

# Interview with Salma El Naqqash

2014

## TAPE 1

**Nicola Pratt:** Okay, lets begin, so can I begin by asking you where and when you were born?

**Salma Elnaqqash:** yeah, I was born in June 1987. In Cairo, and I lived most of my life, almost all of my life basically in Cairo. I only lived in the US for only one year.

**NP:** was that for like a study abroad?

**SE:** yeah, it was a study abroad program for one academic year while I was still a college student, because I studied at the English department at Cairo University and my major was English language and literature. I got the chance to travel to the US to Kentucky to be more specific, for a year for a study abroad program.

**NP:** what do your parents do?

**SE:** Both of my parents used to work as an accountant, now they both had early retirement and yeah, they worked as accountants.

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

**SE:** I just really have a vague memory of the war in Kuwait, between Kuwait and Iraq, but I was 6 years old or something, so I just have a vague memory of it, and actually, no I was younger than 6 years old, because I was born in 1987. So yeah I just remember early vaguely afterwards, when I grew up a bit. That I used to look at the newspapers and see something about it. I vaguely remember it. The political events that are quite marked in my memory is the 911, happening in New York, and of course what followed the war on Iraq and all of that, and also the invasion, the Israeli invasion in Beirut, in Lebanon I mean, in south Lebanon in the 2000s as well. Because I remember I took part in several political protests about the invasion in Beirut, in Lebanon, when Hassan Nasrallah won this war, we were just, we had so many political protests about it, chanting for Hassan Nasrallah and his victory and asking for the Israeli ambassador to leave Cairo, this memory is quite vivid in my head. What else do I remember politically? Of course, yeah, Intifada, Palestine, I was 12 or 13 years old when the first one took place, it was the first one, when Mohammed Al Durra got killed this is a very vivid memory, because in my school we burnt the Israeli flag and we started chanting for Palestine and Dorra's name and we almost got suspended for school for that so that I remember as well, yeah. I mean I didn't mention the political events in order but that's, these are the things that are marked in my memory for the most part.

**NP:** when you, in what year did you enter university?

**SE:** in 2003, it was my first year, it was my freshman's year in college.

**NP:** did you participate in any groups or societies or activities in the university?

**SE:** yeah, well in my first year in university, this might be a bit of an interesting story, or at least I think so. During my first year in university, you know, all my relatives are part of Al Tajamu party which is one of the oldest leftist parties in Egypt, it started back in the 70s. So I was planning on joining this political party to start engaging on a more organized political level but then I was dating a guy then and he said no political parties. And he was quiet firm about it, I thought it was because of his concerns and because of the security concerns because you know, it was 2003, it was t really, there wasn't much space for political activism, it was really dangerous to do so. So I didn't join the political party and some of my friends in college, actually were trying to convince me to join the revolutionary socialist group, and I also didn't do that, I ended up volunteering for an NGO, a women's NGO, called the Forum for Women and Development, and the head of this NGO is actually Farida Elnaqqash, my aunt, so she introduced me to the organization and she thought you know, women's rights and issue regarding gender and equality might be interested in it and ill not create such a conflict with your boyfriend so obviously, it could be an easy way out. And I ended up being politically active as well while dating this person but in a more indirect manner, basically when the NGO said, okay, the staffers are going to take a collective decision to participate in a political protest chanting for Nasrallah because of ending the war in Lebanon. So I would actually take part in it without telling him or telling him later on after the protest is over. So, and this was actually this period in college and the trouble I had in my personal and emotional relationship or whatever, it was part of formulating my feminist conscious in this regard, what kind authority I accept? What kind of power relation I accept? So that was a different question other than political question. Do I want to be politically engaged or not? Yeah.

**NP:** can I ask you a little bit more about the volunteering that you did with the forum of women development? What sort of activities did you do as a part of that?

**SE:** with the forum... did I do... as a part of this group I basically participated in organizing events, conferences, panel discussions on different issues, regarding of course the SIRA convention. Because this NGO was actually taking part in the big monitor on SIRA implementation in Egypt, I also took part in translating their documents all the reports, their articles, because they had a news letter that came out every three months called Anhar, and it was quiet an important source of women's right in Egypt, I used to translate its articles into English and translate all its reports either from Arabic to English or the other was around, so basically, this was my mandate inside the NGO.

**NP:** you said that you entered university in 2003, which is the same year the US invaded Iraq, did you participate in any activities regarding, protesting against that, were you involved in that?

**SE:** actually yeah, there was a couple of political protest that I took part in, one of them, only one of them was inside the university, because they were mainly Islamist groups inside the university so I didn't feel much of an affiliation towards them and I didn't really feel like participating in their protests, so I didn't take part in that. But there were I think, we had a political protest and a couple of silent stands for Iraq, and I took part in that, but as I told you earlier I wasn't politically organized, like I wasn't inside a political entity that actually, given that the NGO is sort of a political entity, but because the mandate was more geared towards women's rights, I wasn't really politically active, just on occasions I would participate in protests for Palestine or Iraq.

**NP:** and did your relationship, if you don't mind me asking, did your relationship with this man last?

**SE:** No, once I came back from the study abroad program, I decided to break up with him, because on a different note, away from political activism, he was very reluctant towards the idea of me studying abroad, he was thinking it was not acceptable because you are not travelling with your parents, since you are not travelling with an authority so it is really not acceptable to travel alone. But I insisted and we were about to break up before I left to the US, but then he gave up and he said okay, I will take this, but I don't want you to keep travelling further in our life, because if we are to get married then I want someone who would take care of me and my children, you know the very stereotypical gender role that is expected from me, and once I got back from the US I decided that this is not how I am going to continue with my life so. That of course he was totally against each and every political protest I ever took part in, or a political stand or whatever, he would totally be against it and he would fight over it a lot because he would think there is a security hazard, you might get arrested and we don't know what would happen to you inside prison, and I don't want you to be detained because it is a bad image for you in front of my family as well, which is his family, in my family its okay to be arrested but in his family its not accepted. That was actually one of the main differences in our relationship that lead eventually to the fact that we cant be together.

