. These include certain police-dependant or military-embedded NGOs. Parahuman subjects are thus hypervisibilized subalterns who become fetishized subjects of politics while their ability to act in emancipatory ways is buried by multiple intersecting modes of sexual, cultural, moral and social fantasy and discipline. I also utilize the term parahuman here in order to comprehend notions of both racializing and queering power.

Notions and categories of racial blackness or sexual orientation are not universal. Nevertheless, security doctrines and governance practices move transnationally to deploy and institute modes of embodiment composed of sexualized and bodily-marked fear and desire (Amar 2010: 1–15; Amar 2011c). In this light, securitized power is essentially about queering and racing subjects that are segregated by gender and culture. By 'queering' I do not mean the policing of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender (LGBT) or non-heteronormative populations or even the emancipatory reappropriation of those policed spaces by sexual dissidents. Rather, here I am interrogating 'queering' in one of its avatars, as a set of security-state practices that generate sexualized, criminalized and sanctioned subjects of social and moral panic. These subjectifications naturalize and justify the intensification of enforcement regimes and hierarchies, anchoring the coloniality of securitization. Thus, the intensity of queering is directly proportional to its sexualized

coloniality, not to its homosexuality. And progressive queer politics is then identified with performative recognitions and reversals of the processes of sexualized coloniality at the heart of security-state interventions. It may be useful to underline that in this framework that there is no 'real' non-queer or non-raced or non-colonial subject underneath the parahuman subjects of security. But this parahuman positionality can also be a nodal site for change. This position becomes an agent if analyses and narratives illuminate state and elite forces of subjectification, rendering queered subjects recognizable, articulate and legible; that is, if securitization dynamics are turned inside out.

In my work, sexuality is seen as the power grid of fear and desire engineered by the colonial humanitarianization of modern subjects of governance. In the context of sexualized human-security governance, subjectivity can become agentval by embracing submission to these subjectifying disciplines, where 'submission to forms of (external) authority is a condition for the self to achieve its potentiality', as Saba Mahmood (2005: 149) argues. This trajectory would include the process by which hypervisible subjects assimilate into apolitical invisibility via the practice of respectability. However, alternative feminist projects in Egypt can, and do, challenge the project of cultivating the ethical self or performing respectable sociality. Below, an examination of the complex politics of harassment, feminist internationalism and human-security state practice will put this conceptual and theoretical framework into action.

AS PROTESTS SURGED, THE SECURITY STATE REGENERATED

In the last two decades, waves of political protests and strikes have grown in Egypt, year by year. Those who have been following these uprisings were not surprised by the revolutionary events of 2011. Since the International Monetary Fund restructuring agreement of 1994 and the Asian Financial Crisis of 1997, Egyptian farmers have protested at being evicted from their smallholdings by the mechanization of agriculture and by the reclaiming of estates by pre-revolutionary landowning classes. Workers' groups have been reorganized and have held nation-wide strikes and sit-ins in response to the privatization of factories, the closing of manufacturing collectives (Beinin 2011) and the liberalization of trade with China, Russia and the EU. Social movements, the Muslim Brothers, and judges' syndicates have challenged political exclusion and authoritarian rule. And feminist groups – middle-class seculars, Islamic feminists, working-class populists, and others – have grown more visible and central to protest movements and as legal, cultural and political innovators. Working-class women have often been the most organized and have often generated the majority force behind the national strikes and mass protests that lead to the 25 January Revolution of 2011 (Amar 2011b).

In the period between 2003 and 2006, levels of mass public protests in Cairo escalated dramatically, driven by the renaissance of an Arab nationalist

sentiment and anti-war mobilization caused by outrage at the US invasion of Iraq and the Israeli raid on Lebanon. Both of these centered on the bombing of civilian targets and infrastructures, inflicting mass casualties largely ignored and rendered invisible by US and Israeli media coverage, but covered extensively in the Arab media. This period also witnessed the rise of a new assertiveness among political opposition parties and the formation of new fronts and alliances among leftists, liberals and democratic Islamists in Egypt aiming to end the three decade-long state of emergency (initiated after the assassination of President Sadat in 1981) and to identify alternative presidential candidates to replace President Muhammad Hosni Mubarak and to block the accession of his son, Gamal.

The security state's initial response to the rising tide of protests during the 1990s was to attempt to delegitimize, intimidate and blur both the image and message of these movements by infiltrating and surrounding them with plain-clothes thugs, deputized by police and paramilitary security forces. Whereas in the 1990s, *baltagiya* (the gangs of 'thugs' and networks of violent extortion rackets seen as emanating from the informal settlements surrounding downtown Cairo) were identified as terrorist enemies of the security state (Ismail 2006: 145), by the 2000s, the *baltagiya* had been appropriated as useful tools of the police. The Interior Ministry recruited these same gangs to flood public spaces during times of protest (Tisdall 2006). They were ordered to mix with protestors and shout extremist slogans in order to make the activists look like 'terrorists'; or, alternately, to wreak havoc, beating civilians and doing property damage in the area of the protest, while, of course, brutalizing the protesters themselves (El-Nadeem 2006). These practices aimed to produce what I call the *baltagi-effect*. This effect not only terrorized the protestors, but also generated new images for domestic and international media and criminological narratives for international security agencies and local law enforcement. Protesters were resignified as crazed mobs of brutal men, vaguely 'Islamist' and fiercely irrational, depicted according to the conventions of nineteenth-century colonial - Orientalist figurations of the savage 'Arab street' (Bayat 2003; Lynch 2003). And protesters became targeted as assemblages of hypersexualized terrorist masculinities. As analyzed so vividly by Jasbir Puar (2007), these masculinities are configured as the necessary and co-dependent constituents of twenty-first-century forms of both liberal incorporation and geopolitical domination. In Egypt, the security state thus deployed and revived the Islamophobic, gendered and working-class phobic metaphor of the 'Arab street', rendering peaceful political movements with overwhelming public support into hypervisible, but utterly unrecognizable, mobs. The production of such hypervisible parahuman subjects is regularized by discourses that cohere around powerful metaphors (Carver and Pikalo 2008): in this case, I focus on the overarching metaphor of the 'Arab street', whose meaning is enhanced by a field of other gender and culture metaphors; in particular, the 'time-bomb', 'predator' and the 'slum'.

