

Interview with Dina Wahba

2013

TAPE 1

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

Dina Wahba: I was born on the 20 July 1986, in Cairo. In Shubra, where my mum used to live, or my mums family, where she comes from.

NP: And you grew up in Shubra?

DW: No, my mum lived in Shubra and my dad used to live in Imbaba, but when they got married they moved to an area called Umrannah, its in Haram, in Giza. It is not a slum area, but it is very popular. And I lived there until the age of... until I was in third preparatory, that's maybe 10, around 9 or 10 years old, and then we moved, my dad made some money, so we did a social movement to Nassir city, which was like a suburban, very different from where I used to live and from where both used to live. And I since then I lived in Nassir city since I was 10 or 11. Of course I changed schools, I was in a what they call "experimental school" a semi public school, and when I moved I moved to a private school, and I lived in Nassir city ever since.

NP: what did your mum and dad do?

DW: My mum was a librarian in public schools up to the age, she worked and I was around 10 also or 8 or something. And my father was an engineer, he worked in a private office but when my dad got sick my mum stayed at home, so for the most part of my life, my mum was a stay at home housewife, but I still clearly remember her working, I used to go to, with her to the school, she always worked in boys school, so I still very clearly remember the library and the school she worked in, her students and everything.

NP: and do you have any strong memories about living in Umrannah?

DW: Of course, also for several reasons, because my fathers family still lives very close to there, they used to, my grandma used to live in Imbaba and at some point around the age of I don't know 13 or 14 or something, she moved to Giza to Haram, very close to.. in a slightly better area but close to where we used to live, my grandma passed away but my aunt still live there, my aunt and uncle, so, I still go there, and also because at some point we had a bit of financial difficulty, so we left Nassir City and we went to a very close area to Umrannah where we used to live, that was when we were 22 or 23. We went and stayed briefly there I cant remember, a few months or a year, and we stayed there and I used to really like it actually when I was younger, I remember very vividly that my mom wouldn't let me play in the streets. That was something, because it wasn't safe, and the streets around were full of thugs and stuff like that. I also remember that I really enjoyed my time there and I

used to go to school by a microbus, and I really liked my school, it was a public school but I really liked my school, it wasn't as dramatic as everyone makes it sound. I liked my friends and back then, there was something called experimental, which is not a government public school, it was a... you are trying to make public schools better so you will have in the school for example, Math and science in English not in Arabic, it was like the place who want their kids to have a good education go to if they don't have money, some sort of a middle way, this is why my colleagues were all coming from middle class families it was good, but of course, I was just discussing this yesterday with a friend, of course when I left from this school to a private school I suffered a lot, because of the English language, we take something called O-level English and A-level English, in the public school we only used to take only the O-level English, then I went to the private school at the age of 10, and my friends were much, much better than me in English, and for me, English was really, really difficult, I was really struggling, and of course, my mother and my father were like barley speak English or read English or write English. So I really struggled with that, but yeah, I still remember vividly, where we stayed, and the school in the street, and I am very proud of where I come from.

NP: have you got any memories, or what are your first memories of national events of political events growing up?

DW: my father actually was a political activist since he was in... I come from... my grandfather, my mothers father, he was an actor but he was also very politically active and he was banished from the country during Sadat and he had to die, he wasn't allowed to come back to Egypt and he died in Iraq or Libya I cant remember, because of his political, he was persecuted because of his political views. He was a Nasserist, and my father was a Nassirist too. Later on in his years, he had many ideological revisions, he wouldn't admit that Nassir was a dictator and everything, but he was a Nasserist for so many reasons. Some of them I understand in person. Basically, my dad was a guy who lived in Imbaba and he had the chance to get educated and go to a decent university and study engineering and be in the student union, the head of the student union in Cairo, in Hilwan University where he studied, and because of Nassir, he never felt that he comes from a lower class or a different class, and that was because of Nassir, I mean, his father was a very simple employee and his son was an engineer, and that was a social mobility that happened during Nassir's time. So he was very active, I mean he was in the protest of 77 the Bread Riots, and he was detained and then he was... the general secretary told the... in Cairo for the Nasserite party... so I vividly remember taking with me to the party, it was in Road El Faraj, an extremely populous area and I still remember, and I don't know, I was 4 or 5 something like that. I still remember running around the party, and attending all of those political meetings and events and sitting in those very hard core manly studies where it was all men most of the time, discussions about politics and I would join these discussions, and my mum never really liked politics and she really wanted me not to be... I think it was because of her father and her husband. And she tried very hard. You know, there is this movie I don't know if I told you the story. There is this movie called El Karnak. It is very famous, because there is this very famous scene where Souad Husni gets raped and it is based on a true story and

it is because she was involved in politics and she always mentioned that if I ever go into politics, this will be my ending like Souad Husni and that woman went crazy and killed her self and so... that was a very dramatic story and a true one. But she failed miserably, what I remember of political and national events, were the meetings I attended with my father, then my father joined Kefaya and then he joined Al Karamah party, which is part of... it was Hamdeens party. He is really fond of Hamdeen. I remember Hamdeen visiting us when my dad got sick, I remember several things, I remember also that back in the 90s Hamdeen used to run for parliamentary elections and my dad was in his campaign along with my cousins and I remember that one of my cousins was kidnapped, along with others Hamdeen's campaign. That was a family drama when I was really young, yeah. These are my childhood political memories.

NP: and when you got older did you become involved in politics?