**NP:** so did you continue with the forum, after you left university or did you start to do something else?

**SE:** for women and development... through out the years of college I was a volunteer there, and once I graduated they gave me a job, I became a coordinator for their leadership capacity program and then, also a trainer in the program because it was based on implementing capacity workshops for young leaders, basically men and woman, and natural leaderships in local communities, so we would travel around Egypt and implement capacity building of which I coordinate the workshop and sort of oversee the organizing and also participate as a trainer and

a facilitator of these workshops. And I stayed there for a year and a half until I graduated.

**NP:** How did you find that work, was it challenging to work on gender issues outside of Cairo?

**SE:** and even inside of Cairo actually, it was quiet challenging it was the first time other than my personal relationship, it was the first time for me to get in touch so close to the reality that people, there are very strong stereotypical gender norms in this society, people are not willing to fight it or change the power balance by any means. So, throughout, my work with forum for women and development, it was the first time for me to let this reality hit me in the face, in a direct manner. And of course when I travelled out side of Cairo, lets say when I went to Upper Egypt or Fayoum or something like that, it would get more and more difficult, because I would talk about FGM for example, female genital mutilation people would show so much resistance to the idea that its not supposed to happen and that it is a form of violence against women. It is just not supposed to exist on this planet to begin with, you are not supposed to cut people because they are born into a particular sex, just doesn't make sense so it was quiet challenging but at the same time it helped me realize how deep are these issues in the Egyptian society. Like we are not talking about things that we can touch on the surface they are so deeply rooted, that you have to do so much work on changing the awareness parallel to changing the laws that would support you on the other end. Because it is just really difficult, it is quiet a challenge to actually think of ways to invade peoples awareness and to switch the idea into something else and try to make them think that what they think is acceptable and normal shouldn't be either or so it was really, it was troublesome at some point actually. Yeah.

**NP:** and how did you get involved in Nazra?

**SE:** well, I was friends with Mozn, the executive director and one of the founders, and two of the other founders of Nazra since 2008, we were friends and we met actually at a summer school for human rights in which I was a participant as a student, and they were the facilitators and Mozn, Maysan and another guy called Basam Murtadha, those were three founding committee of Al Nazra. So since 2008 I met them, and then Mozn offered me the opportunity to participate in several Nazra activities since 2010, and I was busy with working with the forum for women and development, and I also had another job as an English teacher so I was quiet swamped most of the time so I told her, I don't have a lot of free time to spend with other activities at Nazra, and then after that, like with 2011 and the uprising in January 25, I basically lost my job, I wasn't working at the forum for women and development in 2011, I was working with another place called AMIDEAST, that conducts exchange programs for American students in Egypt, I was working with that program at the time, and the program just shut down because of the evacuation of all foreigners in Egypt. So I basically lost my job and I was taking part in the uprising, getting politically involved and all of that, then Musn offered me a job and said I would like to have you as a coordinator in Al Nurah since you have this past

experience, and you are already involved in women's issues, so why not make use of this experience with the organization. So I started I think around March, April 2011, right after the first wave of the uprising.

**NP:** have you heard... sorry, when you first met Mozn, Nazra had already been formed?

**SE:** Yeah, it was registered as an NGO in late 2007. As I understood, 2007.

**NP:** Okay, have you heard of other women organizations in Egypt?

**SE:** Yeah, throughout working with the forum for women and development, I met several other women's organization, you know CEWLA, the Center for Egyptian Women's Legal Assistance. Azza Suleiman center, the Egyptian center for women's rights with Nihad Abu El Komsan. Who else, I mean several other organizations even outside of Cairo, and Alexandria or Sinai or Areesh. I heard of several.

**NP:** did you see any differences in perspective between the different NGOs?

**SE:** Yeah, absolutely, this was one of the debates that Nazra was based on to start with. Most of these NGOs not to criticize them in a negative manner but they were so much focused on [inaudible: 17:48]... form and using [inaudible: 17:49]... and international tools, but they rarely or very, I mean it was not so common amongst such organizations to look at the grass root level and to look at the community mobilizations to start with. A lot of them did not, their point of departure was not a feminist point to be honest, not to judge them in any manner, but they were more concerned with the question of women and development for example, so lets talk about economic empowerment for women or women political empowerment, but they did not have a feminist point of departure and that was a major point of debate between Nazra as a group and other women NGOs that worked back in the 80s. The only exception is the New Woman Foundation that was started by Dr. Amal Abdelhadi and Nawla Darwiche amongst other women, they were different because they were genuinely feminists like Dr. Amal Abdelhadi is one of the very first women as a medic basically, sorry, as a doctor basically, she started working on women, FGM since the 80s or the 70s actually, so the only exception to what I am telling you is the New Woman Foundation, they are the only group whom they sort of hard core feminists and sometimes they took it to a radical extreme which was good, after wards we realized that this was a good point of departure that other groups can build up on like Nazra. So it was, but the general rule was that the women NGOs in Egypt were so occupied, preoccupied with the question of economic empowerment or is it the international tools or the development question of fighting poverty amongst women, but they did not, they were so conservative in other issues they did not have a genuine feminist perspective on things to be honest and it was so frustrating to be honest. Like I remember when I was at the Forum for Women and Development, I was attending a conference for a network that forum was a part of called Roua. And I was talking about sexual freedoms, and I got so much frowned upon for talking about this as if it is not part of the freedoms that are supposed to be

innate. I saw it as part of the feminist question to start with and part of the human rights, I mean, I see that sexual freedoms should be defended s much you defend the freedom of expression or thought, as much as I defend the freedom of religion, I think it's a genuine right so and I got so much frowned upon and the funny thing is that I was sitting amongst the feminists, or so called feminists to be honest. I was thinking how is this not a question to be considered with what you are dealing with? Does this mean that you would judge a girl who would come and say I got pregnant out of wedlock and I need an abortion for example? This be a question that she is not so chastised or not really conservative enough or she went too far, I mean those were questions I was discussing and posing, and people were just so frowning upon me because they were thinking this girl just too radical. So when I met Nazra group I saw the difference to be honest, that I can talk about the personal, because the personal issues are definitely interconnected with political issues, there is so much intersection between both and through Nazra there was space to pose such questions and to talk about them without feeling you are being judged for them, so.