In response to the challenge of the public spectacle of this orchestrated *baltagi-effect*, or Arab street-effect, in the 2000s, Egyptian feminists generated

plans to publicly deploy gender and class-specific protests in order to resist the performative cultivation of terroristic hypermasculinity by the Egyptian security state. Since the staging of 'terrorist-mob' performances depended on the powerful colonial metaphors attached to the bodies of brutal working-class men, Egyptian progressive organizations realized that placing 'respectable' (i.e. upper-middle class) women in mass protests could play a crucial symbolic role. This is not because of anything essential to the gender or political subjectivity of this class of women, but because they were deployed in specific strategic relation to the metaphor of the hypermasculine 'Arab street'. Women's intervention in public space became politically powerful because the human-security state had invested so intensively in generating and hypervisibilizing women as subjects of piety, self-policing, moralization and cultural security. In this context, activists theorized that when women (particularly those visibly marked by class and/or moral bearing as pious and respectable) stand up against the police, rather than collaborate with them, the logic of hypervisibility and misrecognition could be subverted, to some extent (El-Nadeem 2006; Al-Dawla 2008).

In addition to this gendered security-state dynamic, women political protesters in Egypt draw upon a social history of Arab nationalist modernity that has embodied the nation in the figure of the woman (particularly the respectable, literate middle-class mother) (Baron 2007; El Shakry 2007: 165–96). So when women professors, medical doctors, lawyers, university students and syndicate leaders began to command the barricades at major political protests, it became difficult for the state to draw upon class and geopolitical phobias to portray them as terrorists; and the thugification tactic or *baltagi*-effect unraveled. Granted, the international media, and even many Egyptian reporters, could easily believe that crazed thugs could emerge 'naturally' from within a group of working-class male leftists and Islamists. However, when middle-class Egyptian women were harassed, terrorized and brutalized by men during protests, this allowed for a disarticulation of the body politic of the protesters from that of the brutalizers, enabling a recognition that the *baltagiya* were cops in plain clothes, not men from within the dissident organizations.

This strategic placement of certain classed and gendered bodies at the forefront of protests successfully eroded the 'Arab mob' metaphor. The state responded by shifting its aims from using demonized masculinity in order to delegitimize political opposition to using state-imposed sexual aggression in order to undermine class respectability. Women who protested were sexualized and had their respectability wiped out: not just by innuendo and accusation, but literally, by sexually assaulting them in public and by arresting them as prostitutes, registering them in court records and press accounts as sex criminals and then raping and sexually torturing them in jail (El-Nadeem Center 2004, 2006; Tisdall 2006). The aim was to render impossible the figure of the respectable, pious woman who is a legitimate protestor against the police rather than a victim protected or rescued by the police. Any woman who protested would be juridically categorized as a prostitute, given a police file

and criminal record and would have their body and psychological integrity broken (Al-Dawla 2008).

EL-NADEEM COUNTERS THE GENDER PROJECT OF THE SECURITY STATE

In this section I will identify and map an Egyptian feminist approach to the politics of sexualized violence against women. This approach re-scripts the roles of women activists in three ways: (1) they are rendered expert disassemblers of respectability discourse, rather than victims of shame and dishonor; (2) they are interpellated as laborers conscious of the violence of class repression and how those battles take place in public space rather than as gendered consumers unmarked by class; and (3) they are imagined as physically assertive challengers to the police state who strive to apprehend and illuminate the state's and elites' complicity in generating and exploiting hypervisible subjects of masculinity, femininity and respectability. I will then describe how this innovative mobilizing framework was confronted by the backlash of internationally-linked anti-harassment NGOs in Egypt who deployed a more standard middle-class, law enforcement-centered rescue-protection framework. Then I will end by describing how the alternative Egyptian feminisms rejected class respectability and police protection modes and instead remapped other organs of state and public power around assertive public femininities, and how these articulated themselves in the battles with the police state during the 25 January Revolution.

As a primary articulator of this 'alternative feminism', the El-Nadeem Center for the Rehabilitation of Victims of Violence in Cairo (which I will refer to as 'El-Nadeem') led national and international campaigns to expose the state's efforts to assault the respectability of its most effective dissidents through systematic sexual violence, in the period 2003–9. El-Nadeem is not a typical NGO in Egypt, for it has systematically resisted trends toward 'NGO-ization' (Alvarez 2009: 175–7). It does not seek to 'modernize' women or to realize cultural or development projects. Instead, El-Nadeem offers direct psychological and medical aid to victims of police harassment in the streets and victims of torture in prison, particularly to women or others whose harassment or torture displays a gendered or sexualized dimension (El-Nadeem Center 1998a, 2002). El-Nadeem has never become 'NGOized' or appropriated by the state or neoliberal agendas. But the price of this independence has been that it has suffered repeated raids and intimidation.² Sabine Lang (1997) defines NGOization as the process by which radical and redistributive movements, including feminism, become contained and reframed so as to service rather than to resist neoliberal globalization. Islah Jad (2007: 175), in 'The NGOization of Arab Women's Movements', argued that 'NGOization has a cultural dimension, spreading values that favor dependency, lack of self-reliance, and new modes of consumption'; NGOization leads away from the

generation of ideological alternatives, toward *ad hoc*, project-based development (Morena 2006).

