**Interview with Nawla Darwiche**

**2014**

**TAPE 1**

**Nawla Darwiche:** My name is Nawla Darwiche, I was born in 49. So I am 64 years old now. And I was born in a communist family, my father was a lawyer of trade unions, and my mother was also an activist. They were both communists. And they were both from Jewish origins, but they converted to Islam, I think it was in 47, before I was born, because they felt that in order to fight in Egypt, and to be accepted by people, you should be like the main stream in the country. So, I was born in this family when I was born, my father was in jail. I met him when I was 2 years old, and then he went to jail, he went in and out for years. Ad he was arrested in 59 until 64. And at that time, maybe its important to say that the Egyptian communist parties, decided to dissolve them selves in 64. And it was very frustrating for my father especially, and even for me, because I used to read a lot of things, I had ambition to become a member of the communist parties, and… so, it was dissolved and I felt that they had betrayed the cause, so, I was studying at the university in 67, It was, my first year of university, and I remember that, Nassir decided to close the Aqaba, the part of the Suez Canal, Al Aqaba. And then there was this war of 67. And we had all the time, news that we were winning, that we were having big victories, and suddenly on the 9th… I don’t remember if it was the 9th… it was the 5th of June, Nassir resigned, he announced the defeat to the people in a TV speech. And he decided to resign, and it was very funny because, under Nassir, my father was severely injured in the prisons and all this… but Nassir had a very high charisma, so on the 9th and 10th June, there were very big demonstrations in Egypt, calling Abdel Nassir to return back and I went on the streets with everybody in the demonstration, it was the first time for me to go in a demonstrations. And actually he returned back, and the next year I was, in my second year university, and there was the trial for the officers in the army about the defeat, and of course what happened is that the judgment were very weak and the university began to move and I also was a part of this in the university, were demonstrating against the judgments. Maybe I forgot to tell you that my university studies, I was at the, what they call, the high teachers college, and of course, I said pedagogy but it was in the French section of the university. So, there was this very big defeat of the Egyptian army, and people were very depressed, very frustrated, very humiliating feeling all over the country and especially for youth. And we were just expecting something to happen, but very soon, it appears that Nassir began to flirt with the west and I remember there was something called Rogers initiative and things like this. And then Nassir died, so we went again in the streets and we demonstrated and the people were very sad to loose Nassir, and Sadat was the vice president, took over. No, yes… No, he was not the vice president; I think he was the president of the parliament… I don’t remember well.

**Nicola Pratt:** It’s not important.

**ND:** I don’t remember well. And anyway, he became the next president, and it was very clear, that he was pro west, pro America, he began by expelling the soviet experts in Egypt and also he attacked all the supporters of Nassir’s regime, and he began to install a new mode of regime in Egypt. And this was, it wad a hard period and especially in, it was in 76 or 77, when he decided to… I think we should stop it a little bit because it’s very noisy.

**NP:** I think it passed. It passed, No.

**ND:** So, it was very shocking this trip to Israel, I remember I was sitting in front of the Television and I felt that my heart was going to stop. Especially when I saw him coming out of the plane, and of course, we considered that Sadat was a traitor and at that time, I just got married and I had a baby, and my husband was working at the Al Tagammu Party, and especially at Al Ahali newspapers, and Al Ahali newspaper was systematically stopped every week at the print house, and every week because we were living near the print house, we had the visit of the security services at home. So, but what I… I will go back in history in 73, my father, I wasn’t married yet, my father convinced me to join the communist party, there were new formations since 68, there were new formations, something called 8th January, other formations, and my father was affiliated with a group called Al Shurouq. Where there was my father and Michele Kamil, and Nabeel Al Hilali and others, and then this group merged with another group, Zaki Murad and Rifat Al Saeed and old this group, it was an old Hadito group. And their form was called the Egyptian communist party, and so… I was in this party for a long time, but of course, and this is my experience with the party life, is that women are used as secretaries in the political parties, they are not… they don’t have their status, the credit of the work, they are used to type things, make photo copy, etc. So, this was the part, I remained in the Egyptian communist party until, 86 or something like this, and then, we left and there was a new group called Hizb Al Shaab Al Ishtiraqi… The people’s socialist party, something like this. But I resigned in 89. So, there were changes in Egypt. Sadat was making agreements with the world bank and the IMF and there were some conditions such as the structural adjustment policies, but he wasn’t able to do those very quickly, because there were lots of resistance from the people, specially Nassir’s regime gave some benefits to the people, some economic benefits. Of course there were some lack of freedoms, no political rights etc. Sadat, I think it was in 75, he began to open the way for multiple parties. And then so there was so-called left party, which is Al Tagammu, and the middle party and the right party. Anyway, and there was of course, the National Democratic party, which was before, Al Itihad Al Ishtiraqi Al Arabi, I think it was, I can’t remember…