**NP:** can I ask about your participation about the 25<sup>th</sup> January?

**SE:** Yeah, please do.

**NP:** did you hear there is going to be a demonstration on the 25<sup>th</sup>, did you know in advance?

**SE:** like around January 20<sup>th</sup>, I started looking at Facebook, and the Media started to talk about this and stuff, especially after what happened in Tunisia, and honestly, in the beginning I used to laugh at it, I was like haha, it is not going to happen, it is not, not in Egypt, and I took it so lightly and I was thinking, come on, we are not educated like Tunisia is more secular, they are quiet progressive and they have genuine community mobilization and they are really politically organized despite Bin Ali's dictatorship they were able to establish political organizations that functioned underground and everything, but they were politically organized, because they are so enlightened, and because of the European influence in the culture and all of that, so I was just thinking that January 25<sup>th</sup> was not going to take place to start with, but of course, leaving my home on the 25<sup>th</sup> I realized that something different was happening, so because, actually when I was leaving home on that day, when I left home, I started looking around in the streets and thinking this doesn't look like any other political protest, you have around 50 people who all know each other because they all belong to leftist or liberal families, or people who are so much into politics since they were young, and they took it sort of a heritage because of their families like myself. But I was thinking that this time we are looking around and I was standing on the October bridge, and there was a huge mass of people and no one knows the other, it was just the Egyptian people on the street, so that was quiet different for me and then I started to realize that something different is actually happening.

**NP:** so, after the 25<sup>th</sup> you just continued and you went everyday?

**SE:** should I keep going with the...

**NP:** Yeah, I am interested, go ahead.

**SE:** Okay, well on the 25<sup>th</sup>, I took part in the entire day but I decided I am not going to take part in the strike, I am not going to sit into Tahrir. Because people were starting to plan, they started to put up tents and they started thinking lets start the strike now. I felt it was quiet dangerous so I just went home, and I want sure how far it was going to go, then on the 26<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup>, I didn't go to Tahrir at all but I kept following the news and I understood that people are getting beaten in the street and getting arrested in masses, so I was thinking that it is going to be controlled eventually because we have a very powerful security apparatus. And then the 28<sup>th</sup> happened, and January 28<sup>th</sup> I was still working with AMID EAST and student evacuation was not completed yet so they were in danger, so I had to stay with the students at their home, we rented an apartment for them in Saha Square by the way, and I had to stay with them the entire day until they arranged their flights, so I couldn't be on the streets in the day of anger in Egypt, I wasn't able to take part in it or be on the street but Rana my sister she was in Jala Square close to Tahrir where the police starting firing a lot of tear gas, and she said it was quiet violent, but unfortunately I was not able to participate in it by my self and then student evacuation was completed on January 30<sup>th</sup>, and that's, once they left to the airport I left to Tahrir Square, so... and it was quiet a different experience to see so many masses on the street and despite the fact that there was a curfew in Cairo but people just stayed on the street and it was quiet amazing and I stayed you know over night and I took part in the sit in from January 30<sup>th</sup> until February 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> I don't remember which is Camel incident, the Camel day, I stayed there throughout this period and I was between Tahrir square and Hisham Mubarak law center, because I volunteered for the front to defend Egypt protestors which is sort of a legal front comprised of several lawyers, human rights lawyers, some doctors and a lot of NGO activists who would document the arrests taking place and sort of make lists of all the people who got arrested, the names of people who got arrested. The names of the people who died and the names of the people who were at hospitals or injured to be able to document the information and help the families find their children. So I took part in this front through Hisham Mubarak law center, and I would take part in translating their statements and press releases, and in documenting of course, so I was going back and forth between Hisham Mubarak and Tahrir Square. On February 2<sup>nd</sup> I actually left Egypt to take part in the world social forum in Senegal in 2011, I took part in that, and whenever I think about it, now, I actually regret it because I think that, you know, staying in Tahrir Square for the rest of the 18 days would have made a huge difference in my life instead of going to Senegal, but I actually went there because I haven't slept by then, I hadn't slept since January 25<sup>th</sup>, so I was thinking I need to go to Senegal to get some rest not for another reason. So it was really difficult and actually on the day I left, February 2<sup>nd</sup>, the military police invaded Hisham Mubarak, they arrested everyone inside and they took all the papers and laptops because they knew that the front to defend Egyptian protestors is actually functional from Hisham Mubarak center, plus the fact that Hisham Mubarak would be a hub for all the donations made for protestors, so people who

would donate blankets and food and first aide kits and bring it to Hisham Mubarak and then we would take it and distribute it amongst the protestors in Tahrir. So Hisham Mubarak was actually destroyed that day by the military police but thank God I left before I came, and then yeah, I travelled to Senegal, and the day I got back on Feb 11, the day Mubarak left so I didn't attend the rest of it actually but I kept in touch with all my friends and made sure they were all safe, I mean Mozn for starter, I kept calling her every single day telling her, how is everyone doing? Is anybody arrested? Are you all alive? And I just kept in touch with her the whole 18 days. And then when I came back things were a lot different because you know, the protest that was to be arranged on Fridays, they were successful and everything, but things were, they just seemed quiet different, and the whole idea of cleaning up Tahrir Square and painting the pavements and all that started and I wasn't interested in that part particularly to be honest. I was much happier with the chaotic mess that we created. So yeah, I stayed with this, this was my experience with the 18 days in particular.

**NP:** and what did you do, you know, afterwards, and how, what was sort of like, what activities you became involved in?

**SE:** well I basically I worked with AMIDEAST in the end of March, and then Mozn offered me the job so I started working in Nazra. And around march or April, you know the political scene....