DW: not in its formal sense, I mean, I never went with my dad, I mean, my dad used to take me around when I was really young, but as I grew older, first he got really sick really young, so that was... but even before he got sick, he never took me around to Kefaya meetings even though, most of my friends, their father's were also in Kefaya but we never ever met through my father. We just met because of other activism. So most of them they would go with their fathers but my father never took me to those meetings as I was getting older, I don't know why, I never really asked, but I remember at some point after he got sick, years after he got sick, he got less and less politically involved but he would still attend the meetings, I remember when I was in university as I was about to graduate, I started asking him, that I actually wanted to join a political party or do some sort of activism, but I didn't know what exactly, and... of course, I felt that political parties are all extremely corrupted, so I felt like I didn't want to, I wasn't really keen on joining political parties... and no, I wasn't keen on joining, only when I started graduating, when I got close to graduating from the university I started thinking of joining Kefaya. And I actually remember talking to him about this, and he did say, he wasn't especially encouraging and at the same time he didn't say no. what I believe is in political participation in university for me was... or the type of student of student activism that was prevalent back then. Was the model United Nations, those simulations I participated in whether in AUC or Cairo University, in different capacities and most of the faces that you see that I have met and seen who were politically active after the revolution, we were mostly all in these networks doing those MUNs together whether in AUC or Cairo university, so this I was really involved in heavily, and I also studied political science, I was studying in the faculty of economics and political science in Cairo university and I studied political science but I never joined, before the revolution, I never formally joined a political party or a political movement.

NP: so when you graduated from university what did you do?

DW: I worked in several places after I graduated, I used to write during university in a youth magazine, when I graduated I worked in a youth magazine, where I used to write and edit and stuff like that and then I worked as a journalist in a political affairs

magazine, I used to write and also be an editor, and then I took sometime off and I started my masters at Cairo university, and worked for the Arab League for the Arab Women Organization, it is a specialized organization under the secretariat for a year, and then I left and went to London for the masters then came back, and when I went to London, I worked with women living under Muslim laws, and I was working with them until my contract ended this month, and I started working with UN women. That's in terms of career wise.

NP: Yeah, and did you become interested of women's rights as a result of your work or?

DW: it was a mix, I really can't pin point the moment where I started growing an interest for women's rights, I think there are so many things, some of them I am aware of and other I am not. I am a child of domestic violence, my father used to beat my mother, and my mother used to beat me. And my father used to beat me sometimes but mainly my mother, so I grew up in a... my mom... I wouldn't say she was a victim because she was a perpetrator pretty much herself, but I would say that I grew up in a very classic... my mom was sort of the victim image of she is not working not empowered and unhappily married, where her husband wanted to cheat on her and wanted to get married to another woman, and she was very sad. It was this very classic image of not empowered women, living a victim of her society, she couldn't get a divorce, she didn't have enough money, her family didn't stand by her. So, I think that must have been in the back of my mind, I mean, I am ironically working on a project for domestic violence, so, I don't know what does this say exactly, but... so it could have been in the back of mind always, it was always obvious to me from a very young age that there is something really wrong in the world. And also my mum really discriminated against me and my brother, so I was always very... interestingly my father never did. He was very happy that his first born was a girl, he is a very supportive dad giving me the space of what I want, supporting my education my freedoms, but what my did, I was... I really, I was very sensitive to that, and as I grew older I started developing this interest in writing about stuff related to equality, in the youth magazine I used to write about, or women activist and stuff like that, but I would also argue that Bussy also played a crucial... because I joined Bussy before working in the Arab Women Organization, so, I developed an interest in Bussy, I worked with Sundus the director and I knew about Bussy and I wanted to act, and it happened to be this project and then I started writing, I wrote a couple of stories and acted them, so I think Bussy, I started feeling very strong about women issues through Bussy. And I wasn't in particularly looking for work in a women's rights organization, I knew I had this interest but then when I started working for the Arab Women Organization I started also developing a stronger interest in the... and then I started feeling that I want to know more and learn more, again, a huge turning point I would say was after I left, after the revolution when I joined the party, I joined the women committee, and in the committee there were very strong feminists and activists, I met Hania Sholkami, Huda Elsadda, Nadia Abdel wahab, Amal Abdelhadi, Afaf Marei, these huge names and I would argue that I was really influenced by them as well. So, it was a... and then I chose to study gender, and I don't know, I am sorry, I just went from there...

NP: You want to pause?

DW: No, its okay, so it wasn't just one exact thing, it kept, I mean the cause called me rather than I called the cause, and it kept growing from there. And I remember until I joined SOAS I didn't call my self a feminist. So, I only called myself a feminist after being there, so it was... yeah, I have to say, one major turning point was that in between jobs, when I stopped being a journalist and before I went to the Arab Women's Organization, I got an internship with UN women and with Sally, and this also played a crucial role in my interest in the cause. With Sally's work and what she has been doing, and getting involved in this also, got me also interested in it. Its not one thing, I cant remember one moment where I said, and its also not distant for me because my mother was never really an activist and I had no one in the family or family friends even. Even my dad was politically active and everything, but for him feminists and Nawal Al Saadawi are crazy people, I had, because my mum was a librarian and she really loved books, and we all started reading very young, even my brother, and everyone in the family, she would bring everyone books, and I had Nawal Al Saadawi's books lying around here and there, but for my father she was a crazy person, so its wasn't taken for granted that I would become interested in women's rights or anything.

NP: how did you become involved in Bussy? How did you meet Sundus?

DW: I worked with Sundus, because I was working in this youth magazine and I was also an editor and a writer there, and then she told me about Bussy, and I wrote something, I cant remember if I wrote it specially for Bussy, but I wrote something about sexual harassment in work, and it was a funny piece it wasn't very dramatic or anything, and she asked me to act it in... in the play. It was very vividly about discrimination of the work place especially sexual harassment, and then I wrote a couple stories for Bussy, another one about arranged marriage, it wasn't my story, it was a friends story and I wrote it, and this one I already acted, I also acted. So, yeah, and this is how I got involved and since then I just loved it, because Bussy, in the trainings and the rehearsals for the acting, it is not about only acting, it had a lot to do about, its like a psycho-drama, it had a lot to do about reflecting on your own experiences on your own feelings, and finding your voice and connecting with the story, so I wrote other stories that were not mine, so you would have to understand why these women would feel this way, and where do they come from, and also I was exposed to other stories, and because Bussy, you know all of these stories are real so they just have a very different effect on you, I don't know, victims of incest or FGM, and we had very strong stories about these topics, so, I was really sensitized, I never really at that point, which is around 4 years ago or something, I couldn't really write a story that was this extremely personal and intimate like other people wrote about FGM, or AIDS or being molested or whatever. But I was really exposed, my storied were very light and funny, but I was really exposed to, I could never write a story back then about my fathers abuse and my mother, but I only recently, very, very recently was able to start talking about it. So yeah, Bussy played a major part in my sensitization to the issue, and my emotional connection to it and my understanding

