

Interview with Amal Elmohandes

2014

TAPE 1

Nicola Pratt: Can you tell me when and where you were born?

Amal Elmohandes: Yeah, I was born on the 8th of March 1980. In Dubai. Both my parents are Egyptian but my father was working there. So, yeah. And then I came to Egypt when I was 6 years old.

NP: What was your father doing?

AE: He was, as far as I understand he was working in this company that work on electrical generators. and my mom wasn't working, she was a ... she was staying at home, she was a house wife. And... and then we came to Egypt because I have three sisters. I'm the youngest and ... the oldest one was getting into college to study medicine and so my father was a bit skeptical about her staying here on her own. In the dorms so she stayed for a year and then he decided that we should all move.

NP: Ok

AE: Yeah, so

NP: Do you have any memories from when you were growing up of political events or national events in Egypt?

AE: No, not at all actually.

NP: None?

AE: No. I mean ... yeah, no. Because like the .. my family setting is very... we're like very discreet and private and ...yeah, so. I mean I actually didn't start being active until after the revolution. Yeah, so..

NP: Ok. So, you didn't participate in the 25th of January?

AE: I started participating in the beginning of Feb.

NP: Ok.

AE: Yeah

NP: And this was the first time for you to participate in any sort of ...

AE: In a demonstration, yes

NP: In a demonstration. What made you go down

AE: I mean it's a funny story. In my previous job my friends and I were discussing it and we were all like, nothing's going to change and things are getting dismal and ... and I wasn't planning to ... to participate at all and the funny thing is my sister ... she went down on the 25th. and... and then on the... and I was following up on what was happening and I had friends who went down and... and then on the 28th of Jan my father broke his hip joint. So I had to take him to hospital ... it's a really funny story. So, when I was taking him to the hospital the ... toward the end of the street where we live a demonstration was ... and I was actually quite angry ... I was like "What? What the hell are you doing here? I need to take my father to hospital. You're blocking all the streets" So anyway, went to hospital and he was in.. he wasn't in very good shape because he had a history of other medical issues so, we ended up spending the night at the hospital And of course that was when the curfew was announced and ... actually a lot of people were shot and injured. They came into the ER at that hospital. And...and then a couple of days later, a cousin of mine... who basically works in the army, he came to visit him and we started to chatting about what was happening and I was telling him it's horrible and its chaotic everywhere and... and then he started talking to me explaining to me what was happening and ... and then when I listened to what he had to say and... I knew that there was corruption and I knew that everything was ... any... people were ether extremely poor or extremely rich. there was corruption everywhere. I used to volunteer and like charity organizations but I was never involved in anything political. So... when I listened to what he had to say I decided ok, maybe I should go and check it out for myself. So I started going to the Square on my own. And.. and then it hit me that what was happening was something amazing and.... and I started going down ever since either helping the people who join the sit-ins there, take them food, write just blogs or notes about what I see. Because a lot people were attacking what was happening in the Square. And of course when ... when sit-ins would be dispersed, like the 9th of March I would go and document, take pictures, talk to people and then write about it. Until the 8th of July sit-in. That is when I decided to... have a more proactive role. So I used to go to work and then go home ... I was taking care of my father because he was bedridden and all that so I was doing some things for him and then I used to volunteer at the Asr al-Nile bridge gate cause they needed women to ... to search the women that were getting into the square. So I heard that they needed volunteers so I went. I used to go everyday from midnight to 6 or 7 am. And that is when I got to meet Raja Umran and