## TAPE 2

**SE:**... was quiet vivid and everything but things were changing, there were times of how the military council is going to deal with us, because if you remember what happened with March 9<sup>th</sup> and the virginity tests, with March 8<sup>th</sup>, was it March 8<sup>th</sup>? Yeah, when women were beaten on the streets because of the women's international women's day, and women groups were celebrating that day on the street, in Tahrir square, and we were harassed and beaten by random groups and then on March 9<sup>th</sup>, the military council invaded Tahrir Square and they started arresting everyone and the girls got subjected to virginity tests in the military prison. So there were signs of how things are going to change, or which direction they are going to go into, after this period. I started working with Nazra and the Egyptian social democratic party was under, it was still not established yet but we were basically spreading the word out about it. And also there was another group called APYR, Association of Progressive Youth of the Revolution, it was a group formed of leftists young leftists and I took part in this as well, and I was thinking throughout the formation of this association I was thinking that we are going to end up as a political party which is actually what happened, because we only lasted for some months during 2011 and most of the members of this group got involved in political parties including myself, because I joined first the Egyptian social democratic party and I stayed with them for a while throughout 2011, and then I gave up because I felt they were more.. I was thinking they were center left but I felt they were more geared towards the liberal wing and I am not exactly liberal so I think they are different ideologies so I wasn't really comfortable to continue with them, and then late 2011,



there was another party called the popular alliance, the socialist popular alliance party that was formed, I didn't join it from day one because I was so frustrate with the Egyptian social democratic party, so I was thinking I will not take part in any parties for now, so I just, I continued for a while with the Association of Progressive Youth of the Revolution. And then around the end of 2011 I just gave up and I focused totally on my work with Nazra, and with engaging with other feminist groups and I wasn't really concerned with political parties, and then in 2012, I decided to join the other leftist party called the socialist popular alliance party.

**NP:** what sort of activities were you involved in with the Association of Progressive Youth of the Revolution?

**SE:** Association of Progressive Youth of the Revolution, we basically planned to have some real committees, a political committee and artistic committee and a cultural committee and so on and so forth. And we weren't really sure if we are going to continue as an association with the formation of all those political parties, so I was involved with the artistic committee and we started a theatrical troop, so that was basically the only mandate that we had with the Association of Progressive Youth of the Revolution, we started a theatrical troop and we started working on, you know, polishing out theatrical skills as much as possible and we got a theatrical trainer with us, and we stayed there, we continued with this theatrical troop for like a year, and then that was the only thing we did with the association, I wasn't really involved with the committee of political statements or anything like that. Or the committee that was planning all the panels and the sort of political discussions, I wasn't involved in that, I was involved with artistic committee, so yeah.

**NP:** did you put on plays for the public?

**SE:** yeah, we had 2 plays on stage, once we had our show in Ein Shams University, and once we had it on May 1<sup>st</sup> 2011, the labor day, and we actually got beaten on Tahrir square, because people were thinking there were so much extravagance going on and martyrs are still, they just died and we didn't get the rights back, we have to fight the interior ministry and the security apparatus, and you are coming to show us plays and artistic shows and all of that, so, we started, I mean it was a big fight on Tahrir Square on may 1<sup>st</sup> and they actually had to run away from the place as fast as we could. Yeah, it was quiet a horrible experience.

**NP:** were the plays political, like a theme to do with the revolution or?

**SE:** Not exactly, not in a very direct manner, it was more about the notion of unity and being in harmony, which was so similar to the state of the Egyptians throughout the 18 days and how they felt and how close and united, under one similar goal which is eliminating Mubarak. Or removing Mubarak from authority. So it had this notion in it but it wasn't a very direct play you know, so yeah, but still people did not accept it and they were thinking you know, the martyrs are dead and you coming to show us a play, we need to fight with the security apparatus first, so... it was yeah, it was one of those horror stories of Tahrir Square.

**NP:** and how long did you still, are you still with the popular alliance?

**SE:** the socialist popular alliance, I stayed with them for a whole year, and I was actually a member of the labor office, or the labor bureau inside the party, and that was involved basically with workers and all the strikes and sit ins that took part in different factories and different companies, I stayed there for just 1 year and I actually resigned a couple of months ago, because I mean, for several reasons, but one of the main reasons was the direction they were going into specially after the uprising in June 30<sup>th</sup>, they were more geared towards supporting the government, and supporting the military. So I felt that we are completely going in 2 different directions, like the political party is going in such a direction geared towards the military and then I was not accepting that by all means. Actually, my resignation was included with other 300 resignations from the political party, because of several statements that the party released right after June 30<sup>th</sup>, and it had a very direct message of supporting the military. And that we were supposed to support the military and the war on terrorism, we didn't accept that by all means. So there was a mass resignation from the party and I was one of the people who resigned. But I stayed there for a year.

**NP:** do you think that, was the difference within the party, difference in opinion within the party a result of differences in generations? Like or was it more differences between different ideological fractions?

**SE:** it was basically a difference in different ideological fractions, and the other part was the difference in generations, because the party was lead by a group of people who used to be Tagammu members, and they left because of Rifat Saeed, and their fights with Rifat Saeed in Tagammu, and they started their own party which is the Popular Alliance, but they had the same mentality just as Rifat Saeed, they were actually more geared towards supporting the state. And we were thinking the younger group in the party was thinking that this is not democratic left and we are more geared towards a democratic left to start with, and the other thing is, we were thinking that we have to keep our distance from the state. And they thought that we were just these youngsters that are not supposed to have a say in the direction of the party and we were totally against it and we had so many fights with them, and actually we had internal elections inside the party and one of the reasons we resigned because one of the manipulation of the elections towards you know, that this group did, the old Tagammu party members, they actually manipulated the elections to their favor. And to elect the people to the higher committee of the party who were supportive of their directions so I mean, it was one of the main reasons why we resigned plus the fact that they did not hear us what so ever, so it had... it bore both sides the fact that the political party is going in a totally different direction and there was a different ideological approach towards what the party should be like and the other thing was difference in generations, if you look at the supreme committee in the party and the president and his deputies, they are all old people, none of them is one of the young people who is even quiet well names of the leftist

groups, that just said something about the party as well. So yeah, basically [inaudible: 10:58]...

