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WHY THE FEMINIST ELEMENT OF THE ARAB SPRING WILL HELP WOMEN
ACHIEVE QURANIC EGALITARIANISM IN EGYPT

I. INTRODUCTION

This article first propounds the supposition that when basic principles of Islam were initially revealed to the Prophet Muhammad in 610 AD, groundbreaking new understandings of egalitarianism were meant to be injected into a then androcentric society with a new emphasis placed on women's rights and personal autonomy within the new religion's framework.¹ This desire to bring religious and societal freedom to Muslim women is evident through Allah's direct words to Muhammad as transcribed in the Quran and through subsequent Hadith, from which Muhammad's life was to serve as a model of Islamic integrity.² Second, this article discusses why due to the nature of pre-Islamic society, the drastic changes that Islam introduced in the area of women's rights were met with staunch resistance which soon reified into a power struggle whose outcome would decide the lifespan of the still budding religion.³ Understanding this risk, Muhammad was forced to make gender based concessions to his people which culminated in a less generous application of women's rights and allowed men to retain a majority of power in early Muslim communities.⁴ Third, this article discusses how the resultant gender based power dichotomy in early Muslim communities started a trend that continued into recent times in predominantly Muslim countries such as Egypt, observable through Egypt's many gender based discriminatory practices in the areas of marriage, education, and equal access to employment.⁵ Fourth, this article promotes the idea that the Egyptian revolution, with its essential female

¹ HAIFA JAWAD, *THE RIGHTS OF WOMEN IN ISLAM* 4 (1998).

² *Id.* at 5.

³ *Id.* at 25.

⁴ FATIMA MERNISSI, *THE VEIL AND THE MALE ELITE* 137 (1991).

⁵ Sajeda Amin, *Education, Wage Work, and Marriage*, *JOURNAL OF MARRIAGE AND FAMILY*, Vol.66, No. 5, 1292 (2004).

dimension, may finally be the tool that frees women from the backwards social practices Muhammad pioneered against hundreds of years ago, bringing society in line once and for all with a religion whose overwhelming ambition is equality.⁶

The second section discusses rights that Muslim women became entitled to through basic tenets of Islam including enhanced marital rights, rights to pursue an education, and the general ability to function more equally in society. The third section discusses how societies of Muhammad's time were unreceptive to a pervasive installation of Islamic teachings and examines how each direct challenges to Muhammad's leadership, deliberate misinterpretations of the Quran, and protectionist policies towards women hindered the religion from being incorporated as it was truly meant to be. It then considers how this initial misapplication started a trend in many early Muslim societies that continued until recent times in modern Muslim countries, using Egypt as the example. The fourth and final section discusses women's roles in the Egyptian revolution and propounds the theory that their success in helping overthrow Mubarak has reignited a fire within them that had lay dormant for the past hundreds of years; a fire that will empower them to continue fighting the new adversity they face daily and one that will not be pacified until the egalitarian society Islam promised hundreds of years ago is truly achieved.

II. RIGHTS EXPLICITLY AFFORDED WOMEN THROUGH BASIC ISLAMIC PRINCIPLES IN THE AREAS OF MARRIAGE, EDUCATION, AND SOCIETY

Throughout the holy writings of the Quran, women are repeatedly exalted to the near point of sublimity and are granted exceedingly progressive rights in the areas of marriage,

⁶ ESAM AL AMIN, *THE ARAB AWAKENING UNVEILED: UNDERSTANDING TRANSFORMATIONS AND REVOLUTIONS IN THE MIDDLE EAST* 67 (2013).

education, and politics in comparison to women of other contemporaneous societies. In regards to marriage, the Quran stresses that the spiritual nature of such a holy bond requires that the husband and wife work alongside one another which necessitates the marriage being founded upon more than just a cold unnatural bond; for a marriage to work as intended, each passion, affection, and love have to be the overwhelming roots.⁷ This understanding works to make women more than just passive objects associated with child bearing and subjugation and puts women upon a pedestal; through this intimate understanding of marriage, suitors are required to gain a woman's explicit acceptance to enter into marriage and then to treat them as equals after the sacred bond has been consummated, lest they want to be divorced.⁸ Much like in the area of marriage, Islam granted women previously unheralded liberal rights in the areas of education and knowledge seeking.⁹ Muhammad valued the importance of both religious and secular knowledge inside his followers and impressed upon them the understanding that it was their duty to inquire into matters they did not know or understand, resulting in a mass of true believers with deep seated convictions.¹⁰ Lastly, early Islamic laws stressed the importance of women as integral components of society through granting them more progressive rights in the areas of inheritance, remarriage, and the retention of personal property than contemporaneous societies would have ever dreamed of.¹¹

A. The Quran's Empowering of Women through Enhanced Marital Rights

Before the Quran was written, societies as a whole were dominated by men who viewed marriage as a farcical ploy used to procure influential connections and advantageous

⁷ JAWAD. at 7.

⁸ Id.

⁹ Id. at 16.

¹⁰ Id.

¹¹ Id. at 83.

relationships; women were mere pawns, there to connect one ambitious man to another in a scheme whose endgame was the aggregation of wealth, power, and ultimately the repression of women. It has been noted that in pre-Islamic societies, women were held in bondage to their husbands, who could keep them or divorce them at their will and pleasure and that women were viewed as the embodiment of sin, misfortune, disgrace, and shame.¹² The Quran moved away from this shallow and tawdry view of women and marriage in particular and held marriage out in a radical new light; marriage was to be seen as an institution reflecting the concept of partnership and therefore it had to be anchored in each love, the ability of the parties to choose one another freely, and marital equality.¹³ This new ideology transformed women from objects who were married without having a say in the matter into more autonomous beings holding the power to choose whom they married based on personal preferences rooted in feelings of reciprocity shared with potential mates.¹⁴ Further, this new leverage was not relinquished after the woman had chosen her husband and entered into marriage as the Quran besought men to treat women with respect throughout the duration of the holy union and granted women enhanced powers to initiate divorce if things didn't work out as foreseen.¹⁵

First and foremost, the Quran expresses the idea that marriage is not simply a way to build one's fortunes or move up the proverbial ladder; it is to be viewed as a sacred ritual through which a man finds his other spiritual half and becomes whole, a process requiring the discovery of each love, passion, and affection in the opposite sex.¹⁶ This concept is expressed repeatedly throughout the Quran, which in relevant parts states "O mankind! Be careful of your duty to your

¹² JAWAD. at 1.

¹³ QAMARUDDIN KHAN, STATUS OF WOMEN IN ISLAM 26-29 (1988).

¹⁴ JAWAD. at 34.

¹⁵ Id. at 72.

¹⁶ Note: there is an argument that the institution of marriage in Islam is more of a civil contract than a sacred union and a counter argument which understands contractual negotiations before marriage as pivotal in preemptively protecting a woman from unfair practices by her husband to be. Jawad at 47-48.

Lord Who created you from a single soul and from it created its mate and from them twain hath spread abroad a multitude of men and women."¹⁷ The beautiful image this passage conjures is that of a man's lonely, searching spirit being placated only upon finding that which had been lost through his creation: the calming spirit of his female counterpart. This poetical sentiment resonates later on in the Quran, when it is written "He it is Who did create you from a single soul, and therefrom did make his mate that he might take rest in her. And when he covered her she bore a light burden, and she passed (unnoticed) with it, but when it became heavy they cried unto Allah, their Lord, saying: if though givest unto us aright we shall be of the thankful."¹⁸ By painting marriage as the reconnection of two kindred spirits, the Quran repeatedly stresses the importance of choosing your partner in marriage based not on the wealth or power it will bring you, but the spiritual closure it will provide.

By requiring marriages to be built upon foundations of sacrosanct unanimity, the Quran indirectly required couples to build and maintain clear passageways of communication and mutual respect while repudiating the practice of using religion as a mechanism of female repression.¹⁹ It forced men and women alike to engage in a true dialogue with potential mates, necessitating the understanding that women were not just things to be had, they were the completion of the husband and the fulfillment of the earthly part of his journey.²⁰ While portraying marriage as the spiritual reconnection of two equal halves, the Quran specifically carved out new rights for women to help them achieve the desired effect of the holy writings. The most important of these new rights was the ability of women to choose who they desired to marry, a very unusual right at that time. The Quran states "place not difficulties in the way of

¹⁷ MARMADUKE PICKTHALL, *THE MEANING OF THE GLORIOUS KORAN*, book 4, verse 1 (1930).