Anna Marie Smith, when looking at the ‘reform’ of the welfare state in the United States, has traced an equivalent process whereby states withdraw from redistributive policies and intensify moral policing of class-inflected, racialized and sexualized gender. The participation of women’s NGOs in this project is essential for the ideological construction of this process as ‘a vehicle for the delivery of therapeutic intervention’, when they would otherwise be read as deploying punitive and disempowering mechanisms (Smith 2007: 4–5). According to Kristin Bumiller (2008: xii), when ‘sexual violence became important to the agenda of the “therapeutic state” . . . the feminist movement became a partner in the unforeseen growth of a criminalized society, a phenomenon with negative consequences . . . for those women who are subject to scrutiny’. Janet Halley (2006) calls this political project ‘governance feminism’, where certain feminists operate through state projects in alliance with World Bank and police officials, deploying a three-pronged governmentality that she calls the *injury triad*: female harm (victim subjects), female innocence (class-marked and infantilized subjects), and male immunity (predator subjects). This injury triad ‘places its feminism in a position to trump all players and all contesting visions . . . Objectively verified and morally absolute, the Injury Triad comes in as the *a priori* of politics’ (Halley 2006: 338–9).

Seeing through these critical lenses, we can reframe the struggles around NGOization of the women’s anti-violence movement in Egypt as the institutionalization of a class-specific *politics of respectability* (Stoler 1989; Balos and Fellows 1999; White 2001). Respectability politics does the governance work of queering vulgar subjects of disrespect that are essentially racialized (or embodied as parahuman) and then sexualized as targets for rescue and therapeutic intervention, reviving colonial practices of social control in the guise of emancipatory civil society action. This process makes up what UN doctrine and Egyptian state discourse constitute as ‘human security’ deployments (Amar 2011c). As analyzed from two distinct directions by Jacqui Alexander (1994) and Karen Booth (2004), the nationalist politics of respectability among the post-colonial ruling classes in the semi-periphery of the global south can appropriate a certain feminist politics of gendered respect that reproduces colonial notions of class distinction and generates its own menagerie of queer targets for discipline, spectacle and punishment.

In much of the critical gender studies scholarship on the politics of rights in the Muslim world, the history and power of ‘respectability politics’ has dropped out of analysis. For example, the groundbreaking work of Saba Mahmood (2005: 2) has analyzed women’s mosque-based ‘piety circles’ that teach scripture, shape behavior and moralize social relations in a way ‘considered germane to the cultivation of the ideal virtuous self’. Mahmood finds these practices that emphasize moral subjects who perfect their own conformity to rules to be radically non-Western and incompatible with international feminist traditions of the liberal subject of rights, autonomy and self-emancipation.

One can complement and extend this argument, reinserting the politics of piety into the long tradition of the state's involvement in disciplining the respectability of the nation's women. After all, the Egyptian state, until 2011, did appoint all imams in Egypt and also carefully controlled mosque sermons. Given this context, perhaps we need to shift the axis of analysis of gender politics away from the frame of 'liberal rights versus Islamic virtue' toward a frame of 'respectability versus vulgarity'. With this shift, the political theory of class, space and the body asserts itself differently. The West/East and liberal/religious binaries dissolve into more complex matrices of intersections and contradictions, as evidenced in the work of Omnia El Shakry (2007) on the formation of respectable middle-class modernity through the invention of domestic mothering, the work of Khaled Fahmy (2002) on the 'vulgar' protests of women nurses and prostitutes in nineteenth-century Egypt, the work of Bruce Dunne (1996) on the nationalist cultivation of respectable spaces versus subjects of 'debaucherous' sexuality and the work of Wilson Jacob (2010) on the urban discipline of street boys and the emergence of middle class respectability. These scholars open up the conjunctures around and between class, embodiment, propriety and sexualized morality. Likewise, El-Nadeem's contemporary campaign around harassment represents a self-conscious effort to engage the complex, intersectional history of piety movements and respectability politics in both internationalist and nationalist gender politics in Egypt.

El-Nadeem's campaign against harassment and torture in public space and jails began in the 1990s but expanded in the 2000s as the *baltagi*-effect began to take on this deeply gendered and sexualized character (El-Nadeem Center 1998b, 2004). However, rather than aim to rehabilitate the respectability and piety of the harassed protestors, El-Nadeem kept the light of critique on the state; on the practices of the state security services and on police and prison officials. Shame and immorality and hypocrisy were to be exposed in the security state (not among working-class boys). And middle-class professionals who collaborated with the state (in particular, doctors, social workers and aid officials) were held responsible for 'crimes against humanity' in the El-Nadeem reports. El-Nadeem made a bold move: rather than try to rehabilitate the reputation of middle-class political protestors, they insisted that even 'real' prostitutes did not deserve disrespect and harsh treatment by the police and state. El-Nadeem made the pioneering move to offer legal aid and psychological treatment, not just to political dissidents abused and branded as prostitutes, but also to actual working-class sex workers. Working-class sex workers who had suffered police harassment and torture were given equal access to El-Nadeem's legal aid, counseling and social resources, providing these abjected workers a platform from which to speak, recording their testimonies and stories alongside those of jailed political leaders. Prostitutes were not treated as 'trafficking victims' to be forcibly rescued and redeemed, but as workers whose public rights and erotic capital were being violated and extorted by police rackets and state violence. Thoroughly turning the gendered respectability politics of the security state inside out, El-Nadeem made campaigns

against torture in custody and sexual harassment in the street into a political movement against the repressive policing practices of the security state. The logic of hypervisibility and moral panic was rearticulated into a campaign to bring political recognition to a campaign for gendered social justice.