of it, and the dynamics behind it and stuff. And also the Women and Memory Forum, they were doing this gender reading, of course, in university, you are not exposed to any gender readings, or nothing, I never read something, I didn't know what a feminist reading is, and I remember during university I wanted to have something like woman related and I joined this research seminars on women and politics, and it was horrible, it was very sad, I didn't enjoy it at all, the professor was horrible, but when the Women and the Memory Forum did this reading, I said that I was interested to join and they sent me the reading, it was late 2010, and I was blown away, I mean, I remember this, because I read a note after I read the readings, I wrote a story, a very short story, I wrote it on Facebook, as a Facebook note and then after this Sally read it and asked me... they were compiling this book about sexual violence, and women issues and stuff, published by UN Women, and they wanted to have stoics from bloggers and young people writing on Facebook and stuff and she put this story and they only recently like a couple of weeks ago they launched the book, so she asked me to go and speak about it, so I had to go back and read this story and in the story it was very short, but I quoted some of the stuff of the reading that I found, one of the readings specifically. And at that point I felt how I, when I was exposed to the feminist reading, I felt like I could finally put a name to the problem, it was something that I always felt and seen very strongly, but I just couldn't identify at all, and there is this actually is a certain quote written that says this, and this is what I saw when I went to speak about the book, this is what I said, is that there is something, I had read something that in the 50s in America, women would reportedly go to their shrinks and talk about the problem that has no name, a problem that they have and they don't know what to call it. They have a problem in their lives but they don't know what it is, and they really suffer, and the article was referring to the problem that has no name, which is discrimination against women basically. So I felt like through this journey of this, starting to read about gender and stuff, that was my, that was my way of trying to understand that I had a problem that my mum had a problem, that it is something I couldn't see or feel, that was there. Yeah.

NP: Do you remember any of the authors that you read?

DW: I have the name of the... I didn't memorize it but I have the readings, I still have them, I also looked them up, because when I wanted to talk about the book, I wanted to say that this quotes are from this reading, I don't remember the title exactly, but it was "Nimble finger's something something" I mean, surprisingly it was talking about industry, textile industry and women and stuff like that, and I have their names, I have their names, I have them on my email, I can give them to you if you want. Yeah, I can give them to you.

NP: Yeah, send them to me.

DW: yeah, sure.

NP: have you been aware of any other work that was carried out by other women's organizations in Egypt on the issue of violence against women, or was it the first time that you came across the Bussy project to...

DW: Yea, yes, it was the first time, I wasn't from the circle because my father was into politics until a certain point, until he got sick and started to be away as I was growing up, so I wasn't from the circle of activists, feminists, so I wasn't automatically aware by... of what has been going on by other organizations, but I joined Bussy when I was I don't know, 22 or something, so I was already very young, but during university I never knew anything about women's rights organizations or the work or activism or any... I knew Nawal El Saadawi, because everyone knows her, but that's it. I mean I never knew anyone else.

TAPE 2

DW:... only after the revolution when I started joining Nusrah and stuff like that, before I was, yeah, before I knew Women and Memory Forum, I think I also attended a couple of meetings in Nusrah, I can't really remember, but I didn't know about the New Woman, I don't think I knew about the New Woman before.

NP: and you mentioned before the revolution, you said that you thought about joining Kefaya but you didn't, were there any other initiatives or groups or movements that you were involved in?

DW: No, there was like I told you the MUNs, and yeah I thought of joining Kefaya and thought about joining Al Karamah party, Hamdeen's party. But I never did, I didn't come around to do it.

NP: were you thinking about political change or social change, were you thinking like, whether change was possible, whether change was desirable, do you remember about this period and the general feelings about society around you?

DW: things... I remember during my time in the university, it was very clear that the regime is illegitimate and that Mubarak has to go, and that if Jamal comes, it is going to be a disaster, and I felt very strongly about it, but things became increasingly... because of my family really more than anything, we were extremely anti NDP and we were never affiliated in any way with the regime, I mean, whether my parents or the fathers of my parents they all paid a huge price of being in the opposition given what happened to my grandfather, I mean, what happened to my grandfather we didn't talk about it. He was also involved in a court case, he was accused of being a spy, he was trialed when he was away, I never saw my grandfather, and my mum would be extremely embarrassed about this, at that time, because her family they wouldn't stop speaking to them, she couldn't, I mean so many horrible things happened to her because of this, and everyone in the neighborhood called them the daughters of the sly and stuff like that. And only very recently that she become open about it and understand that there is nothing to be ashamed of or that some people actually consider him a hero, and she was very ashamed of him and what happened.