**NP:** It’s okay.

**ND:** and of course, the situation was deteriorating; the economic situation in the country was deteriorating. And in January 77, there were big demonstrations. We can call them hunger demonstrations. It is true that lots of people from the left were arrested, but I don’t think they were behind this demonstration, it was very spontaneous, I didn’t go in this demonstrations because my daughter was a few months old, so I didn’t go in those demonstrations, but of course, I was following all this, and in 75 I got married, and in 76 I had my baby, but since the beginning, my husband was very violent with me, he used to beat me. And it was something very hard for me, and in end of 79 beginning of 80 I got divorced, of course, at that time, it was… it was very badly seen by the society to be a divorced woman. But I had decided to be divorced, so I lived as a single mother with my daughter, and maybe, in this… this cycle of my life is what made me become a feminist after this, because I felt there was something really unjust for women, especially violence against women, so we had… so in 80 I got divorced and my parents were living at that time in Prague, Czechoslovakia at that time, so I went there, with my daughter in 81 we lived there for one year. I was still a member of the Egyptian communist party and during this year, I spent three months in what was called the Leninist International School in Moscow, and actually, right after the 1919 in Russia, the school was opened, and 5 members of the first communist party in Egypt went there to study Marxism, and… but then the Egyptian government, withdrew the Egyptian nationality of them. So, since that time we were the first group of Egyptians to go to that school. For me, it was three… very interesting months, because I spent them studying, and we had very interesting… okay, so, I went for three months and stayed and studied, and had everyday classes for 4 hours, about the Marxist philosophy, economy, materialistic dialectic, etc. all this, it was a whole curriculum, and so we had every day 4 hours, and at the end of the three months, it ended through the month of June, they took all the school, to St. Petersburg, it was Leningrad at that time, and it’s a beautiful city and of course we visited the Jail where Lenin was imprisoned, we visited the Potemkin boat, we went… but it’s a very beautiful city and it was very impressive, because we left from Moscow in the train and it was maybe 10 trains full of students from the school, and we were from all nationality, there were almost 3 thousand students in the school, and we were the smallest group, the Egyptian group was the smallest group. So, it was a very good experience and during this trip, I left my daughter with my parents in Prague and she was very happy there actually. And what was very beautiful in St. Petersburg, tat it was during what they called the white nights, there is no dark, it was in June, and around midnight, because it is built on 62 islands, so there are bridges, and around midnight or 1, they open all the bridges, so it was something really… for me, it was the best trip. And then I returned back to Prague and then I was asked by the party to go back to Russia to have another training alone this time, about how can I explain it? About being sort of a security agent in the party, about how to take pictures, to see if there is something behind me, how to escape how to… something like this, they never used it and I never used it but it was another month and a half in Moscow and at the time it was very cold and I was alone in a flat belonging to the central committee of the soviet Communist Party, and also I had every day lessons with also practical