In 2006–7, El-Nadeem and a few other bold groups began to expand this campaign against police sexual harassment and torture of politicized and criminalized groups by filing lawsuits against police and other individuals for having committed *at-taharrush al-jinsi*, sexual harassment. In this framing, harassment was not a timeless problem linked to masculinity (Amar 2011a). Rather, harassment is defined as the particular perversion practiced by the repressive security state. Turning the essentialist gender politics and respectability project of the UN-linked campaign inside out, El-Nadeem and allied organizations in 2007–8 made another bold move, queering the NGOization framework again, reaching across gender and class divides to report on the state's sexual harassment and abuse of young male prostitutes and youth labor union protestors.

In 2007, police in Cairo rounded up groups of young men whom they identified as homosexual prostitutes; in 2008, unarmed boy factory workers in Mahalla al-Kobra were shot with rubber bullets and arrested. Youths in both cases were harassed, sexually brutalized and then photographed, bloodied and handcuffed to prison hospital beds, in order to spectacularize their humiliation and intimidate the public (El-Nadeem Center 2008). El-Nadeem revealed the gender-constructive nature of the state's hyper-hetero-masculinity, while refusing the UN trend and NGOization process that favored re-essentializing the categories of femininity and heteronormativity and respectability and victimization by focusing instead on state sexual violence against middle-class women protesters and prostitutes, male hustlers and workers alike.

NGO-IZATION STRIKES BACK: POLICING TIME-BOMB MASCULINITY

In 2006–7, a series of events created opportunities for the human-security state to block the momentum of the El-Nadeem Center's counter-hegemonic project, pulling the rug from underneath its radical gender politics. The state reasserted its dominant alliance by fusing police powers with gendered morality politics and class respectability in a new, internationally articulated, multimedia campaign against sexual harassment. As reported by the review Al-Jadid, 'During the downtown celebrations of the holiday of Eid al-Fitr [2006], a crowd of hundreds of sexually frenzied young men participated in violent attacks on dozens of women, surrounding them in the streets, groping and even trying to undress them. As police stood by and watched the scene ambivalently, no one, not mothers nor veiled women were safe from the mob' (Atassi 2008). The Eid al-Fitr holiday is usually a time when Egypt's popular classes – men and women together – enjoy strolling the markets and public squares and shopping in the boulevards of Cairo, during which exuberant overcrowding is usually

experienced pleurably in the spirit of festivity and community. However, in 2006, several occurrences of sexualized mobbing of women were reported, with a few incidents being captured on cell phone video. Significant in each report was the presence of police permitting, and even encouraging, the attacks.

We can recall that the security state in the period between 2003 and 2006 intensified and generalized its practice of targeting publicly and politically active women. The policy was to harass, sexualize and torture them; to impugn their respectability and undermine their status as political subjects or as citizens, except where they acted in collaboration with state-legitimized morality and policing campaigns. Meanwhile security services had been actively involved in cultivating the thugification of Egypt's police, retraining them into the equivalent of Italian *camicie nere* (black shirt) or Iranian *basiji* (morality militia) paramilitaries. However, public sphere NGOs and commentators did not connect the dots here. Rather than seeing these sexualized attacks as fully consistent with the security state's policy of assaulting women's respectability and replacing politics with hypermoralization, outrage was displaced onto working-class masculinity. 'Woman' became the middle-class consumer and 'man' became the unemployed working-class youth. Working-class women who work on the streets or pass through them to go to work were rendered irrelevant and invisible by the terms of the controversy, as were the women who mixed rage and flirting to project vulgarity and stake claims to public space on their own terms. Rather than challenge the state's securitization of the politics of respectability, a series of civil society and governmental campaigns erupted that hypervisibilized and intensified the class-phobic moralization of the issue, focusing on the restoration of respectability and piety. Rather than critique the role of the security state and police in generating these aggressions against women and working-class male youths, many progressive and feminist social movements mobilized to demand the extension and intensification of security-state powers.

Concern shifted from the police and security state as the agent of sexual harassment and sexualized torture to a national problematization of the libidinal perversion of working class boys, which inscribed the international neocolonial discourse of the Arab street or Islamist mob into the fabric of class politics and police enforcement. On the one hand, leftist or social-progressive commentators in Egypt saw the aggression of the 'mobs' as 'a clear manifestation of an oppressed society deprived of its right to have a decent life and a lost youth fulfilling suppressed needs'. In this narrative explosive youth had been created by the corruption and ineptitude of a government that 'squandered public monies' and failed to exert 'serious efforts to ensure citizens a healthy life that meets the basic needs of edible food and clean water, and the basic services of transport and education' (Halawi 2006). Egyptian analyst Amr Abdelrahman (2007), in an article cleverly subtitled 'What respectability veils when it enters public space', adds another important factor: that of the rapidly changing consumer cultures of the middle and upper-middle classes in Egypt.