So, it wasn't really a choice it was... I was very conscious of this but things started getting worse, deteriorating after, I was very aware for example during university who are the professors in the NDP and I would never ever think about to join, if I want to join politics, to join the NDP or whatever, I mean, it is beyond anything I would think of. I was very aware of those professors and we would attack them and all of this, but things got worse, as I grew up I started, I remember vividly the 2005 elections, the presidential Ayman Nour elections, and I started growing an interest but not that much, I didn't vote back then, but I have friends who did, voted for Ayman Nour, and then, I think the turning point was the 2010 elections, I was doing my Masters at Cairo University at that time, and that's when I started feeling like taking politics home, that's when I started caring really very much, that something would happen that would make me actually try when I would see the elections regulated, I started caring and I stopped being apathetic. I always cared but that was different... Khaled Saeed of course, that was of course, after Khaled Saeed, I started feeling that there wasn't an option to start think of whether I should join politics or a protest or whatever, I mean it hit home, I was very close. It was basically, it could happen to any one of us. That was, it could happen to my brother, it could happen to me, it could happen to anyone, it was very... I don't know if it was because it as something big, or of it was because I was growing up or because was joining a different crowd of political.. I have never been, most of my life my friends were never politically active, I am not from the circuit, I am not from, me and Sally as well, we are not from the usual suspects, even though my dad was from the circle but I wasn't. So, after Khaled it was.. and I think it could have been for different reasons, not only because of how huge the incident was that I felt that its not an option anymore, no I had to do something. I remember how sad I was. I vividly remember having a discussion in 2010 with a close friend of mine her name is Darine, and she is also very active and we were both crying because of what was happening in the elections, and after Khaled Saeed, we were all very shaken and depressed and shocked and felt helpless. I don't know what kind of political change... we knew that we want him to leave and we knew that we don't want Jamal. These were the 2 obvious, and of course I was very aware of what happened with the constitutional changes that happened before the 2005 elections and because of my study. But nothing hit home as much as Khaled may he rest in peace, and the elections. I don't know if I thought it was possible, and back then I didn't think of participating in politics because it was so corrupt. But I knew, after Khaled at least that any kind of movement that is going to happen, I am going to have to be there. That was I don't know if it was a choice or a decision or just felt obliged but yeah.

NP: Did you join the Facebook group?

DW: Yeah, of course, we all did. And back then we weren't used to young people dying, I mean, now we are more sensitized and its easier, its I mean it is very sad but now I am not shocked by a young man dying, back then his face was very scary to see someone or age getting killed. Now, we are used to it, but at that time, and of course, there was the 6th April movement, and I remember the strike, I was very supportive of the strike.

NP: Do you mean the general strike in 2008?

DW: was it 6 or 8.

NP: Maybe there was more than one.

DW: yeah I think there was 2.

NP: there was the workers strike, and then the 2006.

DW: yeah, and then the 6. I was very supportive of both anyway. But I wasn't, I was never in the 6th April movement neither of my friends and... Sao I had some friends in Kefaya, in my faculty, studying political science as well. The sons and daughters of activists and stuff like that, but never formally involved.

NP: So, what did you think when you got the invitation for the 25th January?

DW: I didn't think twice, I knew I was going, although I would never participate in the political process before. That was my first time, but I mean after Khaled, I wanted to participate in the first protest during Khaled, but I got sick and I couldn't go, and I was really sad that I couldn't go. So, I knew after Khaled and after the elections that I was... so when I got the invitation I didn't, I even remember I was asking my friend who was against going to the protest. I remember she asked me why? And I couldn't answer, and not because I couldn't find a reason, but because I couldn't list all the... really! I was speechless I couldn't understand can't see why at the first place, I mean it became do horrendous that you can't ask why, and I didn't know exactly why, it was a general everything is wrong, I didn't have a certain demand or anything, it was everything, and especially after what happened with the church. Al Qedessen Church, it just all, that's it... it was this feeling of sadness and helplessness that is enough. I remember on that day, I had work, I remember the day vividly, I had work, and I was the only one of my friends who had work, I had a conference, and we didn't take the day off, so I decided to go after work, and my friends went sense the morning, and I told my parents that I was going, and my mum was freaking out... kept calling me the whole day,. I am sorry...

NP: Shall I pause?

DW: just a second, and she kept calling me all day and I remember I think, that the TV was talking only about Lebanon, something was happening in Lebanon, I cant remember what it was... so she kept saying no body cares about your demonstrations, and no one went, its just about Lebanon, but the conference was going on and I was in the conference and there was this backroom where we do logistics and stuff, the organizing, and my coworkers, they all had YouTube on and videos and I kept seeing these videos and I was pretty amazed and I kept texting my friends ad my friends would say there are thousands of people, and everyone was shocked, and a couple of our friends were chased by police thugs and stayed all day with them on phone and massages and on Facebook and stuff. And then I finished at

5 pm and I wanted to go but Sally had gone and gone back, and my other friends some of them I couldn't reach and others left, so I didn't really have any one to go with and I was in Heliopolis, and it was already dark and I was alone and I felt that it wasn't smart or safe to go alone. So I didn't know what to do and I remember my best friends passed by me and I was in her car and Dina has nothing to with politics whatsoever, she didn't care, of course she wasn't going to go, so I called Sally and basically cried when she, I kept telling her please go with me again, I really want go, and she said that she cant because of her family and stuff, so I basically. And I went with Dina to go and have a Shisha somewhere and I just, I couldn't, I just thought that I would go and sit in a café and have a Shisha and I just as if there is nothing going on, and I just felt like I can't. So, I told her to stop the car and that I will go and you would say in Arabic "is it one death or more?" which means basically if it is about dying, then its fine, something like that it was too dramatic, and then I left, I don't know how she let me go, but she did, she didn't even argue against it, and I took a taxi, at first I thought he wouldn't take me to Tahrir so I thought I would take a taxi to the metro and then take the metro and then go but he said its okay, he would take me and I left my stuff in Dina's car, because I had all the conference stuff, and I went alone, and I was really scared. I think that was one of the, I cant remember a time I was more scared, and I was really scared of, the main things are harassment and rape, whether by the police or protestors or thugs or by anyone, I was really scared of men, and when I got there I started walking in and I was scared of police men and I was scared of men, and I kept walking until I reached KFC, and I stood alone and I was freaking out, there was nothing scary but I was just scared, and then I saw some people with cameras and I figured they were journalists or something, so I decided to stand by them, so if something happens... and then only when I could reach my friends and they came and took me and we started walking, then I felt safer, I realized there were a lot of people and I asked them, by the time they were there they started chanting "the people went to overthrow the regime", by the time I was there, I asked them to take me over to somewhere a bit high so I can see, and I was I mean, I was, I saw the numbers and I was extremely blown away because I had this vision, because I was always fond of non violence resistance and Martin Luther Kind, and Gandhi, I always had a feeling that if we could occupy the square we could do whatever we want. So I couldn't believe it was feasible and then I looked around and everyone was so calm, and something was very different, I wasn't used to... I felt very safe, and I felt like everyone realized that our problem is not with each other but something else, I remember a friend of ours lit a cigarette, so the guy, a guy friend told her, its not the time for your freedom here, he was joking, she can't smoke a cigarette in downtown, in a protest but surprisingly no one cared, no one cared that a girl was smoking in the street, in fact no one cared that a girl was sleeping on the street or sitting in the street, that was very different. Yeah, I remember I felt something very different about being in the street, especially in contrast of being extremely scared. My dad kept calling me, they started freaking out completely and then I told him, you used to go to protests all the time, you cant tell me this now, and he said, I never knew before how much I used to hurt my family by doing that. And then we went to a friends place near by in Zamalik, we were all static, we were all in disbelief of what is going on, Egypt was breaking news