the Masr al-Hurrah movement. And then I joined the movement later on. And, yeah, ever since that (??) my colleagues and I were there and then we tried to set up this mini field hospital behind the Ramsis Hilton hotel and... And ever since we've been active like in demonstrations on the streets, we've supported the Askar Kathibun initiative. We worked a lot with no military trials for civilians movement or group. We worked on hamdin Sabahi's presidential campaign. On the boycotting campaign. We worked on everything. So, yeah. I mean... it was... and then I started ... attending meetings between different movements and parties but I never joined a political party and it was a conscience decision that I decided not to join a political party because I was very skeptical. What was happening in these parties and ... and yeah. I mean basically ... I feel a bit uncomfortable with the term or the description of activist cause I don't consider myself an activist really. But... Yeah we used to basically do things to support ... especially people who were ... damaged or harmed by... the ... other transition period of Skaff or Mursi later on and all that. Just... I mean I just tried to support as much as I can. So... yeah, that was it. And then ... and then I joined Nazra last March. because when I finished my undergrad education I had studied English comparative literature at the American University in Cairo. I decided to go for a masters degree and so I did my masters in gender (??) studies in Trinity College in Dublin. And then I came back and I thought like "now I've got this great certificate degree and I'm going to work for the national council for women just like that. I went and I was shocked that they offered me ... a secretarial job. and they were really arrogant and they were like "If we have any vacancies we're going to contact you" And I was like screw it. Egypt is too... there is no.. Egypt is not a country to work with radical feminism or all that so I decided fuck it. Excuse my language. I just completely gave up and I started working in like developmental projects and things of the sort. And... but I was always interested in feminism and feminist theories and what was happening to women. And for me the National Council for Women was a big sham because ... they gave the impression to the public that they're working on women's issues and women's empowerment but for me it was just political and economic remedies that they were furnishing really. I didn't feel like they were doing anything substantial ... So anyway. I came by chance across Nazra and ... They had vacancies so I applied and ... they were amazing. They took a leap of faith and they hired me so... here I am. and.. and then things... ever since I joined Nazra things.. my perspective started changing because ... Nazra is one of the groups that are heavily involved in the issue of sexual violence. so... in preparation for the 30th of June we had meetings here for OpAntiSh and [Tahrir] Bodyguards and.. they had conducted training on immediate you know medical skills ... first aid skills and listening skills to survivors and all that. and... And witnessing all that and working on that and coordinating with different private clinics for the survivors and to make sure that

medical care is provided for them. And then I volunteered with OpAntiSh, an intervention group. So it kind of changed my perspective. Because I'm not someone who's ... honestly I'm not someone who's passionate in politics. I'm not very savvy when it comes to politics. For me it's just supporting a good cause. and... when I found out about how the political groups and political parties reacted to the gang rapes and sexual assaults that were taking place in Tahrir I was pretty disgusted and repulsed so I decided to do something that is more ... active and ever since I've been ... I've been heavily interested and involved in ... the issue of sexual violence so... yeah. It's pretty much it in a nutshell.

NP: I was going to say... Can I just go back and ask for a few details. What was your BA in?

AE: English and comparative literature.

NP: Ok. And you studied at Cairo University?

AE: At AUC. The American University of Cairo

NP: AUC. Ok. And you said that at one point you met Raja Omran and you joined something called the Free Egypt movement?

AE: Al-Masr al-Hurr Movement. The free Egyptian movement.

NP: The free Egyptian movement. What... can you say what that was?

AE: Sure, it's still on. it's a .. it's a movement comprised of a group of men and women it was formed right after the revolution. It was formed in February Raja Omran and Rami Sha'th were the founders of this movement. and basically they were a group of people and activists that met in the square during the first 8 days of the revolution. the first wave and ... they decided to form this group or establish this movement. and basically the movement it's .. it's a revolutionary movement that supports any revolutionary activism on the ground. So that's why we worked on many different things. We joined protests, we worked on .. we worked with Askar Kathibun [The Military are Liars], No military trials for civilians, we ... Basically Almasr alhurrah movement was more of a movement that lobbies among other movements in meeting where all the representatives from different parties and different movements would attend. And of course because Raja and Rami have a well known history of activism so it was like... Al-Masr al Hurrah movement was one of the movements to be respected ... it was good experience. I met Raja by chance during the July sit-in because she was in charge of... or the movement was in charge of securing the Qasr al-Nil Bridge entrance. And... and

basically we got to know each other and it was a very funny story ... we were in the March on the 23 of July The Abbasiyyah march and we're marching down (??) street and Raja looks at me and another friend of mine called Mahy who I got to know from the July sit-in as well and she was volunteering as well for securing the gate... and she looked at us and she's like "You're members of Al-Masr al-Hurrah movement now" and Mahy and I looked at each other and were like "OK" whatever. So ... yeah.

NP: You... you mentioned that you don't like the term .. you're uncomfortable with the term activist

AE: Yeah

NP: Do you think it's ... a bit.. is that because you feel it's being misused these days? Or you... do you have a definition in your head and you feel you don't fit it? or...