lessons, but the weather was minus 25, it was terribly cold, but it was also another experience it was interesting, and then I turned back to Prague and in October in the 6th of October, Sadat was killed in Egypt. And just before that, before I went to Prague somebody from our Egyptian Communist Party asked me if I could… “Please Dunia, just close the door”… one of our comrades in the Egyptian Communist Party asked me if I could hide a photocopy machine in my flat, I had a flat somewhere, and we put it there, it was an empty flat, and we put the photocopy machine there, and then by chance, I talked to another one who told me, no, you don’t have the right to do this, we are going to remove the photocopy machine from there. And they removed it and I left to Prague, a few months later, people were arrested in Egypt, and the flat was opened by the police, and it appeared that this comrade was In Egypt, of the security services, but he didn’t know that I hadn’t removed the photocopy machine, and they went and they broke the walls, they thought that I had hidden the machine in… its… but, after Sadat died, my daughter’s father asked me to send her to him, I couldn’t say no of course, so I sent her to Egypt, and I wanted to return back of course to be with her, but my name was in a trial. So, somebody from the communist party, belonging to the communist party, and Al Tagammu, because we were all, both faces… he talked with the security services, and they said, okay, she should come to Egypt, and we wont do anything to her, but we will have a talk with her. So, I returned back to Egypt, it was one year later, it must be in maybe march 82 or something like this, and So, they called me Al Mabahith, the security services, and an officer, he knew me before, because he came once to arrest my father at home, so he knew me, and when I entered in his office, he had the flag of the United States on his desk. And he began to talk with me and ask me questions and he said, what do you think about communists? I said, I love them, and he was very alert. You love them! I said, yes, I was raised with communists in the house of my father, so they are my uncles and aunts, of course I love them. So, I know how to deal with those people, you have to be very dignified and very proud of yourself, without giving information. Anyway, so I remained with this, I remained in Egypt and I worked, maybe I forgot to tell you that when I finished university, I finished university in 70 and I went for one year in Algeria, because I loved an Algerian man, and when I went to Algeria to work and be with him, I discovered that I didn’t love him, but I had a contract so I remained for one year in Algeria, I was teaching French there, it was also an interesting experience there, because I met many, fighters from Angola, Mozambique, **[inaudible: 29:08]**… because Algeria was a place where all these people were political refugees. And it was very interesting I learned a lot of other things, new things, and we used at home with my parents to have friends from South Africa and also from Angola and Mozambique all this, so I met them again in Algeria, and then I return back to Egypt, and then I only worked again in 73 in the French cultural center, till 80, end of 80, when I traveled to Prague and then when I returned back I went back to the French cultural center for one year. And then in the party, I decided I should work in an office with somebody and this person, will give me access to photocopy machine to make all the photo copies for the… So, I worked also one year with this man and then I found myself without work because I began to have conflicts with the party, so they fired me and then I worked a little bit and then….