**NP:** would you like some water?

**SE:** No. I am good thank you.

**NP:** are you sure?

**SE:** Yeah.

**NP:** I should, that reminds me, and you were saying earlier that you had originally thought, like back in 2003 to join Tagammu party....

**SE:** I didn't do it but I was thinking it yeah.

**NP:** did your, when you had sort of the opportunity to join a political party, why in the end did you choose another party and not Tagammu?

**SE:** You mean after the revolution? See, it is very problematic for people like me who belong to a political family but they don't want to live inside the same, what do they call it? I don't want to live inside the same gown basically like we say in Arabic, I will not live in the same gown. I just felt like, I don't want to be recognized politically as just a member of Al Naqqash family, I don't want their political stance to be sort of a pressure on me, I wanted to be independent, I wanted to be active in the political sphere but more in an independent manner. So I didn't feel like, yes, I want to be more politically engaged of course I am geared towards the left I am not going to lie about it, I am not going to say as a reaction I am just going to go to the liberal wing, I am not liberal, at least not on the economic level. But so basically yeah, I was thinking I don't want to be involved through the same channel that was created by my family, I want to grow up politically from a different channel basically. So after the revolution I wasn't thinking in Al Tagammu whatsoever, I was more hopeful about the political parties that were formed after the revolution, and I had so many variations, like with liberal groups, Amr Hamzawy started his own party Masr El Hurryah, the social democrats, they had quiet of a balance in political discourse, but I felt that the party wad taken over by the liberals so I wasn't comfortable with that, that was the main reason why I left. And then the more radical left they were forming the popular alliance, the revolutionary socialists were quiet active but I am not a [inaudible: 13:38]... so I never thought of actually joining the revolutionary socialists because again, there is an ideological difference, so I wasn't thinking that Al Tagammu was an option for me, but who else? Especially after the revolution.

**NP:** does that cause any tensions with your family, that you are in a different political party or?

**SE:** were it brought upon some frowning upon but not very much so, I mean well, you know, aunt Amina, she is closer to me than Farida because we talk more regular

basis and we visit each other and all of that. So she was thinking it doesn't really look right for you, for you Salma to join a different political party especially that it belongs to the left wing as well, and the way she saw the popular alliance, is that it was a group of people who were not able to get to power in Al Tagammu, so they started their own political party. I kept telling her, no, it was because of a very huge ideological difference between Rifat Saeed and his group in Tagammu, and this group that started the popular alliance. And she was thinking, no, they are just people who were not able to get to power, they were not close enough to the power in Tagammu so they decided to start a new party especially with Abdelghaffar Shukr, who is one of the think tanks in Tagammu, or used to be in Tagammu as a think tank, and he started the popular alliance. So she said he is not a man to be trusted then, he is not a man of his word politically, and I was thinking no, I see him as a very balanced political orator and his discourse politically is quiet close to what I want to see happening in the political life in Egypt so... it did create, yes to go back to your question, it did create some not tension but more of an ideological difference that was quiet dominant in our discussions but not to the level of a political tension that would affect our relationship, so...

**NP:** did you participate in the different elections that happened since the revolution, since the 25<sup>th</sup> January?

**SE:** Yeah, which were a lot but... yeah, I actually, I took part in all of the referendums and all the political, the elections that took place, because, Mozn keeps making fun of me in this aspect, and she says you believe too much in the active citizenship, and I am like yeah, I mean, a lot of the women who fought for the right to vote back in the 50s they need to realize that it was a fight worth going through so I use my right to vote, and the referendum in 2011, I actually took part in lobbying for voting no in the referendum, so I personally voted no and then there was the parliamentary elections you know, there were different political coalitions taking part in the elections including something, a coalition called The Revolution Continues, that included the popular alliance and that's the one I voted for in the parliamentary elections, although back then, I was a member of the social democratic party that was a member of the Egyptian block, but I didn't vote for the Egyptian block. And then in the presidential elections in the first round of course I voted for Khaled Ali, who was the most radical leftist person, or government, or president in the presidential elections, in the rerun, or the second phase I didn't vote. I decide to boycott because I didn't accept Shafeeq or Mursi. I felt like I am not going to vote for the Muslim Brotherhood, and of course I am not going to vote for Shafeeq, so I am not going to take part. What other elections did we have? Yeah, the second referendum on the constitution I voted no, and I lobbied for no. I took part in a lot of activities like distributing flyers and posters saying no. I tried to do as much as I can and work as much as I can and you know, this was later 2012, so I was already a member of the popular coalition so I took part in their campaign with No for the constitution. What else did we have? We had so many referendums in these 2 years. Of course I saw Tamarrud signatures, I was one of the people who signed, but I could not actually take part in the call for June 30<sup>th</sup>, I had so many problematic with it. And I was too scared that we were removing the Muslim Brotherhood to bring back the

military. I was very worried about the imbalance in the discourse, and Tamarrud in their public discourse they actually seemed to not mind the bringing back of the military, not mind their return and that was too scary for me so I had problematic with June 30<sup>th</sup> and I did not take part in it, although I genuinely hated the Muslim Brotherhood, but I just couldn't take part in June 30<sup>th</sup>. And then I think these were all the referendums, we had too referendums, the parliament elections and the presidential elections, I don't think we had anything else.

**NP:** the Shura council?

**SE:** Yeah, I didn't bother honestly; I was like I am not going to bother about this. I didn't care much about the Shura council, because I thought, it is not really worth it.

**NP:** and with Nazra, can you say a bit more about the type of work you been doing?

**SE:** back in 2011, I worked on one of the initiatives that Nazra actually started which is gender mainstreaming inside human rights organizations and NGOs that don't work on gender equality directly, we worked on this initiatives for 5 months, and then afterwards we started a platform for human rights defenders. And its mandate is to support or to create a support network for women political activists, who would need support from groups like us because they don't have enough legacy or they don't have enough means to support themselves so we would provide them with medical support, psychological support, legal and to document the violations against the women and produce reports about it and I also took part in advocacy and lobbying on the issue on the international and regional and local level. So we created this platform, I was on of the team members who took part in creating it, and I worked with it throughout 2011 since June 2011, up until September 2012, and then I took some time off from Nazra, because I was supposed to start my Masters degree in 2012, but then I decided to postpone it for a while, but when I was still in the Masters program I just said I am going to take part from Nazra, so I think it was about 3 or 4 months that I took time from Nazra then I started to work on my masters and then I withdrew from the program and decided to go back to Nazra afterwards.