AE: It's not that I have a definition but it's just that because... I mean... yeah I squirm a bit when people refer to me as an activist, and before when... It happened that I was interviewed on the TV or whatever they were like political activist Amal Mohandes. But the thing is I just think I... I don't see myself as an activist a) because ... I haven't been active that long, I'm not in it for political reasons, and I think it's a bit disrespectful to those who had to endure a lot of ... either they were detained or they were attacked by people publically... I don't think it's fair for these activists to have people like me who are just trying to understand what's going on, you call them activists as well. For me that's... that is not something that I... That is not a general rule that I apply It's just I feel uncomfortable. I think it takes a lot of activism and it takes a lot of experience to be able to call yourself an activist. And, again, I'm not really interested in politics. I mean for me it's more of a If you have certain rights and they need to get these rights. It was more of focusing on accountability and retribution for those who were murdered for instance. But I was never really in it for the political ... struggles or whatever. And that's why I never joined a political party. We as a movement we were involved in actually the early on establishment of the Dustur Party but I... even then when we were helping out I... I had made this conscience decision "I am not going to be a member of any political party" because, for me, I was very skeptical. I always had this feeling that ... I know it's very negative but I always had this feeling that there's a lot of dirt with political parties in Egypt. and it's not ... they tend to focus more on the politics rather than focusing on the humane values of what you're really trying to do. So...yeah. That's.... so yeah, that's why I'm not comfortable with the term and.. and honestly now the term has been so over used. Anyone is a political activist and... people are celebtrized in a way that's really pathetic if you will. So for me it's like "Yeah, Whatever" activist... I mean it's just... yeah so.... yeah.

NP: Can I ask more about your work on sexual violence.

AE: Sure

NP: or against sexual violence.

AE: Yeah, sure.

NP: Was this ... was working with Nazra the first time that you began to think about the issue? Or had you previously thought about it or ...?

AE: No, the issue of sexual violence is very evident in Egypt. I mean... probably all of us were harassed at some point of our lives. Not just once, maybe several times but... and actually when OpAntiSh, Operation Anti-Sexual Harassment, was formed I had heard about it and friends of mine actually volunteered but I was I was responsible for other things in the movement, like I was coordinating among other movements, so honestly I didn't have the time to even think about "Ok, maybe I should check this out" But like most people I was of course appalled by what was happening. And then when I joined Nazra I found out that Nazra has been very active in that issue and they had worked with and continue to work with OpAntiSh and (??) and other initiatives and groups ever since November 2012. And... and so I got to understand more like the inside stories of what was happening. And what I really respected about Nazra is ... Nazra is very strict about protecting the anonymity of the survivors. I don't see that with other people perhaps or other feminist ... so called feminist groups or NGOs. They don't announce "we're working with survivors of sexual harassment" they just provide the support that's needed and that's it. And that is something that really intrigued me and I was really impressed and ,...It made me realize... I'm not saying that because I work for Nazra, but... seriously Nazra and OpAntiSh are one of the very few groups or initiatives that really are doing it for helping out the survivors. Period. It's not about trying to appear in the media or trying to make a certain statement. They're really ... and actually... what was really brilliant about Nazra as well is ... everyone was opting for the easy argument. It's the Muslim Brotherhood and they're trying to have women get out of the public space and not demonstrate and ...political events and demonstrations but the thing is you know what? I've... when I volunteered with OpAntiSh I saw the men in the intervention. These are not members of the Muslim Brotherhood. These are the average men and teenagers walking down the street every day. So it is a cultural epidemic. It's not something that's politically commissioned or driven but all the NGOs and all the feminist groups they just took the easy way out "It's the Muslim Brotherhood, It's politically commissioned." No. Well you know what? It's not. and that is what I respected about Nazra. That Nazra and (??) they had the will and the courage