TAPE 2

**ND:**… some friends, a British friends, in fact she talked about me to somebody and I worked for many years from 84 to 90, what is called the population council, the International Population Council. And it was also a new experience because it was not Marxism or Communism, but it was development, it was new things that I was learning, as I told you I left the communist party in 89, and I think now, when I look back I think it might be also, linked to the fall of the Soviet Union. Maybe it was not very conscious, but it must be something, there were many things that were falling around you, and this time there was a group, an informal group, who used to publish a sort of newsletter, and called them selves the New Woman Group. And they had many internal problems, because of foreign funding, if you take foreign funding you are an agent of the west, if you don’t take.. you don’t have activities, it was a big story, and the group who was with foreign funding they called some people around them, including me I order to be backed up with the other group, and the other group withdrew from the group and since that time I was stuck with the New Woman Foundation, but I learned also a lot because I was maybe by instinct a feminist but I didn’t know exactly what is feminism, I hadn’t read anything, I didn’t have any fight or struggle of cause of feminism. Actually, the finding members of this group were all from the same political origin, from different groups, but from the left. So, I felt sort of comfortable with the group. So, Sadat was killed in October 81, and Mubarak took over, the first years of Mubarak, there were some hops, that… corruption was not very evident, he didn’t seem to have real program, but he seemed as a patriot person as a… we didn’t… you know, before when he was vice president, people used to cal him La Vache Kiri, he had no Charisma, but I think he learned over the years how to talk and make a speech and how to be strong, and how even to insult and humiliate people. Anyway, beginning the 90s, there are many things that happened. In Egypt and in the region, there was the war between Iraq and Kuwait and Iraq had invaded Kuwait and I think it was with the US approval, or it was the second time I don’t… No, it was with the US approval. And also people were very divided here in Egypt, between of course Saddam Hussein was a big dictator and a bloody dictator, but also, he was an Arab nationalist, and people had this trend very strong in Egypt, on the other hand, another Arab country was invaded, and this country was very arrogant with Egyptians, so it was very mixed feelings. And at the same time, the policies of structural adjustment began to be implemented in Egypt, and privatization and all this and people began to go on pension, and then, and then people began to feel the dangers of privatization and the policy of structural adjustment. Actually, since 85, the civil society began again to immerge on the political scene, and as there were no strong political parties. It is actually the civil society that played the political role for several years in 84 I think there was the Arab Organization for Human Rights. In 85 the Egyptian Organization. In 84 the new woman group was formed, another feminist group in Mansourah was formed. It is the beginnings of the revival of the civil society. And then, so we go to 90, I was working with the population council and suddenly they decided to have a project with USAID, and I didn’t want to work with the USAID, so I resigned from there, and I found a job as instructor of executive secretaries in a petroleum company in Libya, so I went there for 1 year, in a compound, in Sirt, in the Bay of Sirt. And even during the Lebanese, the Libyan spring I was thinking of them a lot, because they mentioned a lot the place I was in The Breiga Harbor. It was a very beautiful place on the sea, and there were lots of Irish people and I love them, I had lots of friends with them, but they were people from many nationalities. It was an experience, not a political experience, but an experience, and experience with men, people from various nationalities, I learned to brew my own beer and things like this, so it was funny. And then I returned back to Egypt, for maybe one year and then I was hired as an administrative manager at the Arab Women’s center for training and research in Tunisia. So, I went there. Why I am telling you all these details is it is because I was not in Egypt during the implementation of the structural adjustment policies. I was in and out so I didn’t know exactly what was… Hi, how are you? All is good… So, I was here and there and I came back from Tunisia in 93, and I began working, I was the coordinator of something called the Beijing trust Fund, it was done for the Beijing conference, and it was also right after the Cairo conference for population and development, and I think this conference was important at the Egyptian level because the Egyptian government has to show how much it was democratic and how much it is supportive to the civil society, so NGOs were released and they did much of work for the development and population conference, then it was very difficult to tell them. Now after the conference you go back to the four walls. And it made a difference and even at that time, many organizations, not really feminist but for women rights began to appear, and some of them have become feminist organizations. This is also some important events I think, and there was the Beijing conference, we managed to send 5 of our members in Beijing. But of course, we were banned by the government because in 93, we were the first organization in Egypt talking about all forms of violence against women. And Mrs. Mubarak was mad at this and she sent us a massage said, even if there is violence against women anywhere in the world, it doesn’t exist in Egypt. I was very well placed to know this, so we conducted a field survey, about women self perception of what is violence, and of course it was not very scientific but it had some indicators and we sent 5 of our girls in Beijing, and it was a big scandal in Beijing, and so we are talking about… and then after the Beijing trust fund I began to work with an organization sponsored by prince Talal Bin Abdelaziz, and this organization is called Arab Network for NGOs. And I was the program manager there, and I worked there for a few years from 95 I think until 2000. But I remember I was there, it was in 95, 9/11…