on CNN and BBC. Everyone was super excited and... I don't know if I can say happy, but yeah. That was the 25th January.

NP: Then what happened?

DW: Then I went home, the next day I had to go to work so I didn't go to the square, but of course I knew about the calls to go on the 28th January. And I knew I was going I mean, that's it. And then I talked to my friends on the eve of the 27th, and I said I am going to wake up and call you and find where you are and meet you. And I slept early, I woke up and there was no Internet and no mobile phones, and I had no land line, so I freaked out completely, I didn't know where everyone is and what was happening and I was crazy, I was going around the house and I said I am going to leave, so I am going to leave, I do t know where I am going to go, but I don't care. And after some negotiations with my family, my mum was also very worried about my aunt who was living in Shubra, she lived alone with another, my other aunt is retarded. So she was really worried about them being alone, she cant reach them, so she said, if you are going to go you can go to Shubra, Ill go with you and we will take it from there. So I said okay, and then we left my father and I don't know how, because my father is sick, there are no mobile hones and no landlines and we just left him, I cant understand how we did that, because we left him and supposedly with my brother, and went to Shubra and... so when we were on the bridge you could really hear people chanting under the sect of October bridge, you can hear them and mum was started crying, and she got very emotional and she started chanting and then by the time we reached Shubra there was tear gas everywhere, and my mum got really sick, and when we went to my aunts house, she was really scared and worried and alone and she needed to buy food, but she couldn't leave my other aunt alone, and so she gave me money and I went to by stuff, and all the places were like half closed because of the tear gas, and my aunt was very close to Shubra street which is the main street in Shubra and there were people, the police were attacking the protestors very viciously and the protesters were beating them back with rocks and glad and stuff like that, and tear gas was... basically the idea was that people wanted to go from Shubra street to Tahrir and they cut the Shubra street so I couldn't go as well. So I bought the stuff and took them, then I went back on foot, at that time I started reading tips on what to wear what to do the numbers of the lawyers if you get caught and I did all those things, I wore layers and long stuff and comfortable shoes and all, and I had the numbers of the lawyers on my mobile if something happens to me, so I tried, and it was very scary, on the 28th it was very scary. And I couldn't reach Tahrir, so I stayed in Shubra alone, my mum was in the house, till they said there will be a curfew, and we freaked out completely, because my father was alone in the house, so I took my mum and we moved very quickly so we can reach Nassir City by the time. I didn't have, I had my car at that point, and then I didn't have any gas in the car, and the petrol stations wouldn't give you gas, luckily we got home, but on my way back. It was obvious that there was no police, you could see that they were gone, because they were vividly there and then they were gone. And then we got home barely on time, and my father was freaking out because he was alone, he was standing by the window and didn't know what to do. And then we started being scared. I wasn't scared by my parents were scared, but

starting with the curfew we started being scared. What is that? We don't know... and then what happened after the 28th is a blur for me. I mean I remember things, but I don't know the exact chronological order for everything so I know that I went to the Square the next day, there was one day when my mum completely freaked out and kept calling me to go back home. I don't know if that was the next day, but I remember we started going to the square breaking the curfew all the time. We would be after the curfew in the square and I would go alone, with friends, with my car, without a car, and there are several images I remember, but I almost went everyday and if one day I didn't go it was for a reason, I can't remember the reasons now, but it was for a reason. I don't know, ask me, there are so many things to say about the 18 days, I don't know.

NP: did you ever stay over?

DW: No. I really regret it, I extremely regret it, but I felt that I didn't want to do this to my parents, I mean, they got into terms of the fact that I would go, and they know they can't say anything, and at some point, my mum thought that, because she couldn't go, because she is old and sick and stuff, she felt that it is her contribution that she would let me go, it was a sacrifice in itself, But I would go back around 11, 12 am, but I never had the guts to stay and I think a big part of it I didn't want to hurt them more, I knew that they were both old, sick and alone and scared and my dad can't go around look for me if something happens, so, but I do regret it heavily. I did defy my family and I did go out, despite what they said, I actually desensitized them to the point they are very happy that I am doing that, but I couldn't insist on staying and this I regret. This I really regret, I mean, if it happens again, I will stay and I will sleep there on the street.

NP: apart from being in the square were there any types of activities you were involved in during the 18 days? Like in any other role, supporting anything or collecting money?

DW: we would all bring food, that is something we did everyday, we would all pass by anywhere and we would get a lot of money... eh, a lot of water a lot of food and stuff. So, that was, we were seen as, we all did it, it never felt like a role, we would all bring food and we would also take food, we would bring food and distribute it and also we would take food from people who distribute it.

TAPE 3

DW:... might have brought medical supplies or something, yeah... yeah that was it.

NP: you said that your, the people you have been friends with from school were not political, did you, during the 18 days, did you discover new things about the friends? Did you make new friends? Did you happen to, what happened to the relationships, I mean you talked about parents, but what happened to your relationships with your peers?