to say, you know what? It's not. They decided to go against the ... the mainstream argument of what was happening. So... Actually I consider myself very lucky to have been able to work a bit on this issue through Nazra. Because... I mean the difference I experience working for Nazra and going down to the Square by myself and then meeting people ... and again, that is one of the main pillars of the women human rights defenders program, which I'm working under in Nazra. I don't know what it is but people just celebrate ... human rights defenders and activists, especially in Cairo and... I know I'm not supposed to say this but screw it, I'm not going to be politically correct. I mean even in Cairo you have these different groups set up. And it's almost like ... I don't want to say this but of course everyone is doing a great job but then you have these dynamics like high school. That's the cool gang, that's the not so cool gang, and that's... It's a bit strange. For me it's a bit strange because if you're all claiming to adopt these brilliant principals and ... values of the revolution but then you have these inner dynamics going on ... it's just.... it's a bit confusing so for me Nazra was ... a more professional and genuine platform to do that if you will. I have to say I've been very lucky because also the movement that I'm a member of it's one of the really... it's one of the movements where most people are ... are decent. If you will. So I have to say I'm pretty lucky. but... but seriously with... especially with the ... with how crazy it has been politically first Mubarak and then Skaff and then Mursi and then now... people are just getting more hostile and I'm talking about activists. People are very hostile ... They operate with double standards all the time. and it's just getting really ugly. So, I'm really grateful to be part of Nazra, to be honest. That's it.

NP: Do you think that Norah's.. the ... this very special characteristic of Nazra and feeling comfortable here ... do you think that is something to do with it being a feminist organization? Or is it to do with the people who work here? Their personalities or their...

AE: I think it's both but it's more the vision that Nazra has. Nazra is a very established feminist movements and Nazra is very passionate about its community and the thing is ... I mean... in a way Nazra is not involved in the ... the politics of what's happening but at the same time... I mean that's my humble understanding but at the same time it takes into account the political dynamics that are taking place and it sees how it affects the women and how it would affect the building of this feminist movement. So, for me, the fact that it is... I mean I consider Nazra a radical feminist group and for me it was the first radical feminist group that I find out about in Egypt. And the fact that being ... radically feminist and having values of... it all being about the welfare of the community and its members and... the genuine value of why people are active in the public sphere or public space ... I think that's what makes a difference. Nazra, it's not about... I mean

how can I say this? The people here are not trying to ... are not trying to establish a reputation for Nazra among the NGO community in Egypt. They're not trying to secure tons of funds to keep operating. They're not just writing proposals to get a shit load of money and that's it. They ... Nazra really cares about the community it works with. And I think that's what makes it special and different. And I think That's why Nazra is one of the very few places where you find people interact with Nazra, talk about Nazra's community. I mean honestly I did not see that with other organizations. I don't see that with CIHRS I don't see that with EIPR I don't... I don't see that with new women foundation. I don't know ... but... of course I'm biased but ... but yeah, I mean ... basically that's why I think I've been very lucky. I could have been working for another group or NGO but ... I was lucky enough to come here so... yah. But definitely I think ... maybe that's naive or a romantic notion of what activism is or what being active in the public space is but I think ... I think that's the trickiest and the most (??) part. I think when you focus on the values and ... how genuine you are about what is it that you want to do I think the more difficult it is and the more successful you are. and the more long term your activism is going to be. because... some people are in it for different intentions... it's sad, it's sad. but... those who continue to be active I think are those who are really genuine about what they're doing. So... I don't have much information to share with you.

NP: No, no, no. Had you heard about Nazra before you applied for the job here?

AE: I did but I didn't know much about it. And then... I checked the website and I started reading about it. So I was like "Wow" and so it was... It was good.

NP: Have you come across any other feminist or women's groups before

AE: Yeah, I came across New Women Foundation, I came across ACT. Act for me was interesting. I'm not politically correct at all. We had worked as a movement We participated with ACT. they were preparing this demonstration called "The day of Egypt's women" it was on the 4th of October 2012 and they organized this demonstration in front of the Tahreer presidential palace They had these posters... it was basically for the ... (??) constitution and sexual harassment. and... we worked with them and joined the demonstration and it was quite an interesting experience ... and it was interesting because ... colleagues of mine and I were responsible for hanging the posters everywhere coming up with the chants that we're going to be chanting in the demonstration and I remember on that day very well I... of course I have these massive expectations ... sexual harassment, the constitution. We're gonna have thousands of women showing up. And actually the numbers were pretty shockingly low. I think we were like a thousand max. and... it was very frustrating for me on a personal level