**NP:** 9/11 in 2001.

**ND:** 2001, okay, I was working till 2002 there, and in 2001, we were preparing a conference in Lebanon, and I was there at the office, and somebody came very happy saying, oh, come on, thee are people who destroyed two towers in the States. And I remember I began to cry, because I felt that this will be a very bad thing for the Arabs, and I think it was true, my feeling was right. Of course, 9/11 was a very good pretext to put all the Arabs in the same basket, to stereotype Arabs as terrorists, and not only at the level of the United States, but also at the level of European countries, until now, it is for us very difficult an entry visa for any country. Except for the states, its much easier. Maybe they think we are Muslim Brothers, I don’t know. But, and of course, after this period, we had… if we talk until 2011, the period of 2000 and 2011, we have many events, and very important events in December 2006, there was the big strike of the weaving and spinning factory in Mahala El Kubra, and for me one of the things that I find wonderful for this strike, you know there are 26 thousand workers in this factory, and from this 26000, there are 3000 women, they are the ones who first stopped their machines, and they went to the man and asked them to stop. And for the first time, women workers were not behind man and they were side by side, and this is a big change and of course, there were two very famous women, Amal El Saeed, and Widad Al Dimirdash, and they were threatened by the security of the factory to be raped in front of the children, actually, since 2005, Mubarak regime, in may 2005, there was a referendum about the presidential elections and women were demonstrating against this. And the security forces used sexual harassment, and since then, women’s bodies are used to break resistance, all forms of resistance. And it is not only political, it can happen with thieves or terrorists, women’s bodies can be used to break resistance. So, it either you threaten them or sexual harassment or you rape them or… its this kind of things, and because the state is practicing this, why not all the people in the street? So, since that date, you will find in the big feast holidays hoards of young men sexually harassing and… the dangerous thing is that sexual harassment is becoming a collective act and not an individual act. So, it is pure violence and of course now, there are a lot of groups working on this, anyway, so, this is one important event. It was followed until 2001, by daily strikes and demonstrations, it was all the time. Also, in 2005 I think or 2006. Baradei returned back from his mission is Austria and he was welcomed in Egypt as a very important figure and a very honest person and he proposed some points that were very well received by people, also, we have the birth of the 6 of April movement in Egypt, which was initiated by young men and women. In 2006 also we had the war on Lebanon, it was the summer of 2006. For me also this period was a sad period, because in 2000, my mother passed away, and in 2006, my father passed away at the age of 95. I remember I was more involved with other human rights organizations, I was invited during this period for an advocacy missions in Brussels, in France, I made a lot of work about the human rights situation in Egypt and so on with other people of course. So, I learned more also about this thing. Also, since 99 I think. My daughter became an actress, so it was also a new field to investigate for me, and of course I was very proud of her, but she began to have her own life and she began to be… and then, what can I remember in this period, 2002, 2001. I remember for example, that once we had a meeting, that Baradei, he asked to meet a group of human rights organizations and we went to him, and I was really very disappointed by this man, he was very strange, because okay, he was sticking to his idea which I can understand very well, but at some certain point he said, people want things to change but they don’t want to do anything. They are just sitting there waiting for change, and I was really angry and I said, I am sorry, if you go near the parliament you will find everyday people demonstrating and sitting in, in front of the parliament, you have to go to the street and see people, and it is true, everyday we have demonstrations, especially the last few years before 2011. Anyway, beginning 2011, Tunisia has its Jasmine revolution and we were all very excited about it, but we never could imagine that it would happen here, and then the young people they called for a demonstration for the 25 January which was traditionally the day of the police. And I think they will do it this year again, anyway, they called for a demonstration and they said it will be the revolution, and we were all laughing and saying no one gives an appointment for a revolution, anyway, on the 25th I didn’t go on the street, but then I heard that all through the night, there were gases all over Tahrir, but they were already lots of people, and they had called for the 28th January a demonstration so all of us we decided to go, and I went in the streets, but after a while, with the tear gases and I am not very young, so I felt that I will be a burden for the people who are with me, so, it is better to return back home, and then after that, everyday I was in Tahrir for 18 days, and then Mubarak decided to step down, or he was forced to step down, it doesn’t matter. So, that night my daughter told me, we must go to Tahrir to celebrate, and for the first time, there was terrible sexual harassment in Tahrir, just the moment he stepped down, it was awful, it was something terrible we had to escape, for me it was a trauma. And I don’t know who are these people who did this, I think it is mainly the people who were sitting in front of the television, and now they went to celebrate their own way what is happening, anyway, we had big hopes of course… please Karim, close the door, I don’t know why they open it and they don’t close it… we had big hopes but I think we were also very naive because no revolution can be achieved in 18 days. I had the chance after the 18 days to meet a lot of people because there were a lt of people coming from Eastern Europe countries from Latin America and from African countries, to give us their experience, and it was clear from everybody that the revolution is a long process, but we might have to wait for 20 years to be able t have democracy. But as very early we as a feminist organization, we felt very early that women’s rights will be jeopardized, so, on the 13th of February, we called for a meeting here, at our, we invited almost 14 women organization and we decided to form a coalition for women’s rights. It was 14, now I think they are 23, and we adopted a sort of a road map, but it was clear very soon, that women were marginalized and will be marginalized, and apparently this is true after all revolutions, after the French revolution it happened, in Eastern Europe it happened, in Latin America it happened, everywhere. Especially when the military is in place, and of course we had all those experiences with the first SCAF that took the power, and that clearly had a deal with the Muslim Brothers, and so women were not only attacked by the military but also all the people who are in the streets with ugly beards and shirt dresses and discourse which is very against women, and against women rights, they were demonstrating to…