DW: it definitely changed, especially on Facebook, because people were extremely against the revolution and we would go into fight and block and delete some friends and stuff like that, but I also made some new friends but mostly I got much closer to acquaintances, we used to be acquaintances before but they became very close friends, very, very close friends, some of the people I have been with in the square during the 18 days, we became very close as a result of this I mean, of the common memories we have. But some of my other friends from school, who were extremely A-political and who were my best friends, they are still my best friends, even... but she was never against, never, not at any point, she was never, she wasn't in the square but she wasn't one of those people who said you have to go back, and she never told me that what I was doing was wrong. That she didn't feel very much for the people who were dying or sacrificing their lives, but others of course we had huge fights, Holoul, I mean, we had huge fights with them, and other we became very close as a result of our common memories, and I was talking to a friend of mine yesterday, we just thinking it was weird that we didn't meet in the square and we knew each other but we never crossed path, but we were talking whether to call it a revolution or not a revolution, and I said that I called it a revolution as a political stance, because my dad was a Nasserist and we would call the 52 revolution a revolution and so many people would call it a coup de taut, and when I asked them they said that it was a coup although they told me all my life that it's a revolution, and he said you know, it is a political stance whether you call it a revolution or a coup, and I call the 25 January a revolution as a political stance not as an academic definition, and I was saying another reason is that I can't ignore what happened, I can't ignore what I felt and what I saw and the magnitude of the experience that I can't explain, and I can't say that this was not a revolution, I mean that would be me lying basically. Maybe if we judge of what happened after, but what happened during, I can't say that it was nothing. And I keep getting those flashbacks and images, at first it was so hard to process, but now it is easier, but at first, right after, I kept getting these images and in these weird times I would be working and suddenly I get these images and I remember we did something with Bousi, the same director of Bousi, Tahrir monologues which is the same idea, which is people writing stories and acting out stories about the revolution and I wrote a story in it... activist, and so I remember after the revolution, we sort of repressed and pushed down all of those feelings, and a few months later I went to the rehearsals of Tahrir monologues and they basically did this enactment of the whole revolution, and I just started crying and I didn't understand why but it was extremely overwhelming, because of the one image that keeps popping up, is that when I was walking in the square you would have two lines of people singing and clapping for you when you are coming to welcome you, and saying "Welcome, welcome to the revolutionists, Welcome, welcome to the free", which means "welcome revolutionaries, welcome free people", and this is an image that I can't... I vividly remember their faces, they were greeting me, old men, young men, and very different people from very different backgrounds, and yeah my relationships changed dramatically after that, because also the square was a space that would overcome the segregation, socio-economic segregation, and we had a very segregated society, I would go to a certain school... even though I jumped classes, and I come from a family from a different... but you go to a certain school, to a certain social club you live in a certain neighborhood and

that's it. There aren't many places... because I went to Cairo University so I was a little bit open; there aren't many spaces that you can be in from a mosaic of different classes, the square was like this. And there are so many clichés that now they seem very, like clichés you don't want to say them but they did happen, like people with beards were sitting with leftists, and singing and all of this happened, we make fun of this now, but it did happen at that point, and I remember we were singing Sheikh Imam, I remember vividly that Sheikh Imam and Ahmed Fouad Negm, they were banned, you can't find a tape or a CD sold anywhere that has the songs of Sheikh Imam and Ahmed Fouad Negm. I knew them because of my dad, he used to sing them to me all of my life, so I was really surprised that everyone was singing them on the square, although officially it should have skipped a generation, because our generation, our whole life their songs were banned. Somehow, they did find us. Yeah, I remember many things, I remember that we would eat so little and I lost a lot of weight, I was very happy, because I really felt like I didn't feel like eating, it was like being in love. It was being, you feel like, you don't need anything, and I remember I had a friend, and when we used to speak and say it was the best times of our lives and she would say stop saying that, we were very scared and we were very worried, and our friends were... we were all at risk of dying, and we were stressed, and it was true, it wasn't like being happy and having fun, it wasn't fun. I have so many stories and memories and anecdotes and images and colors and people and faces. And as time goes by it becomes real, because if it didn't happen, it's only when you meet someone who was there and you dare to talk frankly about it, because most of the time we try to avoid talking about it, actually realize that it happened, and I was just with my friend yesterday and he said, that we all, the people who been through the experience, we all share something that we don't understand, and we can connect over.

NP: why wouldn't you want to talk about it?

DW: there are so many reasons, I am now becoming increasingly detached so it is becoming easier to talk about it, but for so many reasons I mean, and it differs with each person, I mean for so many people, it is painful memories. It was the first time for them in their lives to see people get killed for example. My friend yesterday he was telling me, he was actually standing and then he heard (Tak, Tak), and two people died beside him and he went home and he said there was... he remembers how much he really cried and felt scared, and for others, it was because it was the time they felt they can change the world and then went down hill from there, so it was very... and it was... I think it was very difficult, we never really processed it, we never really sat down and realized that we been through this, just at least for me the next day I decided to close this chapter and start doing something, run and run around, and try to attend a million meetings a day, and do this and that... So, so many reasons, it is so hard to admit that this happened, and that we lived through this, with its good and bad, and then to try and see the consequences in the light of what happened, and then try to link what happened with what happened after, I think it is just painful, I mean, right after, I applied for Chevening, so I wrote a personal statement, and then I was applying for a PhD I went back to my personal statement, and I was shocked, I couldn't recognize this person, I don't know her, I

felt like I never met her, I just... I was so hopeful to a delusional extent, not only Naïve but delusional extent like... I thought I would really, I don't know, be the president and change everything or something.

NP: you mentioned the Egyptian Social Democratic Party, when did you decide to join?

DW: March 2011. I attended the founding meeting and so basically right after the revolution, after the party was established.

NP: what made you join the Social Democratic party, why not another party?