**NP:** why did you withdraw from the program?

**SE:** well currently, I am studying law, so I figured I want to finish my undergraduate degree and then go back in doing my masters degree instead of ding it the other way around, instead of postponing the law degree and getting my masters first. And the masters was in international human rights law, so I figured international human rights law is sort of more geared towards political science, something close enough to political science, but especially in AUC, but what I wanted to do is more in depth, or more focused degree on law in particular, so I was thinking I would have, after I finish the law degree I can start the masters in law, instead of international human rights law, because, and I thought it is not beneficial for me especially that I have been working in this field for so many years now, its not like I am going to learn anything new, I already have the tools, I am already familiar with the convention

through the framework of international human rights, its not like its going to add anything to me, I was thinking once I finish my law degree and my undergraduate law degree I can start my masters in constitutional law because I got so involved with the institution, that's actually a part I need to tell you about. Yeah. In 2011, I among other feminist activists and feminist scholars started a group called Women and the constitution, in 2011. And actually the women and memory forum, Hala Kamal, it was the hub that hosted this group, we basically started as a study group, you know working on different constitutions and think that we want to formulate constitutional articles, that basically work towards the end of gender equality and to advocate for these articles basically, so we started a study group and we decided we are not going to take part in the political debate ongoing back in 2011, whether the constitution should come first or the elections should come first, we were thinking we are strictly a study group, that is going to read a lot of constitutions and see how these constitutions dealt with the issue of gender equality. So and we looked at the well reputed constitutions like the Swedish, the German, the South African of course, the Tunisian, the Moroccan and we figured we want to depend heavily on the Arab constitutions and the constitutional history in Egypt. Because we had so many constitutions since 1923, so we figured we can also depend on this history as well, so we studied all these constitutions and we started forming those articles and we decided amongst each other that we want to mainstream gender throughout the constitution we don't want a particular chapter talking about women's rights, we want gender women's rights to be incorporated in the entire constitution. So we created, we sort of formulated the constitutional articles and then we started carrying out or planning panel discussions or conferences and all of that and we talked to a lot of legal experts like Gaber Gad Nasour for example a constitutional professor. We also talked to Safa'a Zaki Murad, Zaki Murad's lawyer, and she... the one comment she said, these articles look so nice if you were advocating for a human rights advocate but it is not legally formulated. So she reviewed the formulation of the articles and she looked at us and gave us more legal articles that we can lobby for, to be incorporated with the constitution. Also, we took this work and we put it, and we sort of, because the group came under the umbrella of the Egyptian feminist coalition, we thought that it can be complimented by other tools, so other organizations like CEWLA, and ACT the women's organization established by Azza Karim, they actually had, they carried out field research on what women want in the new constitution. So and it was basically to support these articles as well. And then we carried out panels of discussions and we had a press conference regarding this work done by the group and other organizations in terms of field research and then we started lobbying for it with the first constituent assembly in 2012, after the parliament formed the constituent assembly, we were actually very depressed you know, we were sort of frustrated because we thought, okay, we are going to lobby for those articles in the constituent assembly that was taken over by the Islamists so we don't expect much of a result. But anyway we went and we lobbied for these articles and we talked to the women members of this constituent assembly and their very exact words were that we are not going to give you an article about women's equality, we don't think that Egyptian women look like you or talk like you and we don't want them to be like that. So you don't represent anyone for us but you represent yourselves, and we are not going to take this into consideration. So we

were quiet frustrated back then in 2012, we felt like a whole year of our lives as a study group that worked so hard for this and it just all gone, its not going to go anywhere. It was so frustrating, but we figured okay, well, we did our part. I mean at least we did something that grey literature would document and say you know, that would be documented in alternative history and say there was a woman's group who tried to mainstream the gender in the constitution after the revolution but they weren't lucky enough to get it. And then, with June 30<sup>th</sup>, and the happenings that took... with the constitutional declaration by Adli Mansour and all the things that came afterwards, we thought okay, it is time to revive this effort and to start lobbying again for it, because here is a big chance for us to actually pressure civic government more or less, to incorporate these articles and demands inside the constitution. And we were much luckier in terms of this period, we were much luckier, of course we were frustrated because the legal expert committee that was a member committee was all men, and of course they kept all of the controversial articles that were present in the 2012 constitution because if you know the story of the article 209, that talked about Shariaa law as a reference as an ideological reference in legislation and with the interpretation of Shariaa law and I don't know how to translated "the rules of theologians and Sunnis" basically to depend on what Mohammed said, the interpretation of Shariaa and the interpretation of Sahabah, "his followers", so basically and the Sunnis as well, we thought this is going to be a disastrous article for women's rights and the legal expert committee kept it the same way it is in the first draft of the constitution amendment in 2013, so we were very worried about this, and we basically issued a statement saying that these articles that we need to be careful of and those are our observations on the constitution, the draft of the constitutional amendments that came out of the legal experts committee and we actually directed it towards the 50 member committee that came afterward, when Hoda Elsadda was a member. And actually I have to admit that its because of the presence of someone like Hoda Elsadda and in the committee we were able to lobby for these articles and all the reservations we had to be taken into consideration it was because of Hoda Elsadda, to be honest with you. And we actually, the 209 article was actually taken out, it was removed from the draft and we proposed a...