TAPE 3

**ND:**… abolish some laws, on the 8th March 2011, we decided to celebrate the 8th of march, after the revolution we celebrate it in the street. So we went to the press syndicate and we walked until Tahrir Square, and in Tahrir Square we were squeezed, Please Mai, can you close the door because we feel cold. We were squeezed between the thugs of Mubarak and the Salafists, sexual harassments, insults, it was a very bad experience, and then… so, we continued to fight, not always listen to… of course there was this constitution of 2012, which was clearly ignoring women, even not anti, it was ignoring women, we’ve tried t have contacts, we had n the parliament some people who could be sympathetic, such as Amr Hamzawy for example, you know that he is my daughters husband, so we passed with him a draft law, not a draft law, but draft amendments to the penal code about sexual violence. And he worked on this, but first of all the parliament was dissolved and secondly the Muslim Brothers and the Salafis didn’t want it all of course. We, also a group of the coalition met the vice president of the Shura council to expose women demands, there were attempts but it was very limited, but of course there were all the events after Mursi came to power and Al Itihadyah events, and all this. But people were stronger, so on the 8th March 2012. We had a beautiful demonstration on the street, thousands of people, men and women on the street, it was something very beautiful, and no body stop us, and then for me, it was a little bit difficult, I couldn’t go in entire demonstration because I got a cancer, and I just had a surgery in February. So, 8th March I wasn’t very well yet, anyway, and then the Tamarrud group appeared, and people were really very excited about this, I think we all sang the Tamarrud statement, and then there was 30 June, and all what happened on the 30 June, also, we had big hopes, now the situation is quiet frustrating, I personally don’t think it was a military coup, I would rather think it was a popular coup, but not a military coup, because the military coup means that the military moves alone and by its own decision, but it was not, this is my opinion at least. On the other hand, the situation of the region is quiet scaring, in Tunisia the situation is not good, we meet lots of Tunisian friends, they are very much afraid of the Salafi and Muslim Brothers, they don’t trust them at all. Women are marginalized; the security forces are now taking positions against the opposition, it did them. So the situation is not very good. In Morocco the situation is not very good, in Algeria of course it is not good, in Libya, you can expect anything, you can expect that the country will be equally divided, in Palestine the situation is not good, in Yemen the situation is not good. In Lebanon the situation is like this, in Syria the situation is awful. So, in Sudan… so we are surrounded by… we don’t know what will happen and we have been in this state of anxiety and ambiguity since 2011, and people now are tired, we are all tired, I am tired, personally I even very rarely go out, I don’t leave my house, I don’t want to be in the streets, I don’t want to be in demonstrations, I don’t want to see people burning cars or throwing stones or Molotov or… I saw under my house people with fire guns, and I felt very bad, and I feel very sad about my country, and I feel very sad about the poor people, who had, the first slogan of the revolution was bread. People wanted bread, people wanted social justice, wanted human dignity, it was even before freedom. It was very simple demands, and nothing happened, we are now 3 years, its not, of course its not a long time in the history of a country, but it is a long time in the history of individuals, especially that for 3 years you don’t know what is going to happen, not just tomorrow, but after an hour. You don’t know. So, this is our Arab spring, which has turned to be an Arab autumn. Do you have any questions or…

**NP:** I will just ask few questions to clarify. So, in the period between 2000 and 2011, how did your role within the New Woman change?