DW: I knew I wanted a new party, I didn't want to join any of the old parties, I mean, that was one of the... set from before the revolution, I knew I wanted to join a party I knew I wanted to join a new party, and I knew I am not a Nasserite like my father but I am inclined to the left, I am not as left as my father, but I am definitely on the left, so for me center left was very close to what I believed in, so I went to the first meeting to listen more than anything, but then more and more I got involved. Yeah, and I still do believe that this is the closest thing to where I stand politically. I do with all my heart and soul belong to the Popular Socialist party but I have so many problems with them, among them women's rights and gender issues, because they are still stuck with this... argument, that the whole world passed by, like the class conflict before the qualitative conflict, and I won't sum up the problem of the country as the problem of the women, so they are very regressive in that sense, very kind of classic left approach while the social democratic party is not like this, I mean, they have amazing women, you can at least create pressure. This also one strong reason I joined and I stayed in the party is the presence of very strong women activists and feminist leaders, and a very strong women's committee in the party, and not just being active but also having some depth and content and vision, and some framework and understanding of a deeper ideological level when it comes to socialism and women's rights. I mean, as time went by I felt ideologically speaking I found it was the right choice for me, from time to time, I feel I am more on the left that center left, at first I felt I was on the left of the center left, and then I felt no, I am a little bit more than that. But again, I keep on bumping into the wall of the other leftist party that I would want to join, is... I completely disagree with their outlook on gender issues.

NP: and what sort of activities... sorry have you been involved as a member of the social democratic party?

DW: when I first joined I was the head of the women committee and it was such a huge opportunity for me because I was very young at the time, 24, 25. And I was heading a committee that has Hoda Elsadda, Muna Boulgar, and Nadia Abdelwahab, and like all those amazing women, and I also was very lucky because everyone was very enthusiastic and everyone would attend meetings, and want to do something and back then there real persistent challenges, like the party program wasn't gendered at all. So we had to have a huge fight and then to discover that that

political committee that writes all the party papers and programs and statements, they don't have any women in it, so we would have a huge fight to have them, and then we would have a huge fight to have women on the high committee and then the executive council and all decision making bodies so this, I had to go through this, I mean with, I was 24 very new to political life, and I would have huge fights with party leaders basically, older men, very experiences, and I didn't know how I got the courage, I think it was aftermath of the revolution, but I would, I mean I would send them emails, say you have an ideological commitment, so you cant do this, we managed to have women in the political committee and we were rewriting the party program and the high committee. And then I left and went to London, and came back, so it was a year, exactly a year ago, and I went back to the women committee and the foreign affairs committee, and I have been in and out of the youth committee, I was the depute of the youth secretary and then I left, and now... we have a mess with the youth wing so I am a little less involved. Since I been back, we have been, I have been working on, even when I was in London, I would go back and fourth I also joined campaigns for women candidates, since the governorates, since I been back we been, we did a couple of, I was responsible for 2 training, for women potential candidates and women active in the party, one for Cairo and the governorates around it, that was last June and another was in for Alexandria and the governorates around it, and that was in November, and they were both very successful. I also travelled with the party for Norway, to attend the congress of the Norwegian Labor Party and to sign an agreement of the funding of the... oh I cant say that, I don't want to say that.

NP: Sorry, Okay, I will edit it out after this.

DW: anyway, so to establish cooperation, and I went, I am a member of a network of Arab socialist parties. Went to Tunisia to attend a meeting and also, we also have an agreement to have another training in February for potential candidates for women, that was in Tunisia the meeting, and another one is in Istanbul, Basically most of them, most of my work is in the area between the foreign affairs and the women committee, and within capacity building more or less. And of course there is the internal party fights. To consolidate our list of women candidates and potential candidates, and to try to push forward for them, and we decided for the next few months our work in the committee will be geared towards elections, I mean that is the first thing on our agenda, which is pushing within the part pushing among different sister women committee parties to make sure that we have more women representation and capacity building. And then, so I will be involved more or less in the next training and I will probably be involved, there is the Arab Socialist Democratic forum, which involves few social democratic Arab countries, and this forum has a woman wing, and the next meeting will be in March, so I will be involved in, and probably hosting it, so I will be involve din and probably hosting it, and probably be consolidating the first women wing meeting of the forum, also we are in the socialist international, so I will probably be working within the women wing of the socialist international. And we are trying, we have a mess in the youth wing, but we are trying to establish a youth organization, and I am part of the youth organization and in theory the head of the gender unit in the youth organization, but

I am also been active supporter for the student committee, I love them, I would do anything to support them really, they are for me the only thing that gives me hope, whether guys or girls in this committee, they are both impressive, especially girls of course, I have been a little bit involved because in the party, also the geographical offices, branches, so I have sometimes been involved in my geographical branch which is east Cairo, considering I live in Nasr City with my mum, but I have ben but not very much active, I have been sometimes, especially in the women wing of the geographical branch we have a very strong women committee head in that geographical branch. In the next few months I would probably be attending the executive meetings instead of the women committee head, for so many reasons, that's it, this is basically what I have been doing in the party.

NP: you sound very busy indeed, have you thought as standing as a candidate in the elections?

DW: yes, and it comes and goes sometimes I feel like I want to do it and sometimes I feel like I don't want to do it, it is not my place, or other women are more qualified, or my pace would be to stand behind those women, rather than run as a candidate so it comes and goes, but I did think of... sometimes I through I would run into the local council, not the parliament and sometimes I would say no to both, it comes and goes.

NP: and has the... is there a, do you find a place to mentor people who were standing in the elections?

DW: Sorry!

NP: are there procedures...