¹⁸ PICKTHALL. at book 7, verse 189.

¹⁹ S. ABUL A'LA MAUDUDI, *PURDAH AND THE STATUS OF WOMEN IN ISLAM* 154-155 (1991).

²⁰ *Id.*

their marrying their husbands if it is agreed between them in kindness."²¹ This powerful right not only allowed women to choose who they would marry, but implied a negative right as well: the right to refuse to marry men that had been chosen for them, whether the choice had been made by a family member or an important member of society. Taking a step back and analyzing this right the Quran had just given women to choose and refuse husbands reveals a much more important and broadly drawn power: the power to choose husbands based on how these men would treat them throughout the marriage. By having the right to choose who they would marry, women had to be convinced to marry and this convincing necessarily resulted in women being treated with much more dignity and respect. If a woman was proposed to by an immoral man who she believed would treat her with disrespect and hostility, she could simply tell him no, regardless of how much power or wealth he held. On the other hand, if a woman was proposed to by a man with great moral fortitude who treated her with respect and compassion, she would be much more willing to become his wife. This ability of the woman to refuse suitors and pick her husband on her own, therefore contributed greatly to the amount of respect with which women were treated throughout society.²²

Lastly, the Quran besought equality throughout the duration of marriage and implored men, whom it understood to sometimes be hotheaded, to work through personal anger in the marriage in the proper fashion. It is written "but consort with them in kindness, for if ye hate them it may happen that ye hate a thing wherein Allah hath placed much good."²³ This

²¹ Id. at book 2, verse 232.

²² Note: since marriage in Islam has strong contractual roots, where a woman is marrying for the first time, she may need to obtain the consent of a guardian in marriage. This is due to the understanding that first time brides are usually of a very young age and may be entering into the union hastily or based on amorous feelings without regard for long term compatibility. The guardian in marriage is often the bride's father or a close relative and makes their decision based on the best interests of the bride. Women who are remarrying do not normally require the backing of a guardian in marriage. AMINA WADUD, *QUR'AN AND WOMAN* 56 (1999).

²³ PICKTHALL. at book 4, verse 19.

illuminating passage doesn't idly ask husbands to treat their wives with respect, it compels men to treat their wives in line with the recognition that Allah dwells inside them and provides them much support. Further, it is broad in reach and reveals the general maxim so characteristic of the new egalitarian religion: treat women with respect and dignity. By interpreting marriage as a spiritual reconnection through which husbands and wives play equally important roles and not just a stratagem to acquire wealth and power, the Quran empowered women throughout the Muslim world, allowing them greater freedom of choice and forcing men to treat them more equally.²⁴

B. Islam Providing Women with Equal Access to Education and Knowledge

Throughout the Quran and many subsequent Hadiths attributed to Muhammad, the pursuance of an education and the general attainment of knowledge are stressed as paramount to Muslims in their journey towards spiritual enlightenment, regardless of their gender.²⁵ This general sentiment is reflected through the Prophet Muhammad's direct statement "seeking knowledge is the duty of every Muslim, man or woman."²⁶ Muhammad seemed to understand the pursuance of knowledge to be seminal in both the development of Muslims as individuals and the Islamic community as a whole, as it would operate as a vehicle through which Muslims could remove their blindfolds of ignorance. This awakening would transform mere Muslim followers into true believers, each holding deep seated convictions and enduring truths, contributing to the creation of an Islamic community whose foundation would be unshakeable. Noting the superiority of knowledgeable men to mere followers, Muhammad stated "one knowledgeable man is more formidable against the Shaitan than one thousand devoted

²⁴ JAWAD. at 32.

²⁵ FIDA HUSSAIN MALIK, WIVES OF THE PROPHET 47 (1979).

²⁶ Dar-us-Salam, SUNAN IBNE MAJA, BOOK OF SUNNAH (NASIRUDDIN AL-KHATTAB trans.), Hadith no. 224 (2007).

worshippers."²⁷ Noting the superiority of functional knowledge to blind religious zeal, Muhammad stated "to listen to the instructions of science and learning for one hour is more meritorious than attending the funerals of a thousand martyrs."²⁸

Clearly, Muhammad understood the importance of education and the attainment of knowledge to the Islamic community, but he also understood that societies of his time were predominantly androcentric and that he would have to advocate directly on behalf of women to ensure their equal access to knowledge. With this in mind, Muhammad emphasized women's rights to education in many different instances. For example, Muhammad emphasized a father's duty to educate his daughter when proclaiming "if a daughter is born to a person and he brings her up, gives her a good education, and trains her in the arts of life, I shall myself stand between him and hell fire."²⁹ This duty to expose women to education resonates later on when Muhammad exclaims "There are three persons for whom there is a double reward: ... the person who has a slave-girl, and he brings her up and trains her in the best manner and he educates her and gives her the best education, then sets her free and marries her, he has a double reward."³⁰ Here it is evident that even slave girls, who had extremely low status in pre-Islamic society, were to be educated and trained alongside those of higher echelons; in the sphere of education, there was not to be any bias regardless of the status or gender of the individual involved. Because of Muhammad's efforts towards creating women's rights in the area of education, women became very vocal when they felt that they were not being given equal access to his teachings. In one famous Hadith, women in Muhammad's community became upset because he was spending too much time imparting knowledge upon the men and not enough time teaching them. The women

²⁷ Id. at no. 224.

²⁸ JAWAD. at 17.

²⁹ MOHAMMED MAZHERUDDIN SIDDIQI, WOMEN IN ISLAM 132 (1952).

³⁰ JAWAD. at 20.

approached Muhammad to complain of this inequity and accordingly, Muhammad "promised them one day per week for religious lessons and commandments."³¹ This Hadith is extremely eye opening for two reasons. First, it shows the sense of entitlement the women of Muhammad's time had in regard to their pursuit of education and second, it shows that women of that time were not afraid to stand up to men, or even the Prophet Muhammad, to demand what they believed to be rightfully due.

Keeping in mind how much Muhammad stressed education and how much he advocated on behalf of women to have equal access to it, it is astonishing to compare this progressive framework to those of contemporaneous societies of Muhammad's day. In Christian societies for example, women were not expected to speak with the men during church meetings and were restricted in the questions they were allowed to ask regarding the substance of the Bible.³² This subjugation of women rings clearly in the New Testament where St. Paul preaches "women should remain silent in churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission as the law says. If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their husbands at home, for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church."³³ This demand that women remain meek and subservient to men in the area of religious inquiry is directly contrasted by Muhammad's demand that Muslim women undertake an intellectual journey, empowering them to stand on their own two feet and demand equality where it is lacking. While women in early Christian societies were expected to keep their eyes on the ground in front of them and beseechingly ask their husbands answers to questions they didn't understand, Muslim women were instilled with the brashness to approach the Prophet Muhammad and publicly ask for equal

³¹ Dar-us-Salam, TRANSLATION OF THE MEANINGS SUMMARIZED SAHIH AL-BUKHARI (DR. MUHAMMAD MUHSIN trans.), vol.1 no.101 (1994).

³² Holman Bible Publishers, THE HOLY BIBLE, Corinthians 14:34-35 (2003).

³³ Id.

access to his teachings. This limitation on women's educational rights and duties was similarly held in early Judaic communities, where "if women didn't study the Torah, it must also be concluded that they normally received no formal education, since formal study in ancient Judaism was largely limited [to women] to the study of the Torah."³⁴ Women in these early Judaic communities were thought to be most useful as mothers and wives, and therefore did most of their learning in the area of domestic chores "through observation and imitation [of their mother] in the informal atmosphere of the home."³⁵ While teachings in both Christian and Jewish communities still saw women primarily as mothers and wives and discouraged them from thinking or being outspoken, early Islamic teachings valued women immensely and understood their education to be necessary for a successful egalitarian community.