**ND:** in What? Yes.

**NP:** the New woman. Did it change, did you… your personal role within the organization, do you spend more time on…

**ND:** the role! Yes, I give much more time, of course, on voluntary base, especially that for 3 years, I have been the chair person of the organization, but also the role of the organization changed a little bit because in 2006, we had a strategic planning for the organization and we felt, there is a momentum, and in Egypt, we are at a crossroads in Egypt and if we don’t jump on this thing, we will lose the… so, since 2007, we have begun and I think we are the only organization in Egypt, which began to work with women in the industrial sector, and this was a big change and now, we have began with small projects and now we have a program of women and work. So we are working with women in the industrial sector, we are working with women in trade unions; we are no trying to investigate the field of informal work of women. And domestic workers, so we are trying to work, so this for me was fascinating because it was another world…

**NP:** these [programs are still until today?

**ND:** Yes. We have 3 or 4 main programs that have women and work. We have women and political participation, we have violence against women, and of course, this is not really a program, but its an activity an important activity for us, it’s the rights to freedom of association.

**NP:** and during this period of 2000 until 2011, could you say something about the relationship between the New Woman Center and what later created the National Council for Women?

**ND:** Look, as long as it was under Mubarak or Mrs. Mubarak sponsorship, we had no good relation with the national council for women… we were not very enthusiastic, but they were not very enthusiastic at all to have us with them, so they have mobilized groups of women who are more polite we can say… we didn’t have really relationship but with some of their bodies, for example, the ombudsmen, you know, what it is. We had a good relation because the head of this office was a feminist. And she is a friend, we had also you know, we have had here in the New Woman foundation also one of the first media watch projects in Egypt, and then the National Council for Women had a media watch project, so they contacted us and they wanted to exchange experience, but not as a formal… after. When Mirvat Talawi took over the National Council for Women, our relationship is better, because first of all she is a feminist, she was a member of the SIDO committee and all this, and she also respects us, and we had relationship with her before she was the head of the National Council, so our relationship is good, but we can’t say it is very close, because all the time we feel that we can be used. We don’t know exactly, when it takes a good position we can support them and even have relationships with them but to a certain extent.

**NP:** wasn’t Mirvat Talawi the minister of social affairs in 2000? 99?

**ND:** Social affairs yes, in 99, they used her to pass the law, and then they replaced her with somebody else. I dot know why she accepted, its stupid! But apparently people like the seat.

**NP:** Yeah. Could you say a bit more about the type… what was the demand women were making after the revolution, a specific laws, are there specific policies, were there a consensus amongst all women?

**ND:** No, we cant say there is a consensus but there are some, few demands, one demand I don’t agree with but most of them agree with them, is the quota for women, I personally think that a woman can be more anti woman than a man sometimes, and the man can be more pro woman than the woman. So it is not a question of women and men, it is the question of changing the whole culture, but anyway, this is a demand at least… the second thing is that women are afraid about the family code. Because we were threatened that we would have lots of benefits… not lots of benefits, because we don’t have lots of benefits, but some like Al Khula, [women’s right to ask for a divorce]. To be deleted from the law. Also political participation not only in terms of quota, you know it is strange, I noticed when you are working with people you don’t notice the change that happens in their minds, but now when I hear some women workers, they have almost the same discourse as they have, they are much more aware of the marginalization, the discrimination against them, especially when we talk to them about wages and about for example social benefits, things like this. They now very well that there is discrimination. And they talk, we had a conference a few days ago, they were wonderful, So, there is this of course violence against women that is becoming… I think there is almost a consensus about the violence against women. But, also there are different points of view, we are sticking to human rights, and sticking to don’t discrimination between men and women, and some women’s group they are asking for death penalty. You understand. We are not on the same level but we can reach a consensus. But until now, for me the problem is that there is no women’s movement, there are groups, and there are leaders, who don’t want to leave their leadership, so, there is lots of competition, but mostly not competition on the ground, on the real field work, but a competition on big speeches and big events lots of media and things like this.