### TAPE 3

**SE:**... dependent commission to fight discrimination against Egyptians in general on whatever bases, be it sex, gender, religion, ethnic minority or whatever it is, was actually taken from the constitution the final draft. And the same article criminalized discrimination as well, which was a huge success for us, the article talking about, article 11 that was talking about women's equality improved a lot and I think again its because of Hoda Elsadda, and also, the election system that was taken from the first constitutional draft, it was the individual member system, or single member constituency system, and we lobbied a lot especially as Nazra because we were with the elections, we lobbied a lot for eliminating this article, and we actually stated that in the public statements, that it is going to be dangerous for women's participation. And it is going to limit women's participation in a very significant manner, so we lobbied for eliminating this article and it was actually eliminated in the latest draft as

well. So I can say that in 2013 we were much more successful than we were in 2012. Yeah.

**NP:** so, does that mean that you are going to be voting for the new constitution?

**SE:** Okay, its really controversial. Can you stop for a minute I need to use the bathroom.

**NP:** Of course, yeah.

**SE:** It is really controversial because okay, here is the deal. I mean the chapter talking about the rights of freedoms, it improved immensely and we have to give credit to people like Hoda Elsadda, one of the young political activists who took part in the committee is called Amr Salah, he is quiet a prominent activist, because he is genuinely a liberal activist he took part in improving this chapter immensely. It came out even better than the constitution 1971, but the problem is when you look at the other chapters talking about the judiciary and of course the chapter talking about the military institution, it is scary. It looks like you are giving me a lot more freedom and a lot more rights, but how am I supposed to implement them if you are going to let the military such an immune institution, so if I was to start a genuine process of transitional justice I am not going to hold them accountable, and the judiciary who is supposed to legislate, and also to take part in the process, they are immune as well, so how am I going to realize those rights and freedoms, it doesn't make sense, you know. Speaking about the practicality of putting these articles in practice, I think giving the other chapters especially the ones talking about the judiciary and the military it is going to be impossible, because you can't hold the judges accountable for anything, you cant hold the military accountable for anything, so if I were to implement these rights, it is almost non existent, plus if you look at the paradox of having a better constitution ad at the same time releasing the demonstration law, it is really controversial. I mean what kind of message are you giving? You are giving me a constitution that looks better but is not to be implemented. That's a question. And also some of the articles they stated the right that it is to be regulated by the law, so you give so much power to the legislator and he can formulate the law according to his interpretation of the right, so again this is a dangerous tool that you give to the legislator, I mean, I don't know what kind of parliament is going to come next. So I am going to be scared of legislations from afterwards. So I just, I basically think that those two particular aspects taken into consideration would drive me to either vote no or just nullify my vote, because as much as I am so happy with the improvement that took place in the women's right, and because of the political statement as well, basically if I was to say no, it means I am, sort of counting myself towards the Islamist wing, or the wing that would say no, because we don't want to give legitimacy to this transitional period, so I am thinking that to say no, it means, that I would be politically aligning my self with these groups which they don't represent me, I do admit the legitimacy with all its their problematic, there is a legitimacy for the ending of the rule of the Islamist rule in Egypt, and there is a legitimacy for this transitional period, it's a very important political statement I stick with all the time. Yes the military is becoming aggressively empowered becoming



more and more powerful in a very aggressive manner and a clear manner and I am scared of that, but that doesn't mean that I don't realize the legitimacy of ending the Islamist rule in Egypt. But to me with regards to voting on the constitution, If I am to vote no, then I am aligning myself with these people, which I don't acknowledge and on the other hand if I vote yes, I accept the military situation and this is so unacceptable for me. So, I was actually, there was a debate about this in political groups, to whether basically nullify the vote for these justifications or to just simply vote yes because we want to create a different alliance, or to vote no and to say it is not because we are aligning ourselves with the Islamists but it is because we think there are huge problems with this constitution and also there is a huge problem with this transitional period being taken by the military. So we are still debating but for me, I think I would nullify my vote because I just think that these articles are the rights and freedoms of the people are not going to, they are going to be impracticable due to the fact that the military is so immune and the judiciary is so immune.

**NP:** can you explain a little but more why do you see the legitimacy of ending the Islamist rule and the legitimacy of this transition process?

**SE:** why do I see it legitimate? Because I don't judge, I mean I was personally scared of June 30<sup>th</sup>. And I had my problematic with it but that doesn't mean I acknowledge that this is a popular uprising, it is a popular uprising as much as what happened in January 25<sup>th</sup>. So even the arguments of that this was an overturning of an elected president, no it wasn't. It was basically a demand of the people, and if you are to accept the population that left their houses and demonstrated against Mubarak January 25<sup>th</sup>, then you have to acknowledge their presence again in January 30<sup>th</sup>. Especially if we are talking about the fair and genuine elections, I mean Mubarak without forging the elections he would have won the latest presidential elections in 2005 by the way. He didn't need to forge the elections on his favor; people did not know anyone else other than Husni Mubarak so they voted for him. I am pretty sure of that. So If we are talking about the legitimacy of an elected president, Mubarak was an elected president, so why did you accept his overturning by the military council in January 25<sup>th</sup>, and you don't accept it now in June 30<sup>th</sup>. Especially that both are popular uprisings, and because I believe that June 30<sup>th</sup> is a popular uprising I give legitimacy to this period and I acknowledge it with all its problematic of the military dominance and everything, but I think that it is a legitimate period. Because I do believe, I think a lot of other political groups like the revolutionary front, that was created recently, they are saying we stand against Brotherhood and we stand against the military, but what they don't realize is that for the general public, for the people who actually took part in June 30<sup>th</sup>, they don't have a strong stance against the military, these people I think, what we need to do as political groups, is to raise awareness about the militarization of this period and that the military would be an actual, propose an actual danger to the period, and to win them to our side and not to judge them for choosing the military over Brotherhood. And I think such groups actually don't realize that there would be a revolution or could be a revolution against the Muslim Brotherhood, and I think this is very problematic because the Muslim Brotherhood is a genuine dictatorship, what they were trying to establish