This duty of Muslim women to seek out knowledge and education led to the immediate granting of extremely powerful rights which truly cannot be understated. It is well understood that "a dominant discourse of knowledge simultaneously constitutes and is enmeshed in relationships of power...knowledge is power over others, the power to define others."³⁶ By encouraging women to get involved in religious and secular education, Muhammad did more than just spark intellectual development; he empowered women and made them feel that they were integral parts of society. This empowering act created women who were both intelligent outspoken and understood that Islam required more of them than just cleaning up after their husbands or raising their children; it required thorough introspection and intellectual education which would lead them to positions of power unheard of at that day and age.

C. Islam Granting Women Greater Rights in Society

³⁴ LEONARD SWIDLER, *THE STATUS OF WOMEN IN FORMATIVE JUDAISM* 8 (1976).

³⁵ FRED SKOLNIK, *ENCYCLOPEDIA JUDAICA* vol. 6 col. 397 (1972).

³⁶ Sa'Diyya Shaikh, *Knowledge and Gender in the Hadith: A Feminist Interpretation*, *ISLAM AND CHRISTIAN MUSLIM RELATIONS*, Vol. 15, 100 (2004).

Not only did Islam provide a foundation for feministic power in the areas of marriage and education, it also promoted women in all aspects of their daily lives, including giving them new rights in the areas of inheritance, remarriage, and the retention of personal property. One of the most important and groundbreaking new rights that Muhammad imparted upon women was their right to an inheritance. Up until that point, women had no right to inheritance and were subject to becoming part of the inheritance themselves upon the demise of their husband: "Before Islam, when a man lost his father, brother, or son, and that person left a widow, the heir, taking advantage of the privileges of the dowry paid by the dead man, hastened to the widow, covered her with his cloak, and thus arrogated to himself the exclusive right to marry her. When he married her, he deprived her of her right to the part of the inheritance constituted by the dowry."³⁷ Therefore, at the time of inheritance, a wife "seemed to be nothing but an object to be claimed by male heirs, whether they belonged to the clan of the dead man or to her own clan."³⁸ When Sura 4 was transcribed, this despicable practice in the area of inheritance was abolished and women were able to claim equal rights to their deceased husband's assets while retaining their autonomy. Sura 4 literally states "unto the men of a family belongeth a share of that which parents and near kindred leave, and unto the women a share of that which the parents and near kindred leave, whether it be little or much-a legal share."³⁹ These new rights sparked anger in the minds of men, who up until that point had prospered greatly any time a male in their family had died, but Muhammad was not intimidated by the shouts of these angry voices. Muhammad was steadfast in his honest recital of Allah's desire for equality and would not be frightened into submission by men with outdated ideas whose only source of power in pre-Islamic society sprung from their gender.

³⁷ MERNISSI. at 120.

³⁸ Id. at 121.

³⁹ Id.

Through Islam, women also gained the ability to remarry, which up until that point had not been a right expressly granted. Because pre-Islamic society gave men unfair access to a woman's inheritance when her husband died, women were subjected to a waiting period directly following the death of their spouse. During this waiting period, the legal next of kin had the right to marry the widow, whether it be his stepmother or otherwise, and by exercising this option, would take all of her deceased husband's inheritance for himself.⁴⁰ This waiting period sometimes lasted for long periods of time and forced the widow to wait while the next of kin decided her fate: would he remarry her simply to gain access to her wealth, or would he forgo the marriage, allowing her to remarry whomever she chose and giving the inheritance to the male members of her family? Mernissi describes this crass system succinctly, expressing "the clan and the male heirs were less interested in the physical charms of the stepmother than her right to inheritance. In principle, the heir had to return his stepmother's share in inheritance to the men of her clan if he did not marry her, the crassness of the material interest being masked by the ceremony of marriage."⁴¹ In practice, this undertaking was even harsher than it appeared in theory, as very often men would take the widow as a wife to gain her inheritance and then separate from her immediately while forcing her to sign a contract that she would not remarry without his consent. At this point, the former widow was left high and dry, unable to gain her former husband's consent without paying him some sort of bribe, but not being able to afford the bribe because her loss of the inheritance. Mernissi describes this situation as well, noting: "If a suitor asked for her hand of the widow, she could not make any agreement without the permission of her former husband, and in order to get this permission, she had to pay a sum of

⁴⁰ Id. at 122.

⁴¹ Id. at 123.

money sufficient to compensate and satisfy him."⁴² The Quran, abhorring this unfair practice, expressly states "and when ye have divorced women and they reach their term, place not difficulties in the way of their marrying their husbands if it is agreed between them in kindness."⁴³ This leveling of the playing field gave women rights that at our day and age seem miniscule but at that time were unfathomable: the right to free themselves from bondage induced by their husband's tragic death.

Lastly, women enjoyed greater rights in the area of personal property with the introduction of Islam and its requirement of a bride's future husband directly paying her a dowry which would be kept separately in her own name.⁴⁴ While this may seem insignificant, the ability of a woman to first be entitled to a dowry and second be able to keep it in her own name, were exceptionally rare during the early days of Islam. For example, Christian communities in England during this time period required dowries, but they were to be paid from the wife's family to her new husband.⁴⁵ This dowry, along with whatever separate property the wife brought into the marriage, instantly became the husband's own under the general understanding "that which the husband has is his own, that which the wife hath is the husband's."⁴⁶ Furthermore, the dowries which the wife had brought to the marriage would not return to her upon the marriage's dissolution unless an annulment was procured and the woman was able to prove that she had not committed adultery. For all intents and purposes, when a wife entered into marriage in early Christian societies, she not only lost all of her property, but her legal personality as well. "The husband could repudiate any sale of gift made by her as being of no binding legal value. The person with whom she had any contract was held as a criminal for participating in fraud.

⁴² Id.

⁴³ PICKTHALL. at book 2, verse 232.

⁴⁴ JAWAD. at 67.

⁴⁵ R. THOMPSON, WOMEN IN STUART ENGLAND AND AMERICA 162 (1974).

⁴⁶ Id.

Moreover, she could not sue or be sued in her own name, nor could she sue her own husband. A married woman was practically treated as an infant in the eyes of the law. The wife simply belonged to her husband and therefore she lost her property, her legal personality, and her family name."⁴⁷ When the male dominated Christian society is juxtaposed with that of Islam, it becomes increasingly evident how many rights to personal property Muslim women enjoyed from the onset. The Quran demanded men to "give unto women (whom ye marry) free gift of their marriage portions; but if they of their own accord remit unto you a part thereof, then ye are welcome to absorb it into your own wealth."⁴⁸ Not only were wives entitled to the dower, but it and all of the other personal property they brought with them to the marriage remained in their name and could not be subjected to the husband's control. It soon followed that "no matter how rich the wife might be, she is not obliged to act as a co-provider for the family unless she herself voluntarily chooses to do so. Spouses do not inherit from one another and a married woman in Islam retains her independent legal personality and her family name."⁴⁹ Very obviously, early Islamic communities understood the true value of women and worked hard to embolden their rights to the point of near absurdity in the eyes of many contemporary societies.

III. THE MISAPPLICATION OF ISLAMIC PRINCIPLES IN EARLY MUSLIM SOCIETIES AND THE PERPETUATION THAT FOLLOWED INTO PRE REVOLUTIONARY TIMES IN EGYPT

Despite the overwhelmingly progressive principles to which Islam demanded its followers adhere, early Muslim societies were unable to create the egalitarian world that the Quran and Muhammad had divined. The biggest barrier to creating this progressively unbiased

⁴⁷ Leila Badawi, *Islam*, WOMEN IN RELIGION 102 (1994).

⁴⁸ PICKTHALL. at book 4, verse 4.