Abdelrahman (2007) argues that upper-middle-class women in Egypt today need to access broad sectors of the city in order to enact new consumer identities and practices. And they are loathe to risk class degradation by mixing with the popular classes that have taken over the city center after the middle classes had moved out to new suburbs and gated cities. Thus, by moralizing and gendering what was essentially a class conflict over the social cleansing of urban consumer spaces, officials and NGOs were able to demonize downtown boulevards with the same discourse that criminalizes 'slums'. They could thus empower police to launch a 'direct attack on the poor' (Abdelrahman 2007). Egyptian sociologist Mona Abaza's (2011) work on parastatal efforts in Egypt to evict masses of rent-control tenants and popular-class venues from downtown Cairo confirms this internationally financed and legitimized class politics in play.

Nevertheless, in the NGO discourses of harassment, these issues are stripped of class analysis and framed as social problems of boys radiating explosive sexual indiscipline. As columnist Salama Salama (2010) stated, these deprived youth then grow up in 'unplanned zones, not to use the word ghetto, where all kinds of pressures are bound to build up ... We have failed to give our boys and girls chances to interact in a healthy way in their childhood and puberty, leaving them forever puzzled and a bit immature ... just roaming the streets - ticking like a time bomb'.

The harassment and sexual brutalization of women, whether working-class women or middle-class political protesters, is matched by the quasi-racialization and parahumanization of working-class male youth in urban Egypt. Deployed by the Egyptian state and upper classes themselves, this process of policing masculinity shares many of the same tropes with the wave of Islamophobic racism in Europe and extremist militarism in Israel. 'Masculinity studies' and NGO projects to contain, detain and retrain youth have proliferated in recent years (Amar 2011a). This process of managing class inequality through racialized gender and criminalized sexuality has left behind the economic discourse of the 1980s and 1990s (when providing jobs and microcredit were the solutions for youth frustration). Today, the project has become securitized and de-economized, reframed as a 'human security' project saturated with the metaphors of the war on terrorism. Today's assemblage metaphor of 'time-bomb masculinity' has at least two contemporary origins: one in contemporary urban law enforcement, the other in international security terrorology, with these formations constantly overlapping.

In the late 1980s and 1990s, feminist and LGBT activist scholarship began expanding the notion of fighting hate crimes into a broad politics of confronting sexual harassment in public. They called this a war on what they labeled 'sexual terrorism', usually waged against ethnic minority young men in the urban context (Kissling 1991). This dovetailed with police development of gang injunctions in North America, originally called 'street terrorism' laws (Astvasadoorian 1998), which emerged in dialogue with simultaneous attempts to police and reform gang masculinities in the informal urban settle-

ments of Cairo. Of course, 'time bomb masculinity' is also just a dumbed-down or depoliticized version of the 'suicide bomber' trope, which has become the justification for ratcheting up surveillance and undercutting civil liberties in the Middle East, as well as in European cities. In this sense, it represents the ultimate militarization of the respectability discourse of urban modernity. As discussed by Jasbir Puar (2007), the production of the respectable subject of certain kinds of liberal, Western LGBT and feminist politics depends upon the production of the constituent 'other' in the form of the terrorist subject, overwhelmed by Orientalist sexual excess. In a more provocative move, the conclusion to Puar's *Terrorist Assemblages* (2007: 220–3), and also Gayatri Spivak's noteworthy 'Terror: A Speech after 9-11' (2004), revives a bit of the Fanonian romance of the suicide bomber, who is saturated with the erotic power of youth, ballistically projecting a speech act which is phallically and erotically invoked as a 'boy's thing', even when the proliferation of female suicide bombers would imply that the practice was not a 'gendered phenomenon'. In this vein, Gayatri Spivak (2004: 96) wrote,

Suicide bombing ... is a purposive self-annihilation, a confrontation between oneself and oneself – the extreme end of autoeroticism, killing oneself as other, in the process killing others ... Suicidal resistance is a message inscribed in the body when no other means will get through ... It is only the young whose desires can be so drastically rearranged.

In formulations such as those of Puar and Spivak, there are moments in which time-bomb eroticism stands as a spectral subject imbued with a kind of queer possibility, whose shockwave exposes and illuminates the necro-political security state or imperialist war machine. However the findings presented here indicate that in security-state practice, the romance of the suicide bomber is not an erotic narrative that can bear its own message. Instead, the time-bomb subject as it operates here serves a blank slate of ultimate hypervisibility that provides for the endless inscriptions of securitizing speech acts, a radical parahuman. The bomber is utterly subjectified by the security state. The youth, sexuality and queer/femininity of bombers only render such subjects more useful for inscription and securitization as the distilled quintessence of the 'Arab street' and 'sexual terrorism' metaphors. Herein lies the genius of the Tunisian self-immolations and Asmaa Mahfouz's metaphorical 'woman on fire' – who erupted onto history as explicitly non-bomber, non-terrorist reconfigurations of parahumanity. The real or metaphorical flames of these self-immolators ritually re-established popular sovereignty for the Arab Spring and illuminated the terror practices of security states rather than militarily re-legitimizing them as bombers have done.