**NP:** can I also just ask that the role of the New Woman Center is creating a new generation of feminists in Egypt?

**ND:** look at a time we had young women program but it didn’t last long and especially after the revolution young women they want to be on the street and not in a flat, and it is their right and I understand them, but also, of course the young women who work with us… after 1 or 2 month they become… because it suites them, they feel… and the ones who don’t like this, they leave us, but there is something I want to tell you; after the 30th June, and this is not only in our organization, but the Egyptian society is divided, the human rights community is divided, inside the organization, or organizations people are divided, I remember one day we sat here around this table, around 12 persons, and we just, we said; okay, we have different points of view, let every one of us say how she sees the situation, there were not 2 similar points of view. People are divided, and I think maybe this is why people like me, I prefer now, not to enter into conflict, because people are not only divided, people are also attacking each other, they are charging each other of being spies or being agents, or being agents of the army or agents of the Muslim Brothers. All those kinds of accusations, I hate this, and I will not feel comfortable, and I don’t think lots of people feel comfortable with this, but I think it was important to note, because it also switched in the whole life of the country. And now people are divided around the constitution while the constitution, one main point that is controversial is that the right of military to persecute civilians. But otherwise it is much better than many constitutions, so are you going to say No, say Yes, are you going to abstain, people also don’t know what they are going to do. Especially with this climate of attacks, people are afraid to go to the referendum, because they don’t know if they will be attacked. The situation is very tensed and the people are stressed, and maybe lots of people are just becoming insiders.

**NP:** Do you think this is a very unique moment for Egypt in comparison to other moments you have lived through?

**ND:** Yes, it is very unique long moment, because it is 3 years and it can last 7 or 10 years, but it is a moment of course. We have thrown out 2 presidents, it is something. So, yes, it is difficult moment, but it is interesting to see the changes, and you know, despite all of this there is something, I think that is irreversible that happened, people broke the wall of silence. If you go in the street and if you listen to people talking, they all talk about politics, even if they don’t understand anything, they all talk about politics. And this is very interesting, there is something there that is happening, and I consider the 30 June as a wave in the revolution, okay. And I think we are going through a 3rd wave and a 4th wave because social justice is not achieved. Even like this, and as you have seen The Siland Iron factory was on strike and there was solidarity from people at Al Mahala Al Kubra, Marwa and Vivian, please close the door, its very cold…. No, No, the door… and even I read somewhere that the workers of the quarries in the new valley they decided not to produce Iron in solidarity… so there is a movement that will come, but are there leaders capable of taking over? I don’t know, and I don’t think, not yet. It will come from the youth.

**NP:** can I ask you some general questions just now to reflect on everything that you have lived through, you have lived such an amazingly diverse life until now, from a member of the communist party to working with prince… it is quiet an interesting contrast?

**ND:** Talal…

**NP:** and throughout those different periods, and different activities that you have done until now, what is your best memory? Your favorite memory of….

**ND:** I cant tell you I have a favorite memory, I liked very much when I was teaching, because teaching gives you a lot it is very rewarding, but I cant tell you because I enjoyed everything, I like to learn it is very important for me.

**NP:** Sorry, and what has been your worst memory?

**ND:** at work or in my life?

**NP:** It’s your choice it could be in your work it could be in your activism, in your life?

**ND:** My four years of marriage. It was a… a bad memory. But the good thing is that I had a daughter, and this is why men are for.

**NP:** and what are you looking forward for?

**ND:** to in the private life or public life?

**NP:** in both, you can choose to tell me?

**ND:** look in the public life, I would like the situation to be better in Egypt, because the Egyptian people are very good people and they have suffered a lot and they deserve much better than what happens, and you know, a few days ago I was returning back home, and I am living not very far from Cairo University, and there was a students demonstration there, and I was looking at them and I really pitied them because they didn’t look like Muslim Brothers, they were very young, I don’t think they were university students, some of them, it can be just anger, some others can be paid from anybody, I really, I felt bad and you know, people, the situation, this Mubarak regime, it was worst than Nassir, it was worse even than Sadat, it was this corruption on the expenses of the Egyptian people, it is something, I would like, I was hoping so much, we were hoping so much…

TAPE 4

**ND:**… at the private level, I just hope not to become dependent at my age its important.

**NP:** is there anything that I didn’t ask you about?

**ND:** I don’t know, but if any question comes to your mind, even after few months, because you wont listen to this now, you can just email me and I will answer you. Of course I won’t remember what I said so you say, “you said this” what does it mean?

**NP:** Okay, thank you.

**ND:** I hope it was okay.