⁴⁹ BADAWI. at 102.

community was the androcentric nature of pre-Islamic societies whose every rank and order seemed filled with men unwilling to move aside for new ideas of gender-blind equality. Many early Muslims had converted to Islam after seeing the worldly benefits it offered, including the prosperity and safety its military might insured, and were unwilling to abdicate their stranglehold on positions of societal power simply because of Muhammad's religious based revelations.⁵⁰ Therefore, when men in Muhammad's community felt that certain laws were removing too much of their power, they would openly refuse to follow his commands, forcing Muhammad to either make concessions attenuating the egalitarian principles he was preaching or face the possibility of losing control of the men whose help he needed in pioneering the still new religion.⁵¹ Along with direct confrontations, Muhammad also faced passive resistance in the form of deliberate misinterpretations of the Quran.⁵² Newly converted Muslim men who abhorred certain freedoms and powers that the Quran desired to give women would use the deficiencies inherent in human language to misapply ambiguous Quranic principles, leading to a power structure out of keeping with a religion pursuing freedom and more in line with the oppressive pre-Islamic societies to which these men were accustomed.⁵³ While there were many seemingly malicious steps taken by Muslim men to restrain women from achieving full freedom in early Islamic based societies, it is important to understand that many of these actions were not based in feelings of vengefulness, but rather out of paternal feelings of responsibility men had towards a sex they had been raised to believe needed extra protection and help.⁵⁴ Lastly, when early Muslim societies mixed principles of pre-Islamic tradition with those of their new religion, the end result was a

⁵⁰ MERNISSI, at 137.

⁵¹ Id.

⁵² Id. at 139.

⁵³ Id.

⁵⁴ WADUD. at 32.

system diametrically opposed to many of Muhammad's express teachings.⁵⁵ This system, though present in many manifestations throughout the modern world, struggles to find balance between Muhammad's command for equality and the pre-Islamic based call for male supremacy and can be observed by looking at Egypt's societal roles for women in the interdependent areas of marriage, education, and freedom to work directly before the Egyptian revolution in 2011.

A. Muhammad Faces Direct Resistance to Islamic Principles

When Muhammad first began to recite the principles of equality divined to him by Allah, the societies directly surrounding him were still in early stages of development and resisted against many of his egalitarian ideals through each direct confrontation, deliberate misapplication of the holy texts, and through earnest attempts to protect the sanctity of their women, who up until that point had been powerless. In order to understand why the Quran was not able to be applied directly in its full force to early Islamic societies, it is important to understand just what these societies were like at Islam's inception. The Arabian Peninsula directly before the time of Muhammad is described by many historians, including Muhammad Yusuf Abd, as a barbarous and immoral land, full of inhabitants whose freedom from morality was rooted in their lack of true spiritual beliefs.⁵⁶ It is generally accepted that women in general were humiliated, treated harshly and reduced to the position of being mere maids.⁵⁷ Women were held in bondage to their husbands, who could keep them or divorce them at their will and pleasure.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Id. at 28-32.

⁵⁶ JAWAD. at 1.

⁵⁷ Id.

⁵⁸ Id.

With this in mind, Muhammad's demand that society progress towards egalitarianism was an attempt to move men from one extreme to another and resulted in foreseeable actions of compromise through which many Islamic ideals were distorted or completely lost. A shining example of Muhammad being forced to compromise with his followers is evident through what Maurice Lombard described as taking place after Muhammad and his soldiers emerged victorious at the battle of Hunayn. As was customary according to pre-Islamic principles, Muhammad's soldiers were entitled to the spoils of war which included the enemies' women, children, animals, and any other conceivable booty they could lay their hands on.⁵⁹ To be sure not to understate this privilege, it was really one of the only ways that Muhammad's soldiers could ever expect to acquire wealth within their lifetimes and a right they were very determined to keep. A problem quickly arose when the commander of the freshly defeated enemy troops in Hunayn expressed his desire to convert his entire clan to Islam, bringing pre-Islamic tradition in direct confrontation with newly expressed Islamic principles, through which the looting of enemies was not allowed if they were Muslims.⁶⁰ Muhammad's soldiers demanded that he act in accordance with pre-Islamic tradition and disregarded every one of his attempts to assuage their anger and aggression. Muhammad, adamant on following Allah's wishes, eventually even offered his soldiers "six of his own personal sheep in exchange for any one prisoner that his soldiers would release,"⁶¹ but his pleas fell on deaf ears and he was forced to acquiesce to his soldiers' overwhelming demands. Muhammad's soldiers "placed a hand on him, saying 'we will not let you go until you make the distribution [of our captives' booty].' They pulled of his cloak, shouted at him, and made an ugly scene. The Prophet was forced to divide up the remainder of

⁵⁹ MERNISSI. at 137.

⁶⁰ Id.

⁶¹ Id.

the booty on the spot, according to tribal custom."⁶² While some might call this cowardly, it has to be understood that there was very little Muhammad could do at this instance and that he acted with a focus on the bigger picture. Muhammad understood that the time he was living in was very backwards in some regards and that what he was asking of his people would culminate in a near perfect society. With this in mind, he knew that to galvanize Islam, he would necessarily have to take many baby steps; everything could not be accomplished all at once. If Muhammad had refused to make concessions to his men, there was a very real chance that they would no longer be interested in fighting his battles and Islam would soon fizzle. If he bargained with his men, at the expense of some Islamic principles of equality, some important ideals may be momentarily suppressed, but Islam would live to fight another day. Because of his profound foresight, many historians praise Muhammad's clairvoyance and question "what power of negotiation does a commander have with his soldiers when he cannot even let them dream of booty? Without military success there would be no Islam."⁶³ Concessions directly conflicting with rights propounded through Islam were not only made by Muhammad in the areas of war and his soldiers' rights to booty, but occurred throughout the early days of the new religion, especially in the area of women's rights. While Muhammad had divined that women had an equal right to inheritance, which was fought tooth and nail by many men, he understood that these grants "greatly increased the sacrifices that the male believers had to make to Allah" and that "if men had need of God, God also had need of man."⁶⁴ Perceptive to an impressive degree, Muhammad left the fighting for many Islamic principles to times in the future where society would be more receptive of them.

⁶² Id. at 138.

⁶³ Id.

⁶⁴ Id. at 139.

B. Deliberate Misinterpretations Used to Circumvent Islamic Principles

Not only did Muhammad face direct challenges to rules and ideals fundamental to Islam, he also struggled against deliberate misinterpretations of the Quran which allowed men to circumvent many inconvenient Islamic laws. Never was this deliberate misinterpretation more obvious than directly after Muhammad divined laws giving women an unheard of share of inheritance. Even though these new laws were completely unambiguous as "a woman as a mother would have the right to so much, as a wife her share would be such and such, as a sole daughter or a daughter with others, such and such an amount,"⁶⁵ men diluted the importance of these commands through interpreting more ambiguous texts alongside them. One of the most important verses used to hinder women's rights can be found in Sura 6, verse 5 which states "give not unto the foolish what is in your keeping of their wealth."⁶⁶ Using this verse and the ambiguity inherent in the term "foolish", men who desired to keep all of the inheritance for themselves and continue excluding women, "insisted that the foolish are women and children and both of them must be excluded from the inheritance."⁶⁷ Sadly, this conflict lasted for centuries until Al-Tabari, an influential scholar of the sacred text who lived between 838 and 923 AD, undertook an in depth study of the meaning of the term "foolish", concluding that "this verse means that one should not hand over to a foolish person his or her fortune, whatever that person's age or sex. Foolish here means persons incapable of managing their fortune, who might squander their assets. That person must be put under guardianship with the guardian controlling the usage of the assets."⁶⁸ While these passive attempts to retain power against principles of the newly egalitarian religion were less threatening to Islam's survival than the direct confrontations

⁶⁵ Id. 126

⁶⁶ PICKTHAL. at book 87, verse 9.

⁶⁷ MERNISSI. at 126.

⁶⁸ TABARI, TAFSIR, Dar al-Fiqh edn. vol. 7, 561 (1984).

Muhammad faced, they greatly hindered its progression and forced people in influential positions throughout Muslim society to dedicate time to matters that should never have arisen.

C. Pre-Islamic Principles Pertaining to the Protection and Sanctity of Women

Even though the men of Muhammad's time could be seen as malicious in their attempts to withhold equality from members of the female sex, there is another dimension to this power struggle which sheds light on their sometimes murky position. Up until that point in pre-Islamic society, men held all the power and also held almost all of the responsibilities, aside from those pertaining to raising the children or keeping the home. Men's broad set of duties included protecting the respect and sanctity of their women, and this most important duty led to many protective social practices. For example, women were almost never referred to with their own name, but rather by the name of their father or if they were married, their husband. Even in the Quran, "most women are referred to as wives, and the Quran refers to them by means of a possessive construction containing one of the Arabic words for wife: woman, women, spouse, or mate and the name of a particular male."⁶⁹ This reference system represents the general principle that "women should be addressed respectfully-and is intended for those who read the Quran at other times."⁷⁰ Just as it was customary to show respect to women through indirectly addressing them, it was also seen as a sign of respect not to look directly at another man's wife, whose modesty and integrity was never to be attacked.⁷¹ Because of this understanding, women were separated from the public sphere of men during pre-Islamic times and really only began venturing out into society after the introduction of the veil. In this way, the veil could be seen as a sort of "portable seclusion, a liberating invention enabling women to move out of segregated

⁶⁹ WADUD, at 32.