In the discourse of the Egyptian state and its associated NGOs around 2008–9, as they appropriated sexual harassment and UN anti-violence politics to securitize youth as a threat to the public, youth without education or available housing were seen as unemployable, and, thus, unmarriageable, leaving them unmoored and sexually undisciplined. Another factor driving this youth

security crisis was sellout of the country's economy to China. In only a few years, Egypt has become flooded with Chinese vendors selling cheap products made in Asia, continuing the process of colonizing local markets, which was started by the United States and Europe during the 'Open Door' period launched by Egyptian President Anwar Sadat in 1973. What was left of Egypt's job base and manufacturing economy after decades of gradual neoliberalization was being crushed by unfettered competition from China, without any attempt by the Egyptian government to assure that Chinese investment in Egypt's economy paid local dividends. Paradoxically, this mainstream sociological narrative that offers structural interpretations of the causes behind youth sexual aggression demands a solution based on heavy-handed security and police interventions. Fahmi Howaidi stated, 'What is taking place in Egypt now resembles a threat to our national security'. Sherine Abul-Naga demanded that the security services intervene more vigorously: 'In such events, their absence is inexcusable' (Halawi 2006).

Another set of responses came to similar conclusions, although this time focused on issues of respectability and moral self-compartment. One set of moralistic responses took advantage of the attacks in order to blame the women victims and to insist that women wear more modest hijabs. These groups distributed posters and emailed images (Atassi 2008). 'One of them juxtaposes a veiled woman and a wrapped piece of candy, depicting her "purity". The other piece of candy is unwrapped with an unveiled woman in the background, her long hair flying in the wind . . . The uncovered candy is covered with flies. "A veil to protect or eyes will molest", reads the accompanying slogan' (MENASSAT.COM 2008). These campaigns, generated by Salafi organizations and Old-Guard branches of the Muslim Brothers came close to re-naturalizing the tactic of the security state to threaten public women with molestation.

At the same time, other groups, such as the liberal organization behind the youth empowerment magazine, Kelemetna, and the Egyptian Center for Women's Rights (ECWR), shifted attention back onto the immorality of young men. The ECWR released a detailed study, describing the issue of sexual harassment as a 'cancer-like problem' infecting the national body and also as 'clouds in Egypt's sky' overshadowing the nation's reputation. The study found that '83 per cent of Egyptian women and 98 per cent of foreign women said they had experienced sexual harassment. More than half of the Egyptian men questioned for the survey, 62 per cent, admitted to having harassed women, 53 per cent of them blamed the women for "bringing it on"' (Sandels 2008). In the ECWR perspective, dressing modestly or religiously conservative makes no difference in terms of harassment. All focus must be on policing and rectifying the deviant behavior of youthful, working-class men. In the posters and Internet campaigns of Kelemetna and the ECWR, the visual icons capture the profiles of fashionable, unveiled, upper-middle class Egyptians and the campaigns are stamped with the logos of international organizations and donors. Their discourse focuses on respectability and security: 'Respect yourself' and 'Make the street secure for everyone', for example. Although neutral or general in their phrasing, their



Figure 1 Battling posters and symbolic logics of anti-harassment campaigns.
Source: Sandels 2008

graphic representations on the web-ads and posters identify the respectable nation with its internationally-linked upper middle classes, and point the finger at out-of-control youth of the popular classes.

INTERNATIONAL GENDER ENFORCEMENT

The ECWR and Keletmetna represent the organizations that drew most directly on UN gender doctrines and CEDAW institutions, funds, discourses and legal-judicial mobilizing strategies.

Globally, ECWR was part of several transnational networks for human rights and women's rights and received support for its projects from international donor agencies including international NGOs. It had a long standing relationship with The Global Fund for Women . . . It also received support from the World Bank Small Grants program and was recognized for its advocacy work at the grassroots level by being names Winner of the World Bank's 2000 Development Marketplace.

(Rizzo et al. 2010)

As noted by Rizzo et al. (2010), the ECWR and Keletmetna are protest movements of a particular sort, not usually studied by (neo)liberal political science, for these are 'protests' that mobilize to demand that an authoritarian state *expand* its policing powers! These are protests that want more policing and enforcement and punitive sanctions. I argue that these NGOized movements represent, not protests aiming for redistribution or justice (as in the era of 'social security') nor 'consumer and expressive right' (as in the neoliberal era), but are rather activities that reveal the particular gendered and moralized politics of the 'human security' era. In this period, NGOized civil actions move in constant cycles to demand more police protection of gendered and culturalized subjects and are sites where the state moves to subjectify parahuman subjects of re-essentialized gender and moralized sexuality that can only appeal for more police rescue and paramilitarized governance.

Ahmed Salah, director of a Kelemetna group of volunteers, claimed that we need to get back to the time when ‘men were more gallant and protective’; when Egypt had ‘real men’. We need to ‘arrest the harasser and punish him by shaving his head’ (Sandels 2008). When the sexual harassment controversy heated up, Minister of the Interior Habib el-Adly, who was in charge of the police (and, after the Revolution, was arrested for crimes against people and, yes, for systematic sexual harassment), first proclaimed that ‘sexual harassment does not exist’ (Muftah 2007). In full defensive mode against the accusations of El-Nadeem and other groups since the 1990s, the police had assumed that they were being accused of being responsible for the harassment of women in public. However, once it became apparent that civil society organizations were ignoring the role of the police and the security state in the *generation* of sexualized violence, the interior and security establishments jumped on board and embraced the anti-harassment campaign enthusiastically. They sensed the chance as ‘gallant, protective real men’ to utilize the sexual harassment campaign, extending their prerogative power to ‘protectively’ detain women in public, and to round up working-class boys in ways that would degrade and depoliticize their collective aspirations.

For example, in the second week of November 2008, the police arrested more than 400 boys between the ages of 15 and 17 after they were caught ‘flirting with girls’.