throughout the last year, was a genuine dictatorship and I was actually discussing it with a friend she said okay, but the level of violence in this transition is a lot higher than the Muslim Brotherhood did. I mean if we are to compare the incidents of violence and the dispersal of the sit in in Rabaa and Al Nahda, it is a lot more violent than what used to happen in the Muslim Brotherhood period throughout the year Mursi was taking over. And what I say for that, is because he was not able to infiltrate the security apparatus and not able to get his people into the state institutions, because this is a genuine deep state so the Muslim Brotherhood were not able to infiltrate it, that's why they were not able to practice more power, not because they refuse power, or not because they refuse violence, they are genuinely terrorists, we know from our own resources that in both sit ins in Rabaa and Al Nahda, there were a lot of weapons, we know that for a fact, in Nasrah for example we produced a report about both sit ins, and we said that the interior ministry did not actually abide by international rules of dispersal, and it was actually violent and that the death on 1000 people in 2 hours is totally, it is close enough to a crime against humanity. But at the same time in our report we defend the women who belong to the Muslim Brotherhood in both sit-ins, that they were not violent or aggressive and not carrying weapons. But we know that people and the protestors in both sit ins they had weapons, and we know that they were not secure. And we know that terrorism is really a part of their ideology, and they are... violence is genuinely a part of their ideology so I can't really defend them... and when I say there is a popular uprising to go back to the questions about the legitimacy of this period.. they would have been a lot more aggressive if they had more access to the state institutions and particularly in the security apparatus, that's what I believe that's why I think that this popular uprising was a genuine uprising against the Muslim Brotherhood authority. This is to give you justification why I think this period is legitimate and I don't use the argument that Mursi is a democratically elected president because I think Mubarak could have been a democratically elected president by the way and we over turned him, so its not a question of what kind of democracy we are defending here, just the electoral process, is that the kind of democracy we are talking about? You get me? But then again I know the problematic of having the military institution in power, and we know what is happening behind the scene, and we know how much pressure this government that has some people in its formation from us who belong to the secular wing, they are put under so much pressure and I have to acknowledge that, we have this, I had this argument earlier with a friend, who thinks that by giving legitimacy to this period you are actually, defending an authority that killed its people, starting from Rabaa sit in and Nahda sit in and onwards, what happened lately in front of the Shura council, people were demonstrating against the military, the article constitutionalizing military trials and all that, she thinks what kind of power are we defending here and I told her the exact same thing I am telling you now, first, we know the inside story we know that people like Ziad Baha Eldin are put up under tremendous pressure not to be democratic, we know that people like Ziad Baha Eldin and his group inside the government and prone to be arrested if they were to resign from the government, and we know that people who belong to our wing, our political wing, inside the 50 member committee of constitutional amendments they were actually fighting fiercely for the freedoms and rights of the Egyptians, they actually fought fiercely against the article talking

about military trials and about the situation of the military. They fought fiercely for this and I have to give them credit for that and not say that they gave legitimacy to a killing authority or a killer government, I don't believe in this approach whatsoever to be honest and that's why I think this period is legitimate, yes the military is dangerous but yes it is a legitimate period, and it could be a revolution against the Muslim Brotherhood authority, and that's how I perceive it personally.

**NP:** did you convince your friend?

**SE:** did I convince her, no, well she is adopting the political discourse that a front like the revolutionary front I am telling you about, she is adopting their discourse and to me they are a political group who have such a condescending perspective on the general public. If you talk about the general public and you say because they lick the shoes of the army. No, they don't lick the shoes of the army, but they feel safer with the army and you have to present them with an alternative you have to tell them that there could be a civic government that is not formed or influenced by the military whatsoever, and that the military power is actually dangerous to your own rights and your freedoms, this could be a different political discourse to win these people over, and not to tell them you are defending a killer government, I mean it doesn't make sense to me honestly... for the first time in their lives they have a government that they actually want to defend so why not think of a different approach that keep us in a distance from the government and everything but at the same time not give more legitimacy to the Brotherhood, I will not give them more legitimacy, they do not represent me whatsoever, and I think I can win this general public over by presenting them with an alternative, and the alternative would not be sympathizing with the Brotherhood, I acknowledge the state crime against them and everything and I documented these crimes myself but because I mean, I stand at the same distance from the military and I do acknowledge that the military is a criminal institution in this country. Throughout the past 3 years and throughout Mubarak's regime as well. But I will not align myself more with the Islamist groups by all means.

**NP:** is there anything I haven't asked that you think is important?

**SE:** well I told you about the constitution because this was the biggest thing we worked on for the past 3 years, sexual violence, I didn't work on the issue of sexual violence a lot, maybe Mozn would be a better source on this issue and also Amal El Muhandes I don't know if you met her, she is one of our members at Nazra, and she worked herself with the issue of sexual violence, and she can tell you a lot more about the process of lobbying for amendments that proposed for the penal code, the penal law, we proposed some amendments on the penal law or actually the amendments were proposed by Amr Hamzawi from Masr El Hurryah, and we wanted to support these amendments because they give not harsher punishment for sexual perpetrators but more firm approach to crimes of sexual violence. So she can tell you more about the process actually because I don't work directly with it but I know the general story, the rise of sexual violence against women especially in the public sphere and around Tahrir vicinity and it was actually predominant since June 2012, and it was on the rise with November 2012 and onwards it was getting crazier

by the minute but I didn't work with it directly so I cant tell you much about it, yeah, that's the thing. I am trying to think if there is anything else.

**NP:** I can't think of anything else.

**SE:** Sorry.

**NP:** I cant think of anything else.

**SE:** With the parliamentary elections for example, Nazra worked with 16 women candidates but I wasn't part of the political participation team so I didn't work directly with these 16 women, that's it, that's all I can think about.

**NP:** do you plan on carrying on with Nazra? Do you have any plans to do anything different? We have spoken about your law degree that you are doing...

**SE:** No, I am going to continue with Nazra especially that now I am basically the program director, the women political participation program director so which will give me much more space to balance between political activism and supporting women in politics which is a question I am personally concerned with, and yes I am going to pursue, to finish my law degree, I am now in my third year, so I have one more year to go and finish my law degree and then I am going to start my masters degree. For now I don't have any other plans.

**NP:** thank you very much.

**SE:** You are more than welcome.