⁷⁰ Id. at 33.

⁷¹ Id.

living spaces while still observing the basic moral requirements of separating and protecting women from unrelated men."⁷² After thorough analysis, it becomes evident that the inability of early Muslim societies to adopt Islam's egalitarian ideals stems not only from a desire of men to keep certain powers from women, but also from a desire to keep women in their positions of utmost respect and protection while somehow staying true to the basic tenets of the new text.

D. Continuation of Distorted Islamic Principles into Pre-Revolutionary Egypt

The inability of early Muslim societies to integrate all of Islam's egalitarian principles into a working structure led to a synthesis of two diametrically opposed cultures: a pre-Islamic culture whose power structure drastically favored men over women with an Islamic culture whose intention was simply unbiased equality. Hundreds of years after Islam had been introduced to the world, Muslim societies had still not progressed to the equality that Muhammad had hoped for and continued to tread water until backtracking began. This backtracking began during the Abbasid period, through which many discriminatory pre-Islamic practices resurfaced and was exacerbated by the Mongol and Turkish invasions which worked together to besmirch Islamic principles pertaining to egalitarianism and allowed for a much easier repression of women.⁷³

Modern countries with predominantly Muslim roots continue to feel the side effects of this uneasy initial integration, evinced through the cultural norms present in Egypt relating to women's rights in the areas of marriage, education, and work up until the beginning of the Egyptian revolution in 2011. Of the utmost importance is the understanding that each lingering institution of pre-Islamic oppression is deeply intertwined with others in such patriarchal

⁷² Lila Abu-Lughod, *Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving?*, AMERICAN ANTHROPOLOGIST, New Series Vol. 104, No. 3, 785 (2002).

⁷³ John Esposito, *The Changing Role of Muslim Women*, ISLAM AND THE MODERN AGE, Vol 7 No.1 29-32 (1976).

societies; the degree to which women's rights in the areas of marriage, education, and work are restrained is determined by the strength of the bond these interdependent systems of oppression share with one another. Therefore, when women's rights in one area emerge, bases will be formed for the emergence of women's rights in each of the others. While this domino effect will operate to liberate women in the way that Muhammad originally envisioned, getting the ball rolling has remained difficult. It should be noted that although Egypt is hardly representative of Muslim based societies as a whole, it has deep historical roots to Islam and many of its societal structures reflect a desire to incorporate Muhammad's teachings with those of earlier times.

Although Egypt is predominantly Muslim, with most estimates revealing eighty to ninety percent of the population to be Sunni, before the revolution women's rights in the area of marriage were far from what Muhammad envisaged when reciting the Quran.⁷⁴ For starters, women still lacked the complete independence to pick and choose husbands for themselves as for the most part their suitors were picked either by their parents or their extended family.⁷⁵ It has been noted that "marriage in Egypt is usually a matter of family negotiation regarding choice of partner and the timing of the wedding."⁷⁶ Furthermore, before a woman could enter into marriage, she first had to negotiate a written contract with her groom to be.⁷⁷ This contract determined the woman's entitlement to economic support from her husband throughout the duration of the marriage and included "a list of each party's material contributions to the household while revealing the bride's position and bargaining status within the conjugal

⁷⁴ Id. at 29.

⁷⁵ Sajeda Amin, *Education, Wage Work, and Marriage: Perspectives of Egyptian Working Women*, JOURNAL OF MARRIAGE AND FAMILY, Vol. 66, No. 5, 1292 (2004).

⁷⁶ Id.

⁷⁷ H. Hoodfar, *The Impact of Male Migration on Domestic Budgeting: Egyptian Women Striving for an Islamic Budgeting Pattern*, JOURNAL OF COMPARATIVE FAMILY STUDIES 28 (2004).

relationship."⁷⁸ Therefore, where a woman entered into the contract with very little bargaining power, either because she was not at her physical prime or she had very few assets, more would be expected from her in the area of household duties and she could face harsher monetary repercussions if the marriage did not work. Conversely "the more assets a woman brought to her new household, the greater her bargaining position would be."⁷⁹ Because a potential wife would always very much prefer having as much leverage as possible during this contractual time, women were indirectly encouraged to either enter into marriage at a young age while they were still beautiful. For this reason, one mother of a young Egyptian woman noted "my mother in law used to say that a girl has a market value, and we should be quick to get her married before her market value goes down. This man wants her and this one wants her, and if you don't choose one of them, you are going to lose them all, you are going to lose the peak of her market value and she will be left. If the girl gets close to her market value, give her to her buyer."⁸⁰ If a woman waited too long to get married and her beauty had been diminished, her only other option to increase her bargaining power would be to acquire wealth, something not always easy to do. One such woman who had waited quite long to find her husband noted "in order to keep my dignity, I have to prepare myself as well as I can. The cupboard of the dining room has to be full of china sets that I will never use, but I cannot keep my head about my shoulders if I do not buy it."⁸¹ This material understanding of marriage is totally out of keeping with fundamental Islamic teachings and reflects the difficulty Islam has had in vanquishing pre-Islamic norms pertaining to marriage in Egypt.

⁷⁸ Id.

⁷⁹ D. Singerman, *The Cost of Marriage in Egypt: A Hidden Variable in the New Arab Demography*, CAIRO PAPERS IN SOCIAL SCIENCE (2001).

⁸⁰ AMIN. At 1292.

⁸¹ Id. at 1293.

Not only was the institution of marriage inside pre revolution Egypt out of keeping with basic Quranic principles, but it was bolstered and itself bolstered social practices in the area of women's rights to find paying work. Because pre-revolutionary Egypt was still largely a patriarchal system approaching the revolution, women were expected first and foremost to carry out the majority of domestic duties while men were expected to bring home a source of income.⁸² Because of this phenomenon, young women are still at a particular disadvantage in Egypt's labor market today as "the unemployment rate among female youth aged 20-24 years was 52.8% compared to 33% among male youth in early 2013."⁸³ Furthermore, it is noteworthy that while most unemployed male youth eventually find work, "most young women move out of the labor force in conjunction with marriage and childbearing."⁸⁴ While there was no written law that women in pre revolution Egypt must keep the home, many women expressly or impliedly agreed to this when entering into their marital contracts, understanding that nurturing children, cleaning, and cooking are all things that one of the two spouses must do and something that they can probably do more effectively than their male counterpart.⁸⁵ What this obviously resulted in was an extreme hindrance for women in their ability to find paying work in pre revolution Egypt. Not only did such domestic duties take exorbitant amounts of time when done with the passion and caring that they inwardly necessitate, but they required the woman to stay within a geographical area that was not conducive to her finding work. It has been suggested that the reason women were underemployed in Egypt at the turn of the century can be explained through "women's lack of geographic mobility accompanied by Egypt's particular development policy

⁸² Id. at 26.

⁸³ Ghada Barsoum, *No Jobs and Bad Jobs*, (Jan. 6, 2013), <http://www.aucegypt.edu/gapp/caireview/pages/articleDetails.aspx?aid=280>

⁸⁴ Id.