Cairo police director Faruq Lashin confirmed the boys had been arrested for flirting offenses . . . The arrests will be seen as a major victory for women’s groups who have long complained that police ignore sexual harassment claims. Police have been involved in a string of arrests and prosecutions across the country. A teenager was sentenced to two years in prison for sexually assaulting two women this week while a 17-year-old man is on trial for the same offense.³

The sexual harassment controversy that had begun as a thorough critique of repressive policing and the torture of dissident women and youth had been appropriated by the security state and NGO establishment as justification for extending police brutality, mass arrests, social cleansing of the city and the necessity of the emergency decree.

ALTERNATIVE HARASSMENT FEMINISM

To subvert this well rehearsed subjectification and securitized inscription of the voice of the subalternized male working-class ‘time bomb’ subject, Egyptian activists mobilized between 2008 and 2010 around the performance of ‘vulgar’ gender-queer forms of street-occupation.⁴ On 25 June 2008, truck driver Sherif Gommaa pulled over, got out and grabbed the breasts of 27-year-old filmmaker Nuha Rushdi. She responded by overpowering him and dragging him to the police station.⁵ For the first time in Egyptian legal

history, a case of sexual harassment was taken to court, where Rushdi and her lawyers drew upon the clumsy legal codes that ban assault and blasphemy. In October 2008, the court found Gommaa guilty, sentenced him to three years in prison and a fine of \$970, equivalent to between five and six months average salary (UNICEF 2010). This set a landmark precedent, defining *at-taharrush al-jinsi* (sexual harassment) in the law, and distinguishing it from rape or debauchery. In February 2010, the attempt by Gommaa to appeal the verdict was rejected. Although Nuha Rushdi's campaign began by calling upon the police and demanding the extension of enforcement powers, it shifted toward a more subversive challenge, queering the power of morality politics and the class and spatial politics of gendered ethics and respectability, not as a liberal-individualist 'women can take care of themselves' project, but as a different articulation of stateness that displaced police and security institutions and class governance norms, and instead brought together judicial, syndicate and social services branches of the state in more empowering ways.

As Rushdi's struggle dragged on, she was labeled as a lesbian, a Zionist conspirator, and almost a mannish thug. Rushdi refused respectable embodiment by physically subduing the truck driver and performing a citizen's arrest rather than calling the police and by not resorting to the class-based respectability politics offered by the NGO mobilizing framework. Rushdi's campaign gravitated toward congruence with the strategies of the type advocated by the El-Nadeem Center. These efforts found it difficult to articulate themselves through the screen of middle-class feminist ideologies. Instead, they drew support from re-emergent leftist newspapers (advocating a redistributive workerist or 'social security' paradigm for class-conscious gender rights) and alternative Islamic feminist voices (working to repoliticize a politics of piety and intensifying its focus on issues of inequality, criminalization and sexualization).

Two divergent sets of responses stemmed from Nuha Rushdi's eventual legal victory. One, when her legal precedent was taken up by the UN sponsored NGOs, was to enhance the security and punishment powers of the state. However, another set of responses put those same powers into question. The Egyptian Center for Women's Rights followed the former trajectory by demanding the passage of new laws that mandated much higher sentences – up to ten years – and higher fines for sexual harassment. The conviction would also be a crime that would appear on the permanent record, even that of a youth/minor. Furthermore, these new laws not only encouraged, but also mandated police intervention in this area. This might sound like a feminist victory, but not if one knows the historic tendency of police to take advantage of mandates in order to extend their racketeering and extortionary social power. When drafting the law, little thought was given to the ease by which the police, military and security services could misuse it to justify mass arrests of working-class boys engaged in any kind of flirting in any mixed gender, mixed class public area. Police used such codes to extort bribes from the boys (even if no evidence is presented, even if no charges are ever filed by women victims). Boys and their families then face unpayably high

finer and life-destroying criminal records and long sentences in Egypt's monstrous prison system. One result of this 'securitization' of sexual harassment in the law and its mandated extension of enforcement could be the legitimization of police orchestration of wholesale gender segregation in, and working-class eviction from, public spaces.

Aware of this possibility, Nuha Rushdi herself and the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights and the El-Nadeem Center mobilized a distinct framing for the anti-harassment campaign, centering a critique of the masculinist prerogative power of the security state and focusing on a critique of its repressive moralization project and the brutality of its policing apparatus. Through this lens, and in light of these alternative feminist reframings of sexuality, police governance and class struggle, the attack on Lara Logan and the resurgence of 'Arab mob' tropes of predator masculinity during the 2011 can be seen in new light.

CONCLUSION

On 8 March 2011, two sets of massive demonstrations were organized in Cairo, aiming to extend and deepen the achievements of the revolution that had begun only six weeks before. One set of demonstrations involved many tens of thousands of university students, led by young women in leftist and labor movements in coalition with the men and women of the youth branch of the Muslim Brothers that had become increasingly independent of the conservative Old Guard of the movement. They demanded the abolition of the hated State Security institution and a fresh election for all student governments and administrative committees (and they won their demand) A second set of mass protests was led by an interfaith union of Coptic Christian and Muslim anti-police brutality groups who aimed to expose the complicity of Egyptian security and police forces and military special operations brigades in attacks on Christians in Alexandria and in Upper Egypt in the past months. The same day was also designated by the United Nations as International Women's Day.