because when we used to chant against sexual harassment the women themselves who are participating in the demonstration they would tell us "forget about sexual harassment focus on the constitution." I'm looking and I'm like sexual harassment is everywhere they are women and girls that are being raped every day. It's not important. people are not going to react to that. focus on the constitution. I was like... promising. so it was... it was a bit disappointing but... yeah again, it just shows you how obsessed people are with politics. and ... like typical of any patriarchal society anywhere, so... but it was... it was an eye opener. for me so ... yeah, I mean... you know each feminist organization is different and has its own agendas and what it does but... yeah, I mean I... New women foundation they do a lot of great work on FGM Female genital mutilation and... and I used to work with them because I used to coordinate between different parties and movements for example I was coordinating for the first anniversary of the (??) events so I had to coordinate between the (??) youth coalition and all the different parties and all the different movements and the we were working on the Muhammad Mahmud anniversary but then when clashes erupted it all went down the drain but... I came across these different groups like the new women foundation and... and the Bahiyah ya Masr and Other initiatives like "We will find them", No military trials for civilians....

TAPE 2

Amal Elmohandes: (??) Askar Kathibun. And many of them are friends of mine and it was interesting to work with different dynamics and different visions. It was quite challenging at times but it was a very good experience. But, yeah, I mean Nazra is very focused but me ... it is the most radical and I would proclaim to say the most genuine.

Nicola Pratt: You mentioned just now an initiative called Han...

AE: Hanla'ihum

NP: What's this? I've never heard of this one.

AE: This is an initiative. It's a campaign ... it had a lot of struggles due to its objective, not because ... I mean they're doing a great job. One of the main founders is Muna Essam, who is also in Bahiyah ya Masr, and I don't know if you know her. Hanla'ihum basically they are working on locating people who went missing since the revolution. Hence Hanla'ihum "We're going to find them" But unfortunately ... they were only able to find

very few people and most of them are like ... dead or ... So... it's a really tough campaign. but, yeah... That's Hanla'ihum. trying to think of other initiatives. Have you heard of Hakmuhum?

NP: No

AE: Ok, Hakmuhum, we used to work with them ... volunteer with them for a while. Hakmuhum started with a group of ... activists and basically the ... it was actually quite a ... it was like very well known when it first started. I think it started like ... I think it started after (??) After the Maspero massacre. And basically it's called Hakimuhum and they have like the ... like the military the (??) and the... the objective of this campaign was to have members of the supreme council of the armed forces be prosecuted for the crimes that they committed. And they used to bring families of those who were killed and they would present the testimonies... we used to distribute fliers and stickers in certain venues, different locations in Egypt. they has reports issued, they had a website and a Twitter account and a Facebook page. and then it sort of ... not shit down but it was kind of stagnating for a while and then... and it had both men and women and... right now it has (??). because there's this other initiative came out called Warakum Bil Ta'reer. Have you heard of that? Warakum Bil Ta'reer? It's part of the national group for human rights. It's basically ... they're focusing on using the report of the fact finding committee ...

NP: I've heard of it now

AE: Yeah, so, kind of similar but from different approaches. And then... what other initiatives can I think of? Askar Kazibun. Do you know Askar Kazibun? (??) An interesting person to talk to would be Sally Tuma.

NP: I haven't heard this name

AE: She's.... She's one of the main founders of Askar Kazibun. She's been active for long before the revolution. She used to work at CIHRS and she's a psychiatrist. She graduated from the Faculty of Medicine... I can give you her number now actually. Actually on 9/11 I was on a plane going back to Ireland to submit my dissertation. And then when I got off the plane and the airport... like all the announcements and then... when I went to the ... went to the hotel to ... I was staying for a few days to finish up the dissertation and the... the news ... I'll never forget that. It was funny.

NP: When you.. When you were at university you were never asked to join any initiatives or were you aware that there were initiatives of different sorts or...?

AE: No, actually I wasn't cause I was so uninterested in politics. I was more active in other activities like I was... I play music. I play the guitar so... I was playing with this guy at this place , it's a restaurant and... and then we formed a band and ... and I was... I was doing a minor in theater so I was ...I acted in a few plays or worked on costume design or things of the sort. So it was more like ... totally different . yeah. but, no, I mean I was so uninterested in what was going on politically, I was just so ... I was in my own bubble if you want. It's crazy

NP: Do you ever miss that bubble? Do you... Are you happy that you've become a differ... that you escaped the bubble? Do you think about it ever?