⁸⁵ AMIN. at 1292.

that relies on the development of industrial centers far from urban population centers."⁸⁶ In other words, many jobs that became available in Egypt during these times required long daily commutes and "women's lack of mobility, attributed to their greater domestic responsibilities and to social norms of acceptable behavior , discouraged women from venturing beyond the local community for paid work."⁸⁷ Where a wife has the social responsibility of taking care of the marital home through watching the children and cooking family meals, there is hardly time for hour long commutes during the early morning hours. It is now observable how the contractual obligations that women enter into before getting married play a role in women being less able to become active in the workforce throughout the marriage. Representative of the general gender biased sentiment during pre-revolutionary times, when a group of ten to nineteen year old male and female children were asked about domestic responsibilities in reference to gender in 2003, "over 90% of boys reported that wives should be solely responsible for all domestic chores, with girls echoing similar values...furthermore, whereas jobs were cited as the most important reason for educating boys (62%), being better mothers was the most important reason for girls (48%)."⁸⁸ Lastly, it should also be noted that even where jobs are available for women inside their own communities, they must abstain from certain careers to preserve their reputations and therefore "must not work or travel at night and sometimes even avoid jobs that involve being seen in public or working with men."⁸⁹ All in all, through unexpressed but intact ideals relating to a woman's place in marriage, women in pre revolution Egypt found it difficult to enter into the workforce, as it compromised their ability to play their role as mothers and wives.

⁸⁶ AMIN. at 1288.

⁸⁷ Id.

⁸⁸ Id. at 1289.

⁸⁹ Id. at 1296.

Just as the institutions of marriage and work operated in conjunction to cause friction in the areas of women's basic freedoms in pre revolution Egypt, education also played a part in this tangled web. Women were raised in Egypt with an implicit understanding of their importance in the area of domestic matters. These domestic responsibilities, which hinder their ability to travel or find work, have also made the pursuance of an education sometimes seem unwise, as it takes away from the time many women saw as necessary to saving for a proper marriage. One women interviewed from Port Said echoed this general sentiment when reporting that "she thought working after receiving her diploma was better than studying for two more years...starting to work immediately would enable her to begin preparing for marriage and make things easier for her family. If she continued her education, she would graduate at 20, the age at which she expected to be married, and she would not have an opportunity to save for her marriage."⁹⁰ Not only does education detract from a woman preparing for marriage, but it also decreases the chances that a woman will marry by limiting her range of acceptable men to those with similar educations, who most likely will expect her to bring more money into the marriage while it is being contracted for. This fear was expressed by an interviewee who noted "If I went on to an institute of higher education, I would want to marry a man with at least the same degree, if not higher, and it would be more costly for my family to prepare me for marriage. First I would not have enough time to work before marriage and help myself, and also a groom with higher education and status would want a more costly gehaz from my family."⁹¹ It becomes clear that while women in pre revolution Egypt desired to find good jobs and receive educations, these luxuries were ones that they did not believe were obtainable while remaining desirable as wives.

⁹⁰ Id.

⁹¹ Id.

These systems therefore worked together, one supporting the other, warning women that attempts to break through from the grasps of any would result in problems in all.

IV. WOMEN'S FUNDAMENTAL ROLE IN THE EGYPTIAN REVOLUTION AND HOW THIS WILL AFFECT THEIR IMMEDIATE FUTURE

The Egyptian revolution necessarily required the backing of every single member of society in order to successfully oust an autocratic despot whose command of the military and police made him a force to be reckoned with. This gender-blind call for each and every oppressed member of society to hold hands and unite against a common enemy joined Muslims with Copts, doctors with street vendors, and men with women, as each converged into a single unitary voice, demanding in synchronicity the equality and freedom that Muhammad had spoken of hundreds of years earlier. The role of women in the Egyptian revolution can truly not be trivialized as they provided the mass of protestors with the density and tenacity that a successful revolution requires. They stood fearless, shoulder to shoulder with much bigger men, shielding their fellow activists from the rubber bullets, Molotov cocktails, and stones that flew from the tyrannical hands of Mubarak's men, refusing to return to their homes or lower their voices and vowing never again to be marginalized by a society whose recognition of their freedom should have materialized hundreds of years ago.⁹² While women as a whole played an immense and irreplaceable role in the Egyptian revolution, a few in particular stand out as exemplary models of strength and power and whose roles demanded that Egyptian women be given the power to live equally with their male counterparts after the dust had fallen and the newly democratic society had emerged. Despite women's extremely important role in the Egyptian revolution, the emergent government has not immediately granted women the freedom and egalitarianism they

⁹² AL AMIN. at 28.

believed the revolution would create and actually took steps amounting in a retreat in these some of these areas. Despite this new oppression, women refuse to shrink to the sidelines, and using the ousting of Mubarak as a personal success, continue to fight tooth and nail for the equality that Muhammad preached of hundreds of years ago.

A. The Nature of the Egyptian Revolution and the Necessity of Women's Participation

The Egyptian revolution, following the direction of Paulo Freire, utilized the sheer enormity of the oppressed masses to transform what would have been a compartmentalized uprising into a far reaching revolution which demanded participation from every corner of society.⁹³ It was truly overwhelming how the entire Egyptian community, including every possible classification of society, was not only involved in the revolution, but came together to become an integral part of it. Every single time protesters marched, they were represented "by a broad cross section of society, including men and women, young and old, educated and illiterate, who declared that their demonstrations were peaceful but that they were determined to press their demands."⁹⁴ This diversity wasn't only represented through the broad categories of age, gender, and education, but also in the more narrow areas of employment, religion, political belief and really any others imaginable. "Politicians and party leaders, Imams and priests, judges and lawyers, former military officers and veterans, laborers and farmers, professionals and the unemployed, taxi drivers and garbage collectors, young and old, women and men, families with their children, as well as prominent actors, artists, poets, movie directors, journalists, and authors united...Egypt had never seen such unanimity in its modern history."⁹⁵ The unity of these many polar opposite parts was almost unfathomable; Coptic priests conversed freely with Muslim

⁹³ PAULO FREIRE, PEDAGOGY OF THE OPPRESSED 108 (1995).

⁹⁴ AL AMIN. at 28.

⁹⁵ Id. at 36.

imams on the importance of national unity while "the prominent Muslim Brotherhood leaders praised and defended the Copts while Coptic leaders hailed them in return for their cooperation and sacrifices and spoke of a new dawn of Muslim-Coptic relations based on mutual respect and shared citizenship."⁹⁶ The indivisible unity that this large mass of protestors held not only disregarded once immovable barriers between its diverse actors, but it seemed to feed of the relinquishment of these boundaries, growing more and more powerful as each wall was smashed down. Regardless of the hatred the many people of the revolution may have had for one another at one point in their lives, they each understood that the fight they were engaging in was against a far more vile enemy, the corrupt autocratic system headed by Mubarak, and that to emerge victorious, they had to be one.

As women make up the majority of almost any population and were the most oppressed during times leading up to the Egyptian revolution, in order to harness the power of the masses there was an explicit requirement that not only women participate in the process, but that they be given an equal voice throughout its entirety.⁹⁷ This understanding is in line with Paulo Freire's belief that it is "absolutely essential that the oppressed participate in the revolutionary process with an increasingly critical awareness of their role as Subject of the transformation."⁹⁸ Due to the enormity of the female population in Egypt and the level that they had been oppressed up until that point, their anger was the fuel that Freire saw as essential to a successful movement of this sort and something that would be irreplaceable if lost. Just imagine, if women had not participated in the Egyptian revolution, the crowds would have been half their size, the shouts and screams half as loud, and the fear aroused in Mubarak and his men half as palpable. Even

⁹⁶ Id. at 75.

⁹⁷ Id.

⁹⁸ FREIRE, at 108.

with this in mind, the degree to which women participated in the Egyptian revolution is truly astonishing. To preface women's roles in the revolution, Amin writes that "Egypt, like most Muslim countries, is a largely patriarchal society not used to having women, especially young females, leading any group organization, let alone a political movement. But here the Egyptian people witnessed young women not only speaking out against the brutality and illegitimacy of the regime on live television, but also leading the demonstrators in chants and camping out in Tahrir Square for weeks."⁹⁹ These women were truly key actors, without which the revolution could not have been a success, as they "demonstrated in large numbers, were essential organizers, leaders, and spokespersons during all phases of the revolution, including during the most difficult times when they came under physical attack by the security forces and thugs of the ruling party...they posted the calls for mobilization and uploaded their video blogs on the internet, they distributed leaflets and urged their neighborhoods to protest, they were subsequently beaten, injured, and sacrificed their lives and they chanted and led demonstrations against the regime."¹⁰⁰ The participation of women from the very start encouraged women across Egypt to join in the movement, leading to heavy female losses as "at least 10% of the casualties in the first week were women."¹⁰¹ Men who stood shoulder to shoulder with women in Tahrir Square and valued them as equal players, but also took steps to protect them, "shielding them from the batons or rubber bullets of the security forces, or the stones and Molotov cocktails from the goons of the ruling party."¹⁰² Women's roles in the revolution and their deaths that

⁹⁹ AL AMIN, at 67.