Young women committed to the student, labor and anti-police movements and leading them, and many local Egyptian feminist organizations, wanted to support one of the large pre-organized demonstrations; but the internationally linked feminist NGOs and UN agencies insisted on a distinct march for Women's Day. Egypt is not and never has been simply an end-point for vectors of the 'dissemination' of internationalist feminism; to the contrary, Egypt has been an originator, center and disseminator of modern internationalist feminism, of both 'maternal' and radical varieties. Egyptian feminists founded one of the first international humanitarian feminist anti-trafficking organizations in 1859. Internationally linked Egyptian liberal suffragette movements as well as militant women's factory-worker organizers were central to the Nationalist Revolution in 1919. Egyptian feminists reinvented both leftist and conservative versions of international Islamic feminism in the 1960s-1980s. And Cairo hosted the United Nations Conference on Population and Development, 5-13

September 1994, which evolved into a dynamic, contentious forum on women's sexuality and citizenship, featuring the diplomatic and mobilizing skills of Egyptian feminists from all sides of the political spectrum. But due to the circumstances and geography of revolutionary protest activities on 8 March 2011, the Women's Day March seemed to evacuate this complex history and imply that one could separate out an 'international' level of feminism from the national. And as the protests played out, this distinction seemed to be projected onto the binary of elitist versus popular, as if gender concerns needed to be elevated so that they stood apart from the anti-sectarian and anti-police issues identified by the broader revolutionary leadership (including by its young women militants like Asmaa Mahfouz).

Thus on 8 March 2011, a much-reduced group of a few hundred women and UN-agency representatives entered the streets of busy, post-revolutionary downtown Cairo (Chick 2011) for what was originally planned as a 'Million Woman March'. They were faced with resentment from supporters of the student, worker and anti-sectarian movements, from which they had set themselves apart. And, of course, they faced the masculinized class tensions that were still the legacy of the security-state's *baltagi*-effect. Tragically, these confrontations and tensions materialized in the form of several incidents of sexual assault and harassment of the marchers, as the Women's Day demonstration proceeded.

Unfazed, Women's Day march participant Mozn Hassan (a young Egyptian woman activist, lawyer, political organizer and director of Cairo's Nazra for Feminist Studies) stated:

It was a good thing for this class of feminist to finally get out of its hotel conference rooms and well-guarded foundation offices and try to take back the streets. But why did they then act enraged and terrified when working-class Cairenes dared to approach them or shout questions or tease them? Why must this kind of feminist mobilization see the revolution only from the perspective of experiencing, and demanding protection from, sexual harassment? We must fight back for the streets and the state, not sit back in fear demanding that the street and state shower us with privilege and respect.

(Hassan 2011b).

Inspired and informed by perspectives such as Ms Hassan's, this study has followed the struggles around articulating internationalist laws and policies to protect women from violence. Research has demonstrated how this process has been reframed as an intersectional feminist struggle concerned with re-fashioning subjects of class, respectability and state security, as well as rendering legible the masculine and feminine parahuman subjects of governance. Here I have examined the military-humanitarian doctrine and the human rights legacy of UNSCR 1325 and CEDAW by assessing them in relation to processes of NGOization and the emergence of the human-security state in the global

south. The deconstruction of feminist UN politics I offer here does not aim to render feminism irrelevant, nor does it aim to accuse the international gender movement of being a tool of the West or of dominant classes. Instead, this study reveals that there are more productive and emancipatory feminisms emerging on the ground from activists who have learned to turn NGOization and internationalism inside out. Movements such as El-Nadeem expose and attack the repressive power of the security state, mobilizing class conscious pro-worker repertoires. These movements disarticulate the politics of respectability, the enforcement-centrism of UN resolutions, and the quietude or complicity of respectability and piety movements.

As Cairo-based activist and scholar Nadia Ilahi (2010: 11) argues:

Today's Egyptian feminists would help create a safer environment for women spanning diverse class boundaries by focusing on redirecting efforts to encourage alternate forms of masculinity and femininity. Social space as felt in Egypt does convey a different set of experiences for men and women, and further research is needed to illustrate how particular feminist notions of reclaiming space are impacted by class divisions. Women in Egypt are reclaiming space, and it is men and women alike who work to challenge the various meanings of these spaces.

On 1 March 2011, Mozn Hassan (2011a) – who had been attacked by plain-clothes police and sexually menaced by paramilitary thugs during the revolution – stated:

Women engaged in all revolutionary events knowing there was no chance for protection and they are fully responsible for their bodies, life and security. When the debate on sexual harassment returns, we need to discuss not only the society and cultural issues but also how women see their bodies and how they could work to remake the state, and to gain space and not to lose it.

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Notes

- 1 <http://www.ipu.org/splz-e/beirut10.htm>
- 2 El Nadeem Center, 'Torture Report: 1993–1996' (1998a); 'Three Years of El Nadeem' (1998a); 'Torture in Egypt: Facts and Testimonies' (2002, in Arabic); 'Days of Torture: Women in Police Custody' (2004)

- 3 *Daily Mail Online*, 'Hundreds of Egyptian Boys Arrested', 21 November 2008. Available at http://www.dailymail.co.uk/article_1088260 (accessed 23 November 2008).
- 4 A very useful schematic analysis of these kind of 'vulgar' feminist protest strategies, deployed by Muslim lesbian groups in France, which would offer a fascinating point of comparison, has been provided by Paola Bacchetta (2009).
- 5 'Egypt Court Jails Man for Sexual Harassment', *Gulfnews.com.*, 22 October 2008, <http://gulfnews.com/news/region/egypt-court-jails-man-for-sexual-harassment-1.138275>(accessed 12 September 2010).

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