DW: No, there aren't procedures, we are doing our best. Trying to send their names to training programs that are in place by civil society organizations, or having our own training program, like what we have been doing I mean. And they are been... these training programs have been amazing not only for training the women as much as for us to be able to have money to bring the women in one place and be able to sit and talk, and every time I was blown away by the women in the governorates who are very politically active and strong and are willing to go to elections, and so I mean there is this illusion that we don't have women partners, and that is not true at all, there are many amazing, very politically active women, but they are chosen not to be seen. So there is, it is extremely challenging working with women in politics. I mean its an extremely difficult battle and I say of the next parliament comes and we have a very low representation of women, which is going to happen, it will really be shame on us, that in our life time without the Brotherhood, we have a parliament that has like 2 % women. Really shame on us, it means that we are not doing anything, I mean all of us. Whether women in political parties, or organizations, any activist should be extremely ashamed of her self. It means that we are extremely ineffective, it is going to happen. And I feel like politics symbolizes something, I mean, its not all about putting women in the parliament, I

understand I am not naïve, but if we couldn't pass a quota, that's it, but if we are without a quota we can't even guarantee a decent amount of women in the party, and it's not just about having women in the party, it's a symbol of something, of how we are influential in our spaces, I mean, from our bedrooms and homes, to our relations with men to our political parties or bigger configuration to whatever we are. It means that we are all, we are all not influential, just shows the power relations, how much we are nothing. And we keep saying it, train women and fine, those women they will tell you, they will benefit from the training and they are very eager to learn, they are not condescending but it is not just about training women, we already have very good women, and we have so many men that need to be trained, I say this argument for the youth, they keep saying we need to train the youth, and I would say, our ministers need training, and we have 27, 30 year old...

TAPE 4

DW:... Harvard graduates who definitely do not need training, who can train ministers at the age of 40 and 50, who are now in office, so when they say train the youth I feel like it is a condescending argument. And it goes the same for women, we do train women, but that is not the problem, is it for the same exact reason we couldn't pass a quota, we will not be able to have this number of women. And I think that every woman activist should be extremely a gender **[inaudible: 00:43]**...

NP: when you talk about the quotes are you speaking about the inclusion of a quota in the constitution?

DW: or in the election law which is not going to happen.

NP: how do you know?

DW: I know because we can't do it. I mean, we can't. We couldn't pass a quota in our party to have women in the high committee, we couldn't do it and we have Hania Sholkami, we have Hoda Elsadda, we have Muna Bolgar, we have Nadia Abdelwahab, and we couldn't do it, just couldn't do it.

NP: because there was resistance from too many people?

DW: even women, and I remember something telling me something recently when you fail to convince someone of your cause it's not their problem, you must have done something wrong, and that is true. I don't know what it is exactly but... it is really a symbol.

NP: do you think the political transition is helping the women, the political transition will be supportive of women gaining...

DW: No, why? How? Who? What? When? No, why would it be? And how would it be? And in what sense? and who would be supportive? What does it mean? Are

there any more resources geared towards that? No. Is there any more political will? No. the patriarchal culture still very much exists especially in politics, because the politics is the ultimate power play, it is the epitome of the power struggle in society, so there is no reason whatsoever to give space for either minorities or women. I mean they would rather give space to a religious minority than women. They, the Coptic agenda, which is a very important agenda, but let us say that the agenda of 20 percent of the society is far higher than the agenda of 50 percent of society. The Nubian agenda, the Sinai agenda, the Bedouin Sinai agenda is far higher than the women agenda, it could be because they are very good, and it could be because the stakes are different, I don't know, it could be because of million things, but there is no resources and no political will. There is extreme resistance and impunity and there is a complicit... some women are complicit or an accomplice, and some even quote on quote, progressive men are accomplice as well, and everyone is compromising on this and there is absolutely no believe whatsoever that something like this is important. So no. Why would it be? There is no political reason for me to believe that the transition would be better for women.

NP: do you feel that the constitution will be an improvement for women?

DW: in what sense?

NP: that there are clause that explicitly outlaws discrimination on the states of gender, and that women can pass the nationality to their children?

DW: well women can pass the nationality to their children already, nothing new. But the discrimination clause is something that can be built on definitely. But nothing specifically that can be seen as a breakthrough or progression or... it could be built on.

NP: do you think that politics is more, somewhat more difficult than you anticipated? Formal politics?

DW: yeah., I understand. If you strip me off of my identity as a young woman, it is not. So in my capacity, if I want to ignore that I am a woman and I am young and if I want to ignore fighting for both causes, its not. Sure thing. I was just saying that if you strip me off... if tomorrow I decide to either leave the women committee and use it in very instrumental terms, and if I decided that I no longer want to fight for women in politics, or for having young people in politics, and decide to instrumentally use the fact that I am young and I am a woman, and just play politics, whatever that means, it would be much easier. My profile would be much easier and if I decide to let go of certain things and make certain connections and certain relations and compromise certain things, it will be so easy, its not difficult, it is difficult f you want to make it on your self. At least, it is more difficult for more people, but from where I stand from my profile and my privileged position which is not the case for certain women in Menoufiyah, and Sharqiya, or Beheira, or those who only have a diploma or not university graduates, or even university graduates that they don't speak English or they don't live in Cairo, I do have a very privileged

profile, that would make political parties and men in political parties use me very instrumentally make me useful to them, and I could also use it and to have like so many political gains so it could be easy if I decided to, that all I want to do is advance politically, that's all I want to do, it would be very easy for me, for women not just for me.

NP: I understand what you mean? Just to make sure I did get it, in another words there is a choice to be made that a woman can enter politics and work for her own political advancement, her own individual advancement, or a woman can be in politics and work with other women, for the advancement of all other women? Are you saying that there is a choice?

DW: Not a woman. Because of you are a woman who is a Copt from Minya, with a very modest university degree and come from a poor family, even if you go into politics, just for the goal of advancing yourself, you will not make it, it will be very difficult. So, it is not a woman. I am saying I am, from my position, Hoda Elsadda can, Hania Shulkami can, I can, certain women certainly can go into politics, advance their own, very easy for them, and especially because they are women, so herbing women at this point will not be a burden, it will be something that will give them extra space also. Because they would make other people look very good if they are on the table, because of so many other reasons, because of interpersonal relations because of things you can get ahead because you are a woman, because relations that you can make, and certain, and that you wouldn't be seen as a competition in certain arenas so you would be put forward, and because there are so many reasons. So many women, if they choose to advance politically on their own, they can get ahead very easily, definitely.

NP: Thank you!

DW: I really never thought about it like this by the way, I never sat and asked and said is it easy for me in politics or not and why? This is the first time I ask myself and answer myself and never thought about it. Thank you!

NP: thank you!