¹⁰⁰ Id. at 75.

¹⁰¹ Id. at 67.

¹⁰² Id.

resulted, solidified their role "as real partners for genuine change and entitled them to an ownership of this great event in their history."¹⁰³

B. Key Women Actors in the Egyptian Revolution

Even though women as a whole lent to one of the most important dimensions of the Egyptian revolution, a number of women in particular including Asmaa Mahfouz, Isra'a Abdel Fattah, Nawwara Nagm, and Sally Tooma Moore were of the utmost importance to the struggle and truly stand out as shining examples of the power inherent in the human spirit. Asmaa Mahfouz was a 26 year old Business Administration graduate who is described as lacking any formal political training before joining the Youth Movement in March of 2008. Despite this lack of political savvy, Mahfouz played a critical role in the mobilization efforts for the revolution as she posted "passionate daily online videos imploring her countrymen and women to participate in the protests."¹⁰⁴ Describing her own role, Mahfouz elucidated "I was printing and distributing leaflets in popular areas and calling for citizens to participate. I also talked to young people about their rights and the need for their participation. At the time when many people were setting themselves on fire, I went into Tahrir Square with several members of the movement and we tried a spontaneous demonstration to protest against the recurrent of these incidents."¹⁰⁵ She later added that "I said that on the 25th of January, I would be an Egyptian girl defending her dignity and her rights. I broadcasted the video on the internet via Facebook and was surprised by its unprecedented distribution over websites and phone."¹⁰⁶ Mahfouz' most important attribute is clearly her ability to appeal to similarly situated people and give them the feelings of empowerment so necessary amongst the people for a successful upheaval. When this

¹⁰³ Id.

¹⁰⁴ Id. at 46.

¹⁰⁵ Id.

¹⁰⁶ Id.

petite graduate student posted online videos and handed out pamphlets imploring her countrymen to join her in protest, she instilled in them the understanding that they could do it, it was possible, the revolution could be won and they people could snatch the freedom that had been stolen from them years and years ago.

Isra'a Abdel el-Fattah's contributions during the early stages of the Egyptian revolution were also extremely important to its future success, as she was one of the first to use the social media networks of Facebook and Twitter to raise awareness of where the demonstrations were to occur and what its participants could expect. Abdel el-Fattah first came under police scrutiny when she created a Facebook page encouraging Egyptians to "support a strike in the industrial city of al-Mahalla that had taken place on April 6."¹⁰⁷ Within days, and after the Facebook page had garnered over 70,000 supporters, Abdel el-Fattah was arrested marking it as the first time in the past three decades that "a warrant was issued against a female under the notorious emergency laws imposed in the country since 1981."¹⁰⁸ To get out of prison, she had to issue a public apology and express her deep sorrow for contributing to the escalation of problems in al-Mahalla. This did not deter her, however, and days after she was released, she helped create the April 6th Youth movement which remained "one of the most popular political forums on several social networking sites."¹⁰⁹ This movement called for marches to start from all of the major squares, including Cairo and Alexandria, and demanded four things: "that the government develop programs to address poverty and unemployment, that it would end the state of emergency and uphold judicial independence, the resignation of the interior minister whose ministry was notorious for torture and abuse of human rights, and for political reforms including the limitation of presidential terms to two, the dissolution of parliament, and for new elections to

¹⁰⁷ Id. at 26.

¹⁰⁸ Id. at 27.

¹⁰⁹ Id. at 29.

be held after the massive elections fraud of last November."¹¹⁰ By encouraging members from far away cities to unite against a common oppressor, the entire Egyptian landscape seemed to erupt in unison, creating a show of force that could not be dealt with simply with one blow. As the major cities of Cairo and Alexandria erupted in protest, thanks to Abdel el-Fattah's work, rural areas erupted as well and the whole country was joined in a struggle for human equality.

Nawwara Nagm was also exceedingly important to the success of the revolution as she supplied one of the most articulate and well educated voices of the revolution. Nagm was a 37 year old English literature major who since times well before the revolution, had been a "well known political activist as well as a severe critic of Mubarak's regime."¹¹¹ At the age of 22, she had been imprisoned after protesting the inclusion of Israel in Cairo's annual Book Fair. Since the uprisings began on January 25, Nagm was an "eloquent spokesperson, expressing the steadfast political demands of the organizers and protesters, and in the process mobilizing the support of millions of Egyptians and Arabs who are constantly following the revolution on Al-Jazeera and other satellite networks."¹¹² More than anything else, Nagm contributed the abilities of a well-spoken and well known woman of society attracting those to the cause that may not have been supportive otherwise; she took a revolution whose direction may have been seen as youth and social media oriented and added a professional dimension.

Dr. Sally Tooma Moore, a Christian Copt, was also important to the revolution, but not exactly in the same ways as the Mahfouz, Abdel el-Fattah, or Nagm. Moore, unlike these political activists, lent her services to the revolution by saving hundreds of lives in a makeshift hospital in a Cairo mosque during the violent attacks of the security forces and the outlaws sponsored by the ruling party. In a recent interview she demonstrated the unity of all Egyptians,

¹¹⁰ Id.

¹¹¹ Id. at 47.

¹¹² Id. at 48.

Muslims and Copts when she said "It's totally beyond all description how the mosque has been transformed into a working hospital. It is a mosque but there are no religious divisions." Her answer to a question by Al-Jazeera about the regime's assertion regarding the lack of stability in the country was "what is stability without freedom?"¹¹³ While Moore may not have been on the sidelines as long as some of the other aforementioned women, her services were crucial to the revolutionary movement and highlighted both the intelligence and gumption of Egyptian females in their struggle against Mubarak's regime.

C. Direct Impact of the Revolution on Women's Rights

The ousting of Mubarak created an air of insouciant calm over the entire country which sedated the masses and encouraged them to release their clasped hands and return to ordinary life. In the brief tranquility that followed the revolution, surprising steps were taken by the Egyptian people which seemed to indicate a progression towards democratic equality and the world watched eagerly as all signs foretold success. Alas, these felicitous feelings were not meant to persist and as the new societal voices of power emerged, women realized that their seemingly eternal enemy had not yet been defeated.¹¹⁴ First, women were ignored almost completely within the reformation of the political system and second, when women began to protest their lack of political involvement in the emergent government, they were subjected to humiliating physical assaults.¹¹⁵ Despite the incredible forms of subjugation women suffered after Mubarak's ousting, one thing is clear: women of Egypt now understand that they are not impotent, they are not destined to remain on the sidelines of society; they understand that united

¹¹³ Id. at 50.

¹¹⁴ Women and the Arab Spring: Hearings 112-205 Before the Subcommittee on International Operations and Organizations, Human Rights, Democracy, and Global Women's Issues 57 (2011).

¹¹⁵ Id.

they are as powerful as any foe Egypt has ever seen, and they courageously continue their revolution against oppression and towards a true democratic nation.

One of the greatest accomplishments achieved as a direct result of women's roles in the Egyptian revolution and one that may signal even greater things to come occurred when "Egyptian leaders from the House of the Family, Muslim, and Christian, along with human rights activists, renowned scholars, and youth leaders of the Social Media revolution, gathered in Cannes, France at the invitation of Freedom and signed the Cannes Peace Accord and Plan of Action which vowed to support the Egyptian Bill of Rights and Freedoms as a normative guiding legal and policy structure for Egypt."¹¹⁶ It should be noted that the House of the Family is a committee organized by the religious heads of the country "modeling the importance of cooperation between Christians and Muslims and encouraging unity of all Egyptians as one nation and one people."¹¹⁷ This Bill of Rights is really the first of its kind in the Arab world and provides "11 more principles, including equality for women and men, prohibition against discrimination based on religion, gender, ethnicity, language, or belief, freedom of religion, popular sovereignty, rule of law, separation of powers independence, of the judiciary, and human dignity."¹¹⁸ Objectively, this is a tremendous accomplishment and one whose realization could only be achieved through the overwhelming unity demonstrated by the unrelenting Egyptian masses. It shows how powerful and necessary solidarity is amongst the oppressed and stands as a reification of the spoils of war they recently ripped from Mubarak's trembling hands. Along with this great accomplishment, other small victories were felt such as that achieved by the Forum for Women in Development, a Cairo-based women's rights organization, which obtained

¹¹⁶ Id.