AE: I'm grateful that I did. Cause I think ... I think I've become more mature as a person. And it helped me understand a lot of things that ... you could not really understand if you're not ... active if you will. But I was always interested in doing something. Before the revolution ... all that... I used to volunteer with friends of mine in charity like work or I was really interested in working with people of special needs and why... I used to work... before coming here I used to work the Fulbright commission. and I was working for this project called the community college imitative and... we had ... it was basically a program where Egyptian men and women would apply for a grant to study at community colleges in the US. And we had a group of deaf and hard of hearing men and women apply. and I don't know why, ever since I was really young I was really interested in learning sign language and... when 8 of them were accepted, I... One of my best friends and she was also my colleague at the time at work and I took sign language lessons to be able to communicate with them and... so I was more interested in that direction ... But I never... I would have never thought... before the revolution, if anyone would have told me you'd be in a.... political movement ... I would have never believed that. It was so... yeah. So it's just funny how things change. but it's just with the way things are now it's just sad. It's just really sad. I means it's funny that you asked that question because you're probably the first person I'm going to say this to ... It has its toll on your personal life and on your social life like... there are some friends of mine that now... I have problems sitting with them and talking to them because it's like they're in this bubble and they keep talking about things that are ... sure they are like interesting and everything but I'm sitting there and I look at them and I'm like... I don't feel like I can engage with them as I used to before and ... It just... it has its toll and you. It's just exhausting and straining. and sometimes I look at them and I'm like WOW. do I want to get back in that bubble? and sometimes, honestly... I think that would be great. To be able to enjoy certain things like I used to before but, it's over... It's done. So, yeah.

NP: What sort of things did you used to enjoy? Like ... being ignorant in politics? or...

AE: Yeah, I mean, yeah... just going out with friends, hanging out, talking about whatever. Music, playing music. That stagnated for a long time during the... ever since the revolution started. I don't know... it's just... even stupid conversations like no... I'm sorry to say so... it's very judgmental but... a lot of the time I'm sitting there and I'm like nodding and I'm like pretending to be interested but actually I'm not really interested ... it's like... so yeah... any way... but it's not their fault. But, it's just that... yeah I mean one has a different perspective now ... yeah. Any way. I'm not making any sense.

NP: No. I'm interested why these friends didn't leave the bubble like you did?

AE: Yeah, I don't know. I mean some of them were somewhat active. and others just ... and I think it's more like... yeah, when I used to go down to the square I didn't tell my mom. cause I knew she'd freak out and until now my mom freaks out. But... their families were very "No, can't go to the square. It's dangerous" things like that. and... I think they're busy with their own lives. I talk to them and I tell them stuff. They get really worried things like that but .. yeah... I mean ...I don't knew. I guess it's ... I don't know, maybe I was just ... at a certain place at a certain time things were very tense. and I just got shoved into it in a way or another. or I shoved myself into it. And in a way I did because I kind of felt bad. because ... I felt bad that I was so unaware of everything before, so I was dealing with these issues ... feelings of guilt and I also felt guilty because ... when people were talking about the revolution and are you going to go down I was like whatever. so I felt really guilty. to be honest. so I decided that I should compensate for my ignorance in the past. So... yeah.

NP: Interesting. As somebody who is sort of ... relatively recently become active in the public sphere. have... are there any particular challenges that you faced? Apart from your mother worrying.

AE: No, I'm facing a lot of challenges with my family to be honest. because they don't get it and they have completely different views. and for them I mean right now we're having these fights over ... they honestly think I'm a traitor and they think I'm trying to... like... sew chaos into the country and I'm supposed to support the army 100%. We have these fights all the time. My mom until yesterday she was trying to bribe me to go down and vote yes for the constitutional referendum. and I was like.. and I started teasing her "how much are you going to pay me?" Just tell me the number and I'll start thinking about it. Just to tease her because they were like "Are you going to say yes? Are you going to say no? I was like it's my own decision. It's none of your bloody business. So... No, we fight all the time. At first of course it was like where were you ... like when I was down in (??) they were like where the hell are you? people are... and I was like I know I just saw a guy with a bullet in his groin fall right in front of me. So I know what you're