¹¹⁷ Id.

¹¹⁸ Id.

"a decree from the Egyptian government allowing Egyptian women married to Palestinian men to pass their nationality to their children."¹¹⁹ Both of these achievements were demonstrative of the growing amount of power still felt swelling inside the recently victorious crowds, and made people around the world hopeful that Egypt would achieve its dream of equality.

Sadly, the freedom based concessions made to the Egyptian people directly after the revolution were not representative of the movement's immediate future, and women soon thereafter began to feel a familiar sensation of discrimination and anti-feminist sentiment. After playing a vital role in the revolution, women were actively excluded from the reform process as "the ten person constitutional amendment committee responsible for revising the constitution prior to the upcoming elections was all men" and "no women were appointed to be governors and only one women of a possible 34 was appointed to the new cabinet, and she was a holdover from the Mubarak regime."¹²⁰ A committee was formed whose objective was the equality of women, but its creation was understood by all as a condescending pat on the head whose smirking message was "you women can have your little committee while we men do the serious business."¹²¹ Along with being completely excluded from the political reform process, women who have recently taken to the streets to protest their lack of involvement have been subjected to extremely degrading acts of physical abuse including rape and genital mutilation. On March 8, for example, hundreds of women were attacked when they gathered in Tahrir Square to call for a greater voice in Egypt's transition. In May, when the military cleared Tahrir Square, it "arrested and detained dozens of female demonstrators, subjecting them to degrading and dehumanizing virginity tests, which the transitional government said would not be used again but did not

¹¹⁹ Id. at 76.

¹²⁰ Id. at 89.

¹²¹ Id. at 90.

apologize for."¹²² On November 25, "three women were sexually assaulted during anti-Morsi demonstrations by hundreds of men."¹²³ The attacks reached a new low when a Natasha Smith, a British journalist who was filming a documentary on the Egyptian revolution, was "snatched up from her friend and stripped naked while men pulled her limbs apart and threw her around. These men scratched and clenched her breasts and continuously violated her."¹²⁴ This rape was largely similar to one suffered by Lara Logan, a CBS reporter who says that months earlier the crowds "tore off her clothes and raped her with their hands, while taking photographs with their cellphones. They began pulling her body in different directions, pulling her hair so hard she said it seemed they were trying to tear off chunks of her scalp."¹²⁵ Even when they are not protesting, women are facing waves of harassment and violence in major cities such as Cairo, whether they're simply riding the train or walking down the street. Waaa Al Momtaz, a student at City University, doesn't leave her home for up to five days at a time, noting "every day men talk to me in a bad way, laugh at me and say things about what I am wearing" (world news) and one man on the bus even stuck his hand through a gap in his seat to touch her."¹²⁶ Eman Mostafa, a sixteen year old fared even worse as she was gunned down after she "spit in the face of a man who groped her in the province of Assiut."¹²⁷ To make matters even worse, popular preachers such as Salafi preacher Abu Islam encourage the world to blame the women themselves for these occurrences, noting that women are going to Tahrir Square not to protest but to be sexually abused "they tell you that naked women-who are going to Tahrir Square because they want to be

¹²² Id. at 12.

¹²³ Id.

¹²⁴ Felicity Morse, *Natasha Smith, British Journalist Sexually Attacked in Tahrir Square, Vows to Return to Egypt*, The Huffington Post, (Mar. 15, 2013), http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2012/06/28/natasha-smith-british-journalist-tahrir-square-egypt_n_1635150.html

¹²⁵ Interview Entitled Lara Logan Breaks her Silence, CBS 60 Minutes (May 1, 2011)

¹²⁶ Charlene Gubash, Men Don't Have to Worry About Being Caught: Sex Mobs Target Egypt's Women, NBC News (Dec. 5, 2012), http://worldnews.nbcnews.com/_news/2012/12/05/15675200-men-dont-have-to-worry-about-being-caught-sex-mobs-target-egypts-women?lite

¹²⁷ Id.

raped-are a red line! And they ask Morsi and the Brotherhood to leave power!"¹²⁸ Clearly, women have suffered extreme oppression since playing their vital role in Mubarak's ousting.

It is important to realize that the empowerment of women is "inextricable linked to the potential of nations to generate economic growth and sustainable democracy."¹²⁹ Ambassador Verveer noted while speaking in front of the U.S. Senate that the world knows from experience of other societies in transition, that when "women play an active and inclusive role from participating in the drafting of new constitutions to engaging in government decisions to growing businesses, the whole country benefits. No country can get ahead if it leaves half of its people behind. This is not a favor to women. It is not simply a nice thing to do. Women's issues are everybody's issues. Democracy without the participation of women is a contradiction in terms, and economies without the inclusion of women will not prosper."¹³⁰ Unless Egyptians wish to retreat to a society founded upon inequality throughout the power structure, the women who were so pivotal to the ousting of Mubarak have to be given their rightly earned positions and until this is done, the true revolution will not be complete.

Despite the harsh and inhuman tactics used by those in power to restrain women from grabbing the equality inherent in a democratic society, Egyptian women refuse to remain silent. They understand that they played pivotal roles in the ousting of Mubarak as "some were doctors, working side by side with their male counterparts treating thousands of the injured in the street, some were part of the protection and security committees, patting down female protestors to ensure their safety...concisely they were part of every important function of the revolution."¹³¹

¹²⁸ Raymond Ibrahim, *Morsi's Egypt as Repressive as Mubarak's, Women Targeted for Harassment and Rape*, (Feb. 23, 2013), <http://gerarddirect.com/2013/02/23/8186/>

¹²⁹ Women and the Arab Spring 18 (2013)

¹³⁰ Id.

¹³¹ Id. at 21.

In short, by the time Mubarak had been ousted, "the women of Egypt had found their voices and would never return to the margins of society again."¹³² Because of this empowerment, women will continue to take to the streets and continue to voice their demands. They will refuse to step down and play their outdated role as the submissive. They will continue to show up in all corners of society and voice their utter disdain for an enemy whose face may have changed, but who remains the same in spirit. Women have tasted victory and now will not relent from a foe whose success was made possible only through female intervention. As Martin Luther King Jr. once reminded his fellow oppressed compatriots at the height of their struggle against a tyrannical system, "I am a somebody. I am a person. I am a man with dignity and honor. I have a rich and noble history." This understanding has been imbued in women across Egypt, and they will never again back down.

V. CONCLUSION

When Muhammad introduced his followers to Islam in the early seventh century, he was introducing them to a radical new way of thinking that put all members of society on equal footing regardless of their gender. Due to the androcentric nature of pre-Islamic societies and the strangle hold men held on positions of power, many Islamic principles pertaining to the equality of women in society were met with frustration and Muhammad was forced to compromise some of the new religion's ideals in order to ensure its survival. The initial inability of Islam to directly create the egalitarian societies that Islam demanded led to centuries of gender based discrimination in countries with predominantly Muslim roots, such as Egypt, evident even in modern times through taking a look at admittedly normal social practices in Egypt in the areas of marriage, education, and work. Egypt's revolution, through which women played key roles,

¹³² Id.

could finally be the tool that frees women from pre-Islamic imposed bondage as women have found their voice and have been empowered by the understanding that they have the strength necessary to take the equality that should have been given to them hundreds of years ago. Even though women made small gains as a direct result of Mubarak's ousting, they continued to face dismal discrimination, but continued to demonstrate and protest, empowered by the knowledge that they have been successful before and will be successful again. While the Egyptian revolution may not have brought about the gender-blind equality Muhammad pioneered for at the inception of Islam, it has done something almost as important; it has awakened women to the realization that equality belongs to them and that united they can attain it. It has ignited a fire in their spirits that will not be extinguished without the introduction of equal women's rights, and has begun to unravel the pre-Islamic infused gender dichotomy which has plagued Egypt throughout its entire existence.