talking about. but I'm fine and don't worry. But at first they were worried and then ... they were trying to ridicule everything that was going on and there is no hope and ... but with the support of my friends from the ... the activism world I was able... we have a lot of similar stories ... many ... many not just women but men also struggle with their families ... but... yeah now it's at a totally different level. and... it's actually it's funny because I feel alienated at home cause they are all like fixated on one perspective and I'm like complete opposite. It's a bit strange. It's funny during the time of Skaff and that's like a personal story ... I was engaged to a doctor in the military. he used to be the physiotherapist of my ... yeah, he was the physiotherapist of my father ... and it was a bit weird. it was funny because when I'd meet my friends and comrades from the battlefield ... I was being sarcastic there of course ... congratulations, you got engaged? Yeah. SO they're like "What does he do?" and I'm like he's a doctor, he's a physician. he's a physiotherapist. I would never dare say ... but anyway it didn't work out. we left each other so that was good. But again it was weird. it was like the... the dichotomy between your private life and it was quite challenging and... what else... yeah, just what I said earlier about... not distances but ... I don't enjoy talking to my friends ... as I used to in the past. something has changed. and of course the challenge is of everyone is ... having nightmares from all the violence, everyone is ... overwhelmed frustrated ... I think everyone is so... it's quite normal I guess. yeah...

NP: Have you found it difficult to... defend your position since the 30th of June?

AE: Yeah, especially with family. They are very aggressive. And of course it's because ... it's the media... it's under this guise of nationalism. and the war on terrorism and... it's difficult. It's these polarizations ... it's either you're this or that. nothing in the middle. Like for example when my mom sees me going down to ... to take supplies to the women who were arrested from Al-Azhar clashes or whatever. she would get really angry and she was like why are you defending these terrorists. and I'm like they're not terrorists. and 60% of the people that were arrested are actually people who have nothing to do with the Muslim Brotherhood. So you know... She's like you're a traitor ... I'm like, ok. I am. So, yeah. it's quite... even with friends they're like ... "So what? are you supporting the Muslim Brotherhood" I'm like no, I'm not supporting the Muslim Brotherhood. I'm supporting rights in general. Period. that's it. It's just people don't get that. It's... yeah... It's this extreme polarization .. either you're this or that. So you have little room to fit in. and of course because you fit in neither so people are so ready to categorize you as whatever. so it's ... yeah, I mean definitely feelings of alienation have been kicking in ever since June 30th. even more than before. And yeah, like I said in the beginning dealing with like.. When I used to go to police stations I would know how to handle things and I know my way around but now it's quite dangerous. I remember this

... yeah, this last time he threatened us. I was standing there looking at him and I was like ... you know? It's quite scary. but... unfortunately that's the way it is right now. I'm not very optimistic at all. I think things are going to get far worse. but... you know, you just do what you can. but things are going to get far worse. Unfortunately. Yeah. It's just I guess another challenge is dealing with ... I don't know if I'm going to be talking about myself dealing with the fact that... I think there is no hope. but I still have to sustain doing what I'm trying to do. It's quite frustrating.

NP: Why do you think it is important to keep doing what you're doing given that you're very pessimistic?

AE: For me personally I can't imagine myself selling out or opting out. It's like ... It's funny I remember this .. and it's really stupid. I remember this novel I studied during my IGCE studies, literature. of course I remember the name but I remember that the overall theme of this novel was ... that there's this family that lived in this certain house in a certain neighborhood and they were never exposed to anything and... once they were exposed to this other world and then when they came back ... things were never the same because they saw something different and something better. And for me I always think of that. it's like ... I saw something as I my mind opened up to the bigger picture so for me to go back that's not an option. and I see it on a very small scale when I meet my friends who are not active at all and I sit with them and we're talking and ... I sometimes ... I'm sitting with them and I ... I seem to be engaged with what they're saying but I'm just thinking about whatever is going on so... I think that even if... not that I want to ... but even if I wanted to... I don't think I would be able to be honest. Just, that's it. So, yeah. yeah. And I mean, A lot of people have sacrificed a lot so.. for me to whine and complain and say "there's no hope" ... at least just keep trying. that's all. You n=know. that's it. Anything?

NP: Is there anything I didn't ask you that you think is important? Anything else you want to add?

AE: I don't think so. No. Let me think. No I think actually you've asked some pretty ... smart questions. Thank you and thanks for taking the time to ...

NP: Thank you

AE: Sure, pleasure